

Childhood and Youth/Expert

Fundamental differences exist between girls and boys in areas such as physiology, hormones, development and the use of the health care system. Although enormously relevant, these differences have often been ignored in both theory and practice. In recent years, the focus on health-related differences between boys and girls has grown and new findings are becoming widely available.^[1]

Biological development

By the end of the sixth week of pregnancy, the gonads and genitalia of both sexes are morphologically identical. Only then do the SRY genes (sex-determining region on the Y chromosome) and the SOX9 genes on chromosome 17 become active. Together they then ensure the development of a male embryo. In the absence of the SRY protein, ovaries develop instead of testes (see also: Chromosomal basis: XX and XY). Under the influence of testosterone, sex specific brain development already begins in the fetus. For example, the right hemisphere of the brain in boys develops better than the left. On average, boys develop more slowly than girls. The male brain is fully developed at the age of 25, whereas this occurs about two years earlier in women. The male immune system is somewhat weaker, which means that boys on average fall ill more often than girls, especially in the first two years of life. Physical growth is slower and more irregular in boys than in girls. Boys often have growth spurts, while girls grow more steadily. Similarly, emotional and cognitive development is slower and more irregular in boys than in girls. In terms of language development, boys are 12 to 18 months behind girls. In addition, the more highly developed frontal cortex in girls allows for better impulse control. Girls enter puberty between the ages of nine and 14, while boys enter puberty between the ages of ten and 17. Sexual development not only leads to reproductive development and fertility, but above all to radical physical changes, which have profound physical and psychosocial effects.

Research has indicated that brain development of boys and girls already differs in the prenatal period and that biological sex-related factors therefore have an enormous influence. Nevertheless, brain development is significantly influenced and shaped by learning processes during upbringing. Thus, the possibility cannot be excluded that gender stereotypical treatment of children influences brain development to such an extent that differences in brain development in a sex-dependent manner can arise.^[2]

Physical complaints

Physical symptoms are the main reason for consulting a female physician, especially in girls. Health problems include tension headaches, migraines, stomach problems, constipation and exhaustion. The perception of their children's health worsens as children grow older: In 96 percent of those under 12 years of age, parents or caregivers rate the child's health as good, 92 percent of those aged 12 to 18 (adolescents) and 90 percent of those aged 18 to 25 (young adults) report good health. Girls rate their health slightly less positively than boys, although this difference increases with age.

^[3]

Psychosocial problems

According to a Dutch study, young people are generally happy ^[4], although primary school pupils are on average happier than secondary school pupils. During adolescence more girls than boys are unhappy. ^[5] Behavioral problems manifest themselves differently in boys than in girls. Boys are more likely to behave in a destructive way towards their environment: they are more impulsive and more vocal. Girls tend to direct their problems primarily against themselves. They become more frequently depressed, develop eating disorders or show self-harming behavior. Girls with mental health problems are more likely to seek professional help (usually from their family physician) than boys with mental health problems. ^[6]

30 percent of boys over 16 years old drink more than ten alcoholic beverages one day per week, but only nine percent of girls show such drinking behavior. Alcohol consumption among girls is currently on the rise, although they are less able to cope with the effects of consumption. The number of girls aged 15 to 19 admitted inpatient for alcohol poisoning has increased by 101 percent between 2000 and 2010. For boys, this increase was 66 percent. ^[7] Problematic gambling behavior occurs mainly among boys (seven percent compared to 0.9 percent among girls). Problematic use of social media, on the other hand, is more common among girls (8.6 percent compared to 3.7 percent among boys). ^[8] Problematic media use correlates with poor school performance, reduced social interaction (not including interaction via the Internet) and depressive mood. ^[9]

The prevalence of ADHD and autism is higher in boys than in girls and because of this, these disorders are more often overlooked in girls. Autism spectrum disorder manifests itself differently between the sexes. Girls often use compensatory mechanisms for social interaction and communication. Behavioral observation then only provides insufficient insight into the underlying problem. As a result, parents, teachers and often psychologists and psychiatrists are less likely to detect mild symptoms of autism spectrum disorder in girls. Boys with ADHD show impulsive and "difficult" behavior. Girls are considered overactive and over talkative, but not necessarily "difficult", so professional help will not necessarily be sought. ^[12]

You can find the complete article on ADHS **here**.

Growing up with only one biological parent increases the risk of sexual abuse in boys and girls. Girls are generally more often affected than boys (especially if they live with a stepfather). In addition, sexual abuse occurs more frequently in families where the mother is physically or emotionally absent (e.g. due to mental or physical illness). ^[12]

Literature

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