Irritability in ADHD: Associations with depression liability.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:
Irritability and the new DSM-5 diagnostic category of Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD) have been conceptualized as related to mood disorder. Irritability is common in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) but little is known about its association with depression risk in this group. This study aims to establish levels of irritability and prevalence of DMDD in a clinical sample of children with ADHD, and examine their association with anxiety, depression and family history of depression.

METHODS:
The sample consisted of 696 children (mean age 10.9 years) with a diagnosis of ADHD, recruited from UK child psychiatry and pediatric clinics. Parents completed the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment, a semi-structured diagnostic interview, about their child. This was used to establish the prevalence of DMDD, anxiety disorder and depressive disorder, as well as obtain symptom scores for irritability, anxiety, and depression. Questionnaires assessed current parental depression, and family history of depression.

RESULT:
Irritability was common, with 91% endorsing at least one irritable symptom. 3-month DMDD prevalence was 31%. Children with higher levels of irritability or DMDD were more likely to have comorbid symptoms of anxiety, depression and a family history of depression.

LIMITATIONS:
Results are based on a clinical sample, so may not be generalizable to children with ADHD in the general population.

CONCLUSIONS:
Irritability and DMDD were common and were associated with markers of depression liability. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the association between irritability and depression in youth with ADHD as they get older.