



# Do Adults With ADHD Have a Different Disorder From That Seen in Children?



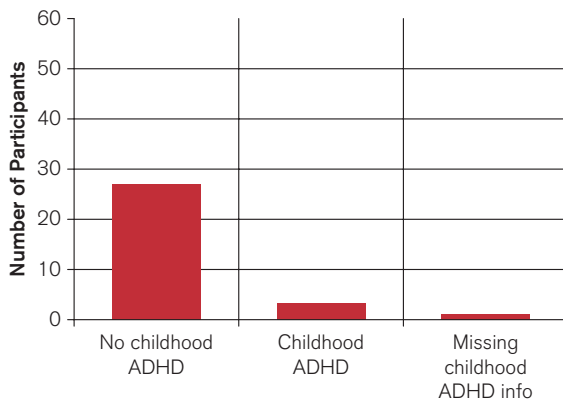
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*DSM-5* focuses on ADHD in childhood, but about half of those children with ADHD show similar symptoms in adulthood. *DSM-5* suggests that ADHD begins in childhood. In fact, in *DSM-5*, both adult and childhood ADHD are seen as neurodevelopmental disorders that begin in childhood. However, until

## FIGURE 5.13 Is ADHD in Childhood Associated With ADHD in Adulthood?

Those with adult ADHD at age 38 and childhood ADHD. Different individuals met criteria for ADHD in childhood from those who met criteria in adulthood.

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recently, few studies have asked if this is the case. One way to examine this question is to ask if adults who currently show symptoms of ADHD also had the same symptoms in childhood. Terrie Moffitt and her colleagues (2015) asked this question in a prospective design. By using a prospective design, the researchers did not need to rely on the participants' memory of their childhood experiences.

These researchers studied 1,037 individuals who were born between April 1972 and March 1973 in Dunedin, New Zealand. Given that that number represented 91% of all births during that period, this gave the researchers a comprehensive sample that included all levels of socioeconomic factors and health status. Assessments of various types were first performed at birth and then every 2 years from age 3 to 15. Following this, assessments were carried out at ages 18, 21, 26, 32, and 38. Included in these assessments were measures of ADHD. Overall, 6% of the children met criteria for ADHD, and 3% of the adults at age 38 met criteria. What surprised the researchers was that different individuals met criteria in childhood and adulthood. In fact, only 3 of the 61 children who had ADHD symptoms in childhood continued to have the symptoms in adulthood. On the other hand, an additional 28 individuals showed ADHD symptoms at age 38 but did not have them in childhood. These data are shown in *Figure 5.13*.

These data raise the question of whether adult ADHD is a totally separate disorder from the ADHD seen in children. If this is the case, it is important to understand how it develops. It is also important to know if it is associated with other psychological issues such as substance abuse, trauma, or anxiety. There is not a clear answer to this question, since over half of those individuals with adult ADHD in the New Zealand study showed no mental health diagnoses at age 38. Further, one would want to know how to treat adult ADHD because there may be very different mechanisms involved compared to childhood ADHD.

**Thought Question:** What research would you propose to better understand adult ADHD?