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UB study finds higher divorce rate for parents of children with ADHD

By Henry L. Davis
NEWS MEDICAL REPORTER

Parents of a child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are nearly twice as likely to divorce by the time the child is 8 years old, a new University at Buffalo suggests.

The study, which is the first to investigate this issue in depth, also found that the marriages of divorced couples involving children with ADHD ended sooner than marriages with no ADHD-diagnosed children.

“Certainly we are not suggesting that having a child with ADHD is the only reason these marriages end in divorce. Disruptive child behavior likely interacts over time with other existing stress in the family to spark conflict in a marriage and, ultimately, divorce,” said William E. Pelham Jr. professor of psychology and pediatrics and senior author on the study.

The work led by Pelham and Brian T. Wymbs, who received his doctorate in clinical psychology at UB, appears in the October issue of the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. The study looked at 282 adolescents and young adults diagnosed with the disorder in childhood, as well as their parents, comparing them with 206 other participants without ADHD. Results showed that 22.7 percent of parents of children with ADHD had divorced by the time the child was 8 years old, compared to 12.6 percent of parents in the control group. Divorce rates of parents with and without children with ADHD were not significantly different after children passed the 8-year mark.

The researchers suggested that when parents interact with an ADHD child, they are more distressed, argue with one another more and view one another as less supportive, compared to when they interact with a child without ADHD.

The biggest contributor to an increase in the risk of divorce turned out to be a father’s antisocial behavior, followed by such issues as mothers with substantially less education than fathers, children diagnosed with ADHD at a younger age, and families with racial or ethnic minority children.

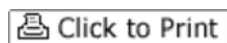


The researchers suggested that those who treat children with ADHD and disruptive behavior problems take note if parents are having marriage problems and try to intervene to prevent the children from going through the trauma of divorce. But they also suggested that divorce may be the best option for some couples who may have serious and frequent marital conflicts and are raising difficult- to-manage children.

hdavis@buffnews.com

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