

Premature children 4 times more likely to have behavioral disorders

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Children born prematurely are four times more likely to have emotional problems or behavioural disorders, according to research led by the University of Warwick.

A team led by the University's Department of Psychology and Warwick Medical School examined the behaviour of 200 six-year-old children who had been born below 26 weeks gestation, known as 'extremely pre-term'.

The researchers attempted to contact the family of every child born in the UK and Ireland at 25 weeks or earlier, between March and December 1995. From a possible 308 children who survived the first 6 years, the parents of 241 responded to the study.

The team compared the behaviour of these extremely pre-term children with a control group of a similar age. They used reports filed by parents and teachers to test whether extremely pre-term children had more pervasive behaviour problems (described by both teachers and parents).

The researchers found 30.6% of pre-term children were hyperactive, compared to 8.8% in the full-term group, and 33.3% of pre-term children displayed attention problems, compared to 6.8%.

They highlighted a distinction between genders in the pre-term group. Boys born prematurely showed a higher degree of behaviour problems, such as ADHD, and girls experienced more internalising disorders such as anxiety and depression.

The study also showed that extremely pre-term boys were more vulnerable to behavioural problems, and they had a greater impact on parents and teachers than extremely pre-term girls.

Professor of Developmental Psychology at Warwick Medical School, Dr Dieter Wolke said: "In this cohort of pre-term children we found a considerable excess of behaviour difficulties,

including problems in a range of domains such as emotion, hyperactivity, attention and peer relationship problems. Parents and teachers agreed these behaviour problems had a considerable impact on home and school life for 23% of the pre-term group."

Source: University of Warwick

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