The effect of having a child with ADHD or ASD on family separation

Kousgaard SJ, Boldsen SK, Mohr-Jensen C, Lauritsen MB.


Abstract

PURPOSE:
The primary aim of this study was to estimate the risk of parental separation associated with having a child with ADHD or ASD when controlling for a large range of known risk factors for parental separation using Danish registries.

METHODS:
The study included all children with ADHD or ASD born between 1990 and 1998 in Denmark and a sex and age matched random sample of children from the background population. We followed these children and their parents from birth until the child's 25th birthday, parental separation or December 31, 2015, whichever came first. Data were analyzed using Cox Proportional Hazard models by estimating hazard ratios (HR) and 95% confidence intervals. Models were adjusted for a range of child, parental, and family variables.

RESULTS:
The study included the parents of 12,916 children with ADHD, 7496 children with ASD and 18,423 controls. The study found that, even after controlling for a range of potential risk factors, having a child with either ADHD (HR = 1.8, 95% CI 1.6-2.0) or ASD (HR = 1.2, 95% CI 1.1-1.3) significantly increased parents' risk of separating compared with non-affected families. Other factors associated with parental separation were parental imprisonment, parental psychopathology, low parental education level, low household income and living in a larger city.

CONCLUSION:
Parents of children diagnosed with ADHD or ASD were more likely to separate than control parents. It is important to improve our knowledge about the particular characteristics of families at risk of separating to prevent distress for the families and their child.