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Hyperactive girls at risk of serious problems in adulthood, study says

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Hyperactivity in young girls may be linked to adjustment problems such as poor performance in school, abusive relationships and teen pregnancy, a new Canadian and British study suggests.

"Girls with high levels of hyperactive and physically aggressive behaviours, and girls with hyperactive behaviours only, are at risk of facing problems in adulthood," said lead author Nathalie Fontaine, with the Department of Psychology at University College London.

These problems include poor performance in school, abusive relationships, nicotine addiction and a reliance on welfare assistance.

Fontaine, noting that the results were similar to studies conducted on hyperactive boys, said prior to this study, the research had focused on boys.

"Most of the previous research on hyperactivity and aggressive behaviours concerned boys," she told CBC News via e-mail. "Little is known about this topic in girls, notably the consequences of these behaviours and how to prevent them."

Researchers from the University College London and the University of Montreal studied 881 girls in Quebec from age six through 21, asking teachers and parents to report behaviour problems such as restlessness and being fidgety and physical aggression.

One in 10 girls demonstrated high levels of hyperactive behaviour, while another one in 10 showed signs of both hyperactivity and physical aggression.

By the time the girls were 21, those who were most hyperactive or aggressive were more than twice as likely to become smokers and four times more likely to perform poorly at school.

"Elementary schoolgirls with the highest levels of hyperactivity were at high risk of serious adjustment problems in adulthood," the authors wrote.

Girls with both hyperactivity and physical aggression, about 8.5 per cent of the

sample, reported problems of abusive relationships, early pregnancy and dependency on welfare.

However, Fontaine noted, "Not all hyperactive girls are at risk of future difficulties. About 25 per cent of the girls with high levels of hyperactive behaviours in childhood did not show adjustment problems [in] early adulthood."

Fontaine said the findings can be used to help schools, clinicians and researchers design and implement "preventive interventions" for girls as early as possible.

"Our study suggests that girls with hyperactive behaviours in childhood should be a primary target for intensive prevention programs because they are at risk for serious problems later in life," Fontaine said.

She said future research should focus on factors that trigger hyperactive behaviours, look at what is happening before kindergarten, and the development, implementation and assessment of preventive interventions for girls.

The study is published in the March issue of Archives of General Psychiatry.

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Lucy Belvedere wrote: Posted 2008/03/25

at 12:02 AM ET How easy it is to lay blame --- parents, nicotine, caffeine, diet and so on. Genetics may play a role in how the brain is "wired" at birth. Every decade has had its bad girls (and boys). I am surprised that more people in the general public aren't aware that brain health may be a huge factor in this problem and other behavioural difficulties and the root cause may be complex. Intervention does not necessarily have to mean taking drugs, but could include other behaviour modification therapies at a very early age, even with pre-schoolers if the problem is recognized. The bottom line is that these children deserve attention and time from both the medical community and those in the field of education to help them attain a better future. It may not be the most pressing health issue, but still deserves consideration. Brain research may one day provide some clearer answers.

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Voska1 wrote: Posted 2008/03/25

at 9:54 AM ET Sounds like a study to promote more drugging on kids.

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JayJay wrote: Posted 2008/03/25

at 9:27 AM ET A lot of these problems are the parents' faults. Perhaps kids are so hyperactive because of all the sugar and unhealthy food parents feed them. Instead of preparing a healthy lunch, kids get pre-prepared "lunchables" from the store because parents don't have the time, or don't want to take the time, to make a healthy lunch. And then when their kids are hyper they give them drugs to calm them down, when all you have to do is limit the sugar intake.

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Avicenna wrote: Posted 2008/03/25

at 2:31 AM ET 1-simac-1 hits the drug sell right on big pharma's head - this will eventually lead to the diseasification of "hyperactivity" in children as a state that needs a pill cure. Putting cynicism aside for the moment, the problem with this kind of study is that it doesn't differentiate between the potential causes of hyperactivity - is it due to their homelife? food? neglect? born premature? were they exposed to drugs prenatally? lack of omega-3's in the mother's diet? This study follows closely the publication of another which found that girls with ADHD were more likely to develop anorexia. There has been some correlation between both ADHD and hyperactivity and a lack of essential fatty acids and other nutritional deficiencies during the critical period of neural development both in utero and after birth. Maybe all we need is access to less refined and nutritionally complete foods for both mothers and their babies. Unfortunately, due to our polluting most of our natural environment with toxins, most expectant mothers are scared away from eating fish - the best source of the essential fatty acids needed for developing brains.

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alastair berry wrote: Posted 2008/03/24

at 8:25 PM ET I must admit that I'm not 'with it' these days, at 78, but as a boy I knew that girls who smoked were signalling that they 'were easy lays'.....

Some things have not changed! Mind you back then Welfare assistance did not exist (but condoms did!)

"These problems include poor performance in school, abusive relationships, nicotine addiction and a reliance on welfare assistance."

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ideriso wrote:Posted 2008/03/24

at 3:36 PM ETIn regards to 1-Simac-1's comment, not only is nicotine a stimulant, but so is caffeine. And while it is illegal for minors to purchase cigarettes, it is legal for minors to purchase coffee, energy drinks, and pop. Perhaps it should be taxed, too. A cup of coffee costing upwards of 15\$ might limit caffeine intake.

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fredzena wrote:Posted 2008/03/24

at 2:11 PM ET"Not all hyperactive girls are at risk of future difficulties. About 25 per cent of the girls with high levels of hyperactive behaviours in childhood did not show adjustment problems [in] early adulthood."

Perhaps this is what future research should be focused on.

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1-Simac-1 wrote:Posted 2008/03/24

at 1:55 PM ET"preventive interventions for girls"

I can't help but think this is going to be pharmacological in nature.

Hey people of the public! Are Your kids becoming too unruly? do they have more energy than You? Do you wish they'd just slow down to Your speed? They're probably hyperactive and need to be calmed down because nobody likes people running around with too much energy, and doing stuff.

The problem with this study, as presented here, is that it suggests that the hyperactivity is The cause of being on welfare, pregnancy and poor school performance. Let's concentrate on the school aspect here, as it is probably the largest socialization factor in a young person's life.

The study doesn't appear to look for one instant at the underfunded state of schools; where thorough sex education is shunned, sports programs get slashed and music is being given up on. Perhaps they should adress the fact that the school system does not cater to intelligence, but to the mean - that is, the average. Study after study comes out suggesting that girls are statistically smarter than boys. So when people are "restlessness and being fidgety" it's more likely for reasons not adressed in this study.

Teach the kids about sex and they'll be careful about pregnancy. Let them exhaust themselves on a gamefield and they will be calmer in other venues. Put an oboe to someone's lips (or trumpet, or flute, or clarinet, etc...) and you might get them hooked on classical instead of nicotine.

Nicotine! Which, the article might have adressed, is Already a powerfully addictive substance. Surely we all know this, but for the sake of admitting there are Other factors, include it.

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