Early Detection of ADHD: Insights From Infant Siblings of Children With Autism.

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Abstract

Converging evidence suggests shared genetic underpinnings of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Studies of infants at risk for ASD have proliferated over the past decade; the few studies that have followed these infants beyond age 3 report a range of difficulties facing a subset of these infants as they reach school age, including elevated levels of attention problems and externalizing behavior. Given this, we aimed to identify early predictors of school-age ADHD outcomes in a sample of infant siblings at risk for ASD. This study reports on a sample of 59 infants at high and low risk for ASD who had been followed for more than a decade, collecting data at regular intervals from 3 to 36 months and then determining diagnostic outcome at 8-10 years of age. Seventeen participants were diagnosed with Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.) ADHD at school age (n = 14 high risk, 3 low risk). As infants, the ADHD outcome group demonstrated atypical longitudinal patterns of sustained visual attention. A significantly larger proportion of their parents reported behavior/temperament problems at 36 months of age, and examiners noted the presence of inattentive, hyperactive, and/or impulsive behaviors in this group by 18 months of age. These data suggest that behavioral indicators of risk for later ADHD may be present early in development, which may improve earlier detection and treatment of the disorder.