

Predicting the Adult Functional Outcomes of Boys with ADHD 33 Years Later

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Abstract

Objective

Little is known of factors that influence the course of childhood attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Objectives were to identify early features predictive of the adult outcome of children with ADHD. In the longest prospective follow-up to date of children with ADHD, we examined predictors of multiple functional domains: social, occupational, and overall adjustment, and educational and occupational attainment.

Method

White boys (6-12 years, mean, 8) with ADHD (N=135), selected to be free of conduct disorder, were assessed longitudinally through adulthood (mean age, 41), by clinicians, blind to all previous characteristics. Predictors had been recorded in childhood, and adolescence (mean age, 18).

Results

Childhood IQ was positively associated with several outcomes: educational attainment, occupational rank, social and occupational adjustment. Two other childhood features that had positive associations with adult adjustment were SES and reading ability, which predicted educational attainment. In spite of their low severity, conduct problems in childhood were negatively related to overall function, educational attainment, and occupational functioning.

Among multiple adolescent characteristics, four were significant predictors: antisocial behaviors predicted poorer educational attainment; educational goals were related to better overall function; early job functioning had a positive relationship with social functioning, and early social functioning was positively related to occupational functioning.

Conclusion

Besides childhood IQ, which predicted better outcomes in several domains, there were no consistent prognosticators of adult function among children with ADHD. Providing additional supports to children with relatively lower IQ might improve the adult functional outcome of children with ADHD. However, predicting the course of children with ADHD remains a challenge.