

Kids with ADHD three times more likely to have language problems, which worsen academic outcomes

Language problems are extremely common in children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and contribute to poorer academic outcomes, a study by the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute has found.

The study of 391 children participating in the Children's Attention Project, which was published in *Pediatrics*, found the risk of language problems in children with ADHD was nearly three times higher by six years of age.

Researchers screened for language problems in children with ADHD and controls. They found 40% of children in the ADHD group screened positive for language problems, compared to 17% of children in the control group. Rates of language problems were similar in boys and girls with ADHD.

The study also found that the children with both ADHD and language problems had poorer academic outcomes including more trouble with reading and maths, compared with those with ADHD alone. However, children with ADHD and language problems did not have poorer social skills than those with ADHD alone.

Researchers found that fewer than half of children with ADHD and language problems had ever accessed a speech pathology service and only one-quarter were currently seeing a speech pathologist.

"We are concerned that few children with ADHD and language problems are currently accessing speech pathology services, especially given that language problems are related to poorer academic outcomes," said lead researcher, Dr Emma Sciberras.

"Routine assessments for ADHD do not generally include standardised language assessments, but given the strong association between language and academic underachievement, if children with ADHD are falling behind academically they should be referred for a language assessment."

In another study, also published in *Pediatrics*, researchers looked at how anxiety influences the lives of children with ADHD. They found 64% of children with ADHD met criteria for one or more anxiety problems.

The study found two or more different anxiety problems in children with ADHD was associated with poorer quality of life and behaviour. However, children with only one anxiety problem were not especially impaired.

"It's really important to identify anxiety problems in children with ADHD," said Dr Sciberras. "Given that anxiety is so common in children with ADHD and is associated with poorer functioning, it's vital that anxiety is assessed as part of clinical assessments for children with ADHD. Importantly, anxiety needs to be re-assessed at follow-up consultations, as anxiety may develop overtime for children with ADHD."

Researchers say the studies highlight two such areas of additional difficulty; language problems and anxiety for children with ADHD.

“Both of these studies demonstrate that the additional difficulties that go along with ADHD, in this case anxiety and language problems can make daily functioning even harder for children with ADHD. If parents are concerned that their child with ADHD has anxiety, language or any other additional difficulties that are not currently being managed, we encourage them to discuss their concerns with their child’s treating clinician.”

...ends...

Media contact:

Simone Myers, Murdoch Childrens – (03) 8341 6433 or 0407 852 335

Available for interview:

Researcher, Dr Emma Sciberras