Childhood Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and Homelessness: A 33-Year Follow-Up Study

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Abstract

Objective
To examine whether childhood attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) predicts homelessness in adulthood, and whether the persistence of childhood ADHD through adolescence influences likelihood of homelessness.

Method
A 33-year prospective, controlled, follow-up of clinic-referred 6- to 12-year-old Caucasian boys with ADHD (probands; mean = 8), at mean age 41 (follow-up [FU] = 41). Comparisons, children without ADHD from the same medical center, were matched for age and socioeconomic status (SES). Both groups were evaluated at mean age 18 (FU18). Homelessness was assessed at FU41 in 134/207 probands (65%), and 136/178 (76%) comparisons. We tested 1) the relationship between childhood ADHD and homelessness; 2) whether adolescent dysfunctions (conduct disorder, non-alcohol substance use disorder, arrests, and school dropout) accounted for this relationship, if found; and 3) whether ADHD that persisted through FU18 elevated probands’ homelessness rate.

Results
Probands had significantly higher rates of homelessness than comparisons (23.7% vs 4.4%), ($\chi^2$(1)=21.15, (df=1), p<.001). In a multivariate analysis, including childhood ADHD and covariates, the probands’ significant elevation of homelessness remained (OR= 3.60, 95%CI: 1.32-9.76, p=.01). Probands with persistent ADHD through adolescence had significantly more homelessness than remitted probands ($\chi^2$(1)=12.73, p<.001), but this relationship was no longer significant when conduct disorder at FU18 was controlled (OR=1.97, 95%CI: 0.89-4.38, p=.09).

Conclusion
Among Caucasian boys followed into adulthood, childhood ADHD was associated with an elevated rate of homelessness. Findings point to the need for clinical monitoring of childhood ADHD through adolescence, even when ADHD does not persist, in hopes of mitigating a cascade of malfunction that includes homelessness.