

ATTENTION PROBLEMS IN CHILDHOOD AND SUBSTANCE USE 18 YEARS LATER

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Introduction: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has been linked to substance use disorders later in life. However, the unique contribution of ADHD is not clarified yet. Insufficient research in this area has considered first substance use, associated behavioral problems and female gender in longitudinal and community settings.

Aims: To study the association between childhood attention problems and substance use 18 years later.

Method: Using a French community sample of 1103 youths followed from 1991 to 2009, we tested associations between childhood attention problems (dimensional constructs) and substance use between ages 22 and 35, adjusting for potential childhood and family confounders.

Results: Individuals with high levels of childhood attention problems presented higher rates of substance use (regular tobacco smoking, alcohol abuse/dependence, cannabis problematic use, cocaine lifetime use). However, when taking into account other childhood behavioral problems, early substance use, academic difficulties and family adversity, childhood attention problems were only related to regular tobacco smoking and cocaine lifetime use.

Conclusions: This longitudinal community-based study shows that, except for tobacco and cocaine, the association between childhood attention problems and substance use is confounded by a range of early risk factors.