

Depression and anxiety affect up to 15 percent of preschoolers

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Almost 15 percent of preschoolers have atypically high levels of depression and anxiety, according to a new study published in *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. The five-year investigation also found that children with atypically high depression and anxiety levels are more likely to have mothers with a history of depression.

The study was conducted in Canada by an international team of researchers from the Université de Montréal, the Université Laval and McGill University, as well as Inserm (Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale) in France, Carnegie Mellon University in the U.S. and University College Dublin in Ireland.

“As early as the first year of life, there are indications that some children have more risks than others to develop high levels of depression and anxiety,” says first author Sylvana M. Côté, a professor at the Université de Montréal's Department of Social and Preventive Medicine. “Difficult temperament at five months was the most important predictor of depression and anxiety in the children.”

As part of the investigation, the scientists annually evaluated a representative sample of pre-schoolers from five months to five years of age. All 1,758 children were born in Québec and mothers provided information during extensive interviews on behaviour and family members.



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“We found that lifetime maternal depression was the second most important predictor of atypically high depressive and anxiety problems during preschool years,” stresses Dr. Côté. “Our study is the first to show that infant temperament and lifetime maternal depression can lead to a high trajectory of depressive and anxiety problems before school entry.” “It is critical that preventive interventions be experimented with infants who risk developing depressive and anxiety disorders,” adds Dr. Côté. “Health professionals should target such high risk children at infancy, as well as their parents, to have a long-term impact on their well-being.”

About the study:

The article, "Depression and anxiety symptoms: onset, developmental course and risk factors during early childhood," published in *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, was authored by Sylvana M. Côté, Michel Boivin, Richard E. Tremblay, Xuecheng Liu, and Mark Zoccolillo from the International laboratory for child and adolescent mental health (Université de Montréal; Université Laval; McGill University; Inserm U669, France; University College Dublin, Ireland) and Daniel S. Nagin of Carnegie Mellon University in the U.S.

Partners in research:

This study was supported by the Québec Government Ministry of Health, the *Fond québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture*, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council and the Canadian Institutes for health Research, Sainte-Justine University Hospital Research Center, and the Université de Montréal. Data collection and management by the Québec Institute of Statistics and the International Laboratory for Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

On the Web:

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- About the [International Laboratory for Child and Adolescent Mental Health](#)

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