



Is parental educational status to blame for academic problems in children?

By Jessica K. Edwards

Children of parents with low educational attainment have up to three-fold higher risk of developing a psychiatric disorder such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and depression than children of parents with high educational attainment.¹ The mechanisms underlying this paradigm, however, are unknown. Now, a Norwegian sample comprising nearly 35,000 children in 28,000 extended family units has been used to understand whether this association is due to shared genetic or environmental factors or due to the direct effects of parental education attainment itself.

Educational attainment was self-reported by the mothers and fathers included in this Norwegian Mother, Father and Child Cohort Study (MoBa). The mothers also reported children's symptoms of ADHD and depression and academic problems when their children were 8 years old. The researchers found that children of lowly educated parents had a two-fold higher risk of high ADHD symptom levels and academic problems compared to children of highly educated parents. This association persisted after controlling for shared genetic and family environmental factors. The risk of depression based on parental education status was lower, and was explained by shared genetic factors. The researchers suggest that factors related to parental education could constitute a target for interventions that aim to reduce ADHD symptoms and academic problems in children.

Referring to:

Torvik, F.A., Eilertsen, E.M., McAdams, T.A., Gustavon, K., Zachrisson, H.D., Brandlistuen, R., Gjerde, L.C., Havdahl, A., Stoltenberg, C., Ask, H. & Ystrom, E. (2020), Mechanisms linking parental educational attainment with child ADHD, depression, and academic problems: a study of extended families in The Norwegian Mother, Father and Child Cohort Study. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatry*. doi: 10.1111/jcpp.13178.

References:

¹Russell, A.E. et al. (2016), The Association Between Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): A systematic review. *Child Psychiatry Hum. Dev.* 47: 440–458. doi: 10.1007/s10578-015-0578-3.