

## **Social attributions for externalising behaviour patterns in boys and girls**

*Katerina Maniadaki, Edmund Sonuga-Barke & Efthymios Kakouros*

Male to female ratios in clinic-referred samples for externalising behaviour problems in childhood range from 9:1 to 6:1. However, it has been claimed that this gender difference might reflect referral biases. The aim of this study was to investigate whether social attributions about externalising behaviour patterns differ as a function of the child's sex and whether these sex-differentiated attributions can offer an alternative or complementary explanation for the observed gender difference in prevalence.

Two questionnaires, exploring the participants' attributions about the nature, causes, and recommended parental reactions to the same externalising pattern of behaviour expressed by a boy and a girl, were administered to 160 female students of the Department of Early Childhood Education at the T.E.I. of Athens. A between-subject design was used.

The results indicated that externalising behaviour patterns expressed by girls were considered as significantly more deviant from the socially accepted behaviour than the identical behaviour patterns expressed by boys. Moreover, the less typical for their sex, the most severe was considered the condition for girls but not for boys. It was also found that organic reasons were mainly attributed to the boys' externalising behaviour, whereas environmental factors were mainly accused for the girls' behaviour.

With regards to these findings, it is suggested that identical patterns of externalising behaviour are differently viewed in case of boys and girls, which might lead to differential socialisation practices concerning this kind of behaviour for the two genders. Implications for the relationship between differential socialisation practices and actual differences in the prevalence of externalising behaviour problems in boys and girls are discussed.