



Study: Children with chronic illness just as happy as peers

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Children with a chronic illness often lead lives that are just as happy as those of healthier peers, according to a new study.

Medical advancements may mean children with chronic conditions live longer, prompting researchers to look at their overall health status and their satisfaction with life. They analyzed data from the National Institutes of Health's Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System in which caregivers answered questions about 1,253 children ages 5-9.

Consistent with previous prevalence estimates, 20% of the children had a chronic illness such as asthma, obesity, digestive problems, depression and epilepsy, according to "General Health and Life Satisfaction in Children with Chronic Illness," (Blackwell CK, et al. *Pediatrics*. May 6, 2019, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2019/05/02/peds.2018-2988>).

As researches predicted, children with a chronic illness also tended to have worse overall health. Those with the worst general health were boys, Hispanic children and children from single-parent households. Increased stress was linked to worse health, while having a high-income family was associated with better health.

Parents' perceptions of their children's happiness and life satisfaction were similar regardless of whether their child had a chronic illness, the study found. As with overall health, stress was linked to lower satisfaction, and high-income families were linked to higher satisfaction.

"The current study suggests that having a chronic illness is certainly a health challenge (evidenced by lower parent-reported general health) but does not preclude these children from having happy and satisfying lives that are comparable with those of peers without illness," authors wrote.

They attributed the life satisfaction of children with a chronic illness to "positive health assets," which "strengthen one's capabilities to adapt to environmental challenges, satisfy needs, and attain goals, which enable well-being."

"Overall, this work highlights clinical opportunities to broaden the perspective of health beyond the absence of disease to one in which all children, regardless of illness or impairment, can have well-being," authors said.

They called for future research with a nationally representative sample and analysis of the impact of specific illnesses.

Resources

- [AAP resources for managing chronic conditions](#)
- [Information for parents about chronic illness in children from HealthyChildren.org](#)