

ADHD increases the likelihood of becoming a teen parent

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“We must be better at advising young people with ADHD on sexuality and birth control,” says professor in child and adolescent psychiatry.

Teenagers with ADHD have a much higher chance of becoming young mothers and fathers than their contemporaries.

That is the conclusion of [a large Danish register study](#) [6], which shows that individuals diagnosed with ADHD are twice as likely to have children in their teenage years (between the ages of 12 and 19).

“This is entirely new knowledge, which is really important. We know from other studies that becoming a parent at a young age is associated with a range of negative consequences—both for the young parents and for their children,” says lead-author Søren Dinesen Østergaard, an associate professor at the Department of Clinical Medicine, Aarhus University, Denmark.

He stresses that we need to be extra careful that young people with ADHD receive adequate guidance regarding safe sex.

Negative consequences

Previous research has shown that ADHD is associated with so-called risky sexual behaviour, such as becoming sexually active at a younger age, having more sexual partners, and a tendency to have unprotected sex.

The new study documents that this behaviour causes individuals with ADHD to become parents at a young age.

The negative consequences of becoming a parent at an early age are typically that the parents have a poorer education and are more dependent on social benefits compared to their peers who do not become parents at an early age. Furthermore, the children of very young parents often have low birth weight, are born prematurely, or die in infancy, shows previous research.

A great study

Professor Per Hove Thomsen, a child and adolescent psychiatrist from Aarhus University Hospital, praises the study and its use of the Danish registers.

He suggests that the new results should be taken into account when treating young people with ADHD.

“We should be better at advising young people with ADHD on sexuality and birth control. We should be

aware of the risk for early pregnancy,” says Thomsen, who has studied ADHD for many decades, but was not involved in the new study.

Neither Thomsen nor Østergaard are surprised by the main finding of the study--that individuals with ADHD are more likely to become parents as teenagers compared to their peers without ADHD, “but I was not expecting to see a doubling of the rate of teenage parenthood in ADHD – that is remarkable,” says Østergaard.

Impulsiveness + inattention = no birth control

The researchers have taken account of other factors that can influence the relationship between ADHD and becoming a parent early in life. For example, that children and teenagers with ADHD often come from difficult social conditions, some of which also increase the risk of early pregnancy.

Having adjusted for these aspects, the results clearly indicate that it is indeed ADHD, which increases the likelihood of becoming a teenage parent.

“Our findings are also completely compatible with core symptoms of ADHD such as impulsiveness and inattention,” says Østergaard.

“Impulsiveness means that you think less about the consequences before you engage in something, for example, sex. A consequence of inattention is likely to be that you simply forget to use birth control,” says Østergaard.

[Read more in the Danish version of this story on Videnskab.dk](#) [7]

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'Teenage Parenthood and Birth Rates for Individuals With and Without Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: A Nationwide Cohort Study', *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* (2017), doi: 10.1016/j.jaac.2017.05 [6]

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