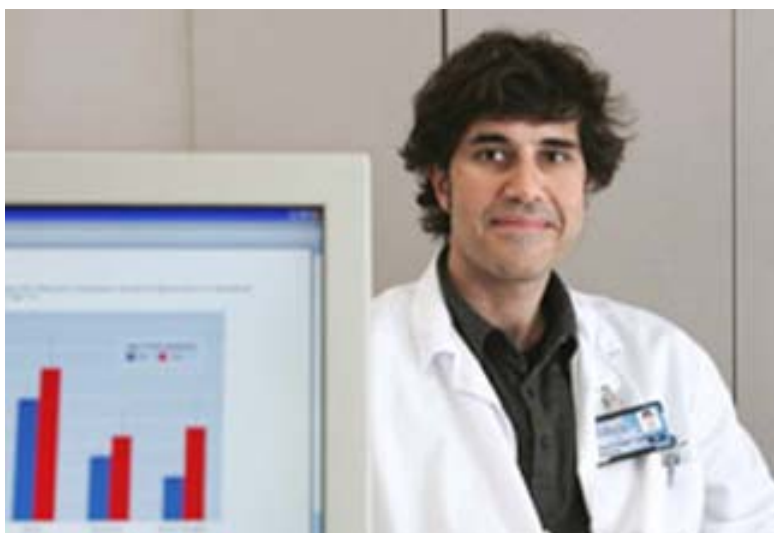


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Obsessive symptoms in childhood can multiply the probabilities of an obsessive compulsive disorder



A research group led Miguel Ángel Fullana, researcher at the UAB Department of Psychiatry and Legal Medicine, psychologist at the Institute of Psychiatric Treatment of Hospital de Mar in Barcelona and researcher at King's College Institute of Psychiatry, London, has carried out a first study which connects the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive rituals in childhood with the risk of developing an obsessive-compulsive disorder as adults. One of the main conclusions of the study is that children who repeatedly manifest having obsessions and compulsions notably increase their risk of suffering from a disorder later in life.

The research used data from the Dunedin Study which has been carried out with citizens of Dunedin, New Zealand since 1973. It is the only place in the world where a long-term follow-up of different psychological variables has taken place from childhood to adulthood with a sample of one thousand people. Researchers assessed the evolution of two variables in participants at ages 11, 26 and 32: the repeated presence of obsessive ideas (e.g. recurrent and undesired

thoughts to harm others) and compulsive rituals (a need to wash their hands constantly, to check up on small everyday tasks to prevent harm or repeatedly carrying out activities that seem meaningless, etc.).

Based on the analysis of these data, researchers for the first time have obtained objective proof that there is a correlation between obsessions and compulsions in childhood (when study members were age 11) and the probability of suffering from an obsessive-compulsive disorder as an adult (observed at ages 26 and 32 among participants). More specifically, the girls and boys in the study who showed symptoms of obsessive or compulsive behaviour at 11 - a total of 8% of the population studied - were six times as likely than others to suffer from an obsessive-compulsive disorder in adulthood.

"There is nevertheless no need to become alarmed with the cases of children who manifest these symptoms, since they are very common amongst children aged 8 to 10, while the percentage of adults with this disorder does not reach 2%. What should be done is focus on preventive measures for these children, since we've seen that the risk is much lower amongst the rest of the population", Dr Fullana stated.

According to the authors of the research, these results can be extrapolated to other populations, even though they were obtained from a sample population in New Zealand, since the characteristics and incidences are similar in other parts of the world.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is generally accompanied by a family history of this disorder and its treatment has a strong psychological component based on screening prevention strategies, as well as drug therapy based on the administration of anti-depressants.

The study has been published in the American Journal of Psychiatry and was carried out with the participation of researchers from King's College London; Duke University, Durham, USA; University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; and the University of Otago, New Zealand. It was coordinated by Dr Miguel Ángel Fullana, researcher at the Department of Psychiatry and Legal Medicine at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, at the Institute of Psychiatric Treatment of Hospital de Mar in Barcelona, and at the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London.

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