Sex differences in ADHD trajectories across childhood and adolescence

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Abstract

Previous studies have hinted at sex differences in developmental trajectories in ADHD symptoms; however, little is known about the nature or cause of these differences and their implications for clinical practice. We used growth mixture modelling in a community-ascertained cohort of \( n = 1,571 \) participants to study sex differences in ADHD symptom developmental trajectories across the elementary and secondary school years. Participants were measured at ages 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 15. We found that females were more likely to show large symptom increases in early adolescence while males were more likely to show elevated symptoms from childhood. For both males and females, early adolescence represented a period of vulnerability characterized by relatively sudden symptom increases. Females affected by hyperactivity/impulsivity may be more likely to be excluded from diagnosis due to current age of onset criteria. More attention should be paid to early adolescence as a period of risk for hyperactivity/impulsivity symptom onset or worsening.