

The final report detailing how the project participants are doing at present, is now ready. The results can be divided into three main findings.

1. The at-risk group is characterised by large individual differences, where some are doing far better than others
2. Children in the risk group generally have more problems compared with the control group
3. The problems exhibited and experienced by at-risk children increased until early school age

Wide range

While the risk group also consisted of some youngsters who were coping well, others were found to be struggling in many different areas. Although some of them scored high on mental tests, the drug-exposed group performed worse on average than the comparison group.

"The risk group showed wide variation. While one youth was annoyed by having to take up an extra course to get into medical school, there were many who were in great need of help," says Egil Nygaard.

"Although we must remember that the differences between the groups in the project are only an average and do not apply to individuals. We should therefore be careful not to generalize too much about what the outcome is for these children," he explains.

About the study

The children involved have been tested eight times from seven months to adolescence.

Caregivers, most often adoptive and foster parents filled out questionnaires about their child's behavior at six different times during their childhood, and twice about health.

The children were videotaped on four separate occasions.

Their brains were examined using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), once when they were around 11 years of age and then again as adolescents.

The youths were interviewed and answered questions concerning their behavior, emotions, relationships, sexual behavior, experience with substance abuse, quality of life and social support. Similar information was provided by the caregivers.

The study was started by Vibeke Moe, Kari Slinning and Lars Smith of the Department of Psychology (PSI), University of Oslo and Aline spedbarnsenter.

Struggled to cope

Despite the fact that some did well the differences between the two groups were generally large. The differences were also not limited to specific abilities, such as impulse control, but rather concerned many important areas of life.

Both teachers and caregivers of at-risk children reported that the youths had more problems with general functioning than did the teachers and parents of children in the comparison group. This included difficulty concentrating and self-regulation of behavior and emotions.

"This is also consistent with findings we have from earlier, when we tested different cognitive skills such as

word comprehension, fine motor skills and memory in both groups during adolescence," he adds.

Increased until school age

The differences between the comparison group and risk group also increased up until school age. This underscores that this is a crucial time period for these children, according to the study.

The cognitive test results, along with teacher and parent reports of the children's behavior at 4 ½ and 8 ½ years showed that both group differences in cognitive ability and problems with the regulation of emotions and behavior increased from infancy until the end of school.

Preschool teachers reported problems already at 4½ years of age, while differences emerged in the caregivers reports first at 8 ½ years of age.

However, group differences did not seem to increase further in the period between 8 ½ years and adolescence.

 [Children born to drug-addicted mothers need support right up to the early school years, says Assistant Professor Egil Nygaard. \(Illustrative photo: Colourbox.com.\)](#) [6]

 [The MR-scan at Rikshospitalet University Hospital was among the methods used in the study. \(Photo: Terje Heiestad/ UiO.\)](#) [7]

 [Assistant Professor Egil Nygaard. \(Photo: Tron Trondal, UiO\)](#) [8]

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[Nygaard, E. \(et al.\) Behavior and Attention Problems in Eight-Year-Old Children with Prenatal Opiate and Poly-Substance Exposure: A Longitudinal Study. Plos One \(2016\)](#) [14]

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