The Indirect Effects of Childhood ADHD on Alcohol Problems in Adulthood through Unique Facets of Impulsivity.

Pedersen SL, Walther CA, Harty SC, Gnagy EM, Pelham WE, Molina BS.

doi: 10.1111/add.13398. [Epub ahead of print]

Abstract

BACKGROUND AND AIMS:
Research has not studied unique impulsivity dimensions as prospective links between childhood attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and alcohol problems. We examined the association between childhood ADHD, 5 facets of impulsivity and alcohol problems in adulthood, and the indirect effects of childhood ADHD-to-impulsivity-to-alcohol problems. Design, Setting, and Participants Participants were from a longitudinal study (N = 289, MAge = 28.67) of individuals with (n = 170) and without (n = 119) childhood ADHD. The ADHD sample, as part of an ADHD summer treatment program, was initially diagnosed in childhood (1987-1996, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA) via structured parent interview and standardized parent/teacher ratings. The ADHD sample and demographically similar individuals without ADHD (living in the greater Pittsburgh area) were recruited to participate in the Pittsburgh ADHD Longitudinal Study (PALS) between 1999 and 2003.

MEASUREMENTS:
Self-reported impulsivity (UPPS-P) and alcohol-related problems were assessed in adulthood (2011 - 2014).

FINDINGS:
Adults with, compared with those without, childhood ADHD had more alcohol problems (β = .34, p < .05) and higher levels of negative urgency, positive urgency, lack of perseverance and lack of planning (β's = .24-.31, p's < .001). Impulsivity facets (except sensation seeking) were related to number of alcohol problems (β's = .34-.61, p's < .05). Negative (b = .26, p < .01) and positive (b = .27, p < .01) urgency mediated the association between childhood ADHD and number of adult alcohol problems.

CONCLUSIONS:
Elevated levels of emotional impulsivity (negative/positive urgency) may place children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at increased risk for alcohol problems in adulthood.