

## **Hyperactive girls face problems as adults**

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Hyperactive young girls are more likely to have poor school-leaving qualifications, become hooked on smoking and fall into mentally abusive relationships later in life, according to a collaborative study led by UCL (University College London) and the University of Montreal. Few studies have looked at the consequences of aggressive and hyperactive behaviour in girls, but the latest study shows that hyperactivity combined with aggressive behaviour in girls as young as six may lead to greater problems with abusive relationships, a lack of job prospects and teenage pregnancies.

The study, published in the latest issue of the journal *Archives of General Psychiatry*, followed the lives of Canadian girls from the age of six until they reached 21, to understand the link between hyperactive and aggressive behaviour in childhood and adjustment problems in early adulthood. Of the 881 girls monitored, around one in 10 showed high levels of hyperactive behaviour, while another one in ten showed both high levels of hyperactive and physically aggressive behaviour.

Young girls displaying hyperactive behaviour (restless, jumping up and down, not keeping still, squirmy or fidgety) and those showing physical aggression as well (fighting, bullying, kicking, biting or hitting) were found to have a high risk of developing adjustment problems in adulthood, in particular addiction to smoking, mutually and psychologically abusive relationships with partners, and low educational attainment. However, only females with both hyperactivity and physical aggression were found to report later problems of physical as well as psychological aggression towards their partner, along with early pregnancy and dependency on welfare.

Dr Nathalie Fontaine, UCL Psychology, says: "Our study suggests that girls showing chronic hyperactivity and physical aggression in childhood should be targeted by intensive prevention programmes in elementary school, because they are more likely to have serious adjustment problems later in life. Programmes targeting only physical aggression may be missing a significant proportion of at-risk girls. In fact, our results suggest that targeting hyperactive behaviour will include the vast majority of aggressive girls.

"However, not all hyperactive and physically aggressive girls grow up to have serious adjustment. In our study, we found that about 25 per cent of the girls with behavioural problems in childhood did not have adjustment problems in adulthood, while more than a quarter developed at least three adjustment problems. We need more research to understand the factors that prevent or trigger the development of such problems. Other risk factors more specific to girls, such as social and relational aggression (e.g. rumour spreading, peer group exclusion) also need to be considered in future investigations."

## Notes for Editors

1. For more information, please contact Dr Nathalie Fontaine at UCL on +44 20 7679 5394, e-mail: [n.fontaine@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:n.fontaine@ucl.ac.uk) or Dr Richard Tremblay at the University of Montreal on tel: +1 514 343 6963, e-mail: [tremblar@grip.umontreal.ca](mailto:tremblar@grip.umontreal.ca).

2. Alternatively, please contact Ruth Metcalfe in the UCL Media Relations Office on tel: +44 (0)20 7679 9739, out of hours +44 (0)7917 271 364, e-mail: [r.metcalfe@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:r.metcalfe@ucl.ac.uk).

3. 'Girls' hyperactivity and physical aggression during childhood and adjustment problems in early adulthood: A 15-year longitudinal study' by Nathalie Fontaine, Rene Carbonneau, Edward Barker, Frank Vitaro, Martine Hebert, Sylvana Cote, Daniel Nagin, Mark Zoccolillo and Richard Tremblay, is published in the March issue of the journal Archives of General Psychiatry. Journalists can obtain copies of the paper at <http://archpsyc.ama-assn.org/> or by contacting the UCL Media Relations.

4. This study was funded by the CQRS, SSHRC, FCAR, NHRDP/CIHR, US NSF, US NIMH and NCOVR.

5. The study was carried out by UCL, King's College London, University of Montreal, Laval University, University of Quebec, McGill University, Carnegie Mellon University and Inserm in France.

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## **Contact**

**Dominique Fourniol** Head of Media Relations +44 (0)20 7679 9728

**Ruth Metcalfe** Media Relations Manager +44 (0)20 7679 9739

**Jenny Gimpel** Media Relations Manager +44 (0)20 7679 9726

**Dave Weston** Media Relations Manager +44 (0)20 7679 7678

**Out of hours:** 07917271364