

Growing Up with ADHD: How Diagnosis Shapes Socioeconomic Trajectories

Maëlle Tholimet

maelle.tholimet@univ-rennes.fr

Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, this paper investigates the long-term socioeconomic consequences of an Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis in childhood on adult earnings. We first account for sample selection into employment to ensure unbiased estimates. We then address the measurement error inherent in ADHD diagnosis using an instrumental variable strategy, correcting for attenuation bias. Across models, our results show that childhood ADHD significantly reduces the probability of employment in adulthood. However, once both measurement error and sample selection are properly addressed, ADHD has no direct effect on earnings conditional on employment. The economic cost of ADHD thus appears to operate primarily through reduced labor market participation rather than lower wages among those who work. These findings highlight the importance of accurately measuring mental health conditions when estimating their long-term economic impact. They further suggest that policies aimed at early detection, access to care, and labor-market support for individuals with ADHD may yield substantial economic benefits by mitigating employment disadvantages that emerge early in the life course.

JEL classification: I14; J14; J31; C26

Keywords: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; Adult outcomes; Add Health.