

News & Comments

Which Parents Transfer Anxiety Disorders to Offspring?

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Research has found a link between a parent's anxiety disorder and anxiety disorders among their children. Compared with children of the opposite sex, children of parents of the same sex were more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders. Having a parent with an anxiety disorder is one of the strongest known risk factors for developing an anxiety disorder, and this effect increases when [two] parents have anxiety disorders. Parents passing on genetic risk to their children and their influence on the environment could explain this association. To determine whether parents and children had anxiety disorders throughout their lifetimes, participants were given semi-structured interviews. It was found that anxiety disorders in the offspring of same-sex parents were associated with high rates of anxiety disorders, whereas anxiety disorders in the offspring of opposite-sex parents were not. Offspring of same-sex parents without anxiety were also less likely to experience anxiety. In contrast, opposite-sex parents without anxiety were not associated with lower rates of anxiety in their offspring. It is well documented that genetics contribute to anxiety disorders, but researchers have not found a genetic explanation for same-sex transmission of anxiety disorders. Children-of-twins research also suggests that environmental factors play an important role in transmitting anxiety from parents to their children, the team said. Anxiety was over three times more prevalent in children of parents with bipolar disorder than in children of parents without major mood disorders or psychoses. Parental depression was not associated with anxiety in children. A lifetime diagnosis of anxiety in offspring was significantly associated with parental anxiety disorders when evaluated independently, but parental mood disorders were not. According to the researchers, treating parents for anxiety may prevent the transmission of anxiety disorders between generations if a causal link is established.

KEYWORDS

Anxiety, diagnosis, parental, same-sex parents, parent's anxiety, genetics, anxiety disorder, parental psychiatric disease

