Explaining attention differences of the very and extremely preterm compared to term born adults

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Acknowledgements:

All authors declare no conflicts of interest.

The BLS study was supported by grants PKE24, JUG14, 01EP9504, and 01ER0801 from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Science. Authors Robert Eves, Marina Mendonça, Samantha Johnson, Peter Bartmann and Dieter Wolke are supported by an EU horizon 2020 grant, agreement number 733280. The authors thank all current and former Bavarian Longitudinal Study group members, pediatricians, psychologists, and research nurses. They also thank those who contributed to study organization, recruitment, data collection, and management at the 26 year assessment: Barbara Busch, Stephan Czeschka, Claudia Gruenzinger, Christian Koch, Diana Kurze, Sonja Perk, Andrea Schreier, Antje Strasser, Julia Trummer, and Eva van Rossum. Special thanks are due to the study participants and their families.

The EPICure study was funded by the Medical Research Council, UK. We are indebted to the EPICure 1 Study Group, which includes pediatricians in 276 maternity units in the UK whose contribution was invaluable. We are also indebted to the many children and parents for their continued participation in the EPICure Study.

Abbreviations

ADHD Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

ADHD-I Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder- Inattention

ADHD-H Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder- Hyperactive/impulsivity

VP/VLBW Very preterm/Very low birthweight

EP Extremely Preterm

IQ Intelligence Quotient

ANT Attention Network Task

TRAB-AS Tester Rating of Adult Behaviour – Attention Span

Word Count: 4161

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Running head: Very and Extremely Preterm Adult Inattention

Conflict of interest and sources of funding: All authors declare no conflicts of interest relevant to this article to disclose. Studies were funded by Medical Research Council, UK and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Science, Germany. The analyses were funded by a doctoral scholarship awarded to the first author.

Manuscript No. JDBP19-203, originally entitled "Explaining attention differences of the very and extremely preterm compared to term born adults"

NUMBER	EDITOR/REVIEWER COMMENTS	AUTHOR'S RESPONSE	REFERENCE PAGE MANUSCRIPT
1.	**Editorial office's comments to author:** It becomes confusing regarding the BLS being the discovery sample and EPICure being the replication sample. This distinction gets lost in the manuscript (this beginning on the first line in the Results section of the Abstract and also on p 8) and if the second study is for replication should the samples be combined in the text?	**Thank you for this feedback. Throughout the manuscript we now make it clear that we perform initial analysis in the BLS sample and then replicate in EPICure. We have also changed from using EP/VP/VLBW when referring to consistent results across cohorts to instead "VP/VLBW or EP" to signify that the data is not being combined**	**Throughout**
2.	With regard to measures of WM, the two measures differ with respect to difficulty: both involve dual conceptual tracking but the number letter task would seem more difficult than digits reversed. As the authors indicate, the measures of working memory therefore are a concern	**In the limitations section of the discussion we now address this issue. While the tasks are different, past research has found them to be highly correlated, with a coefficient of 0.6[1].** 1. Shelton JT, Elliott EM, Hill BD, Calamia MR, Gouvier WmD. A Comparison of Laboratory and Clinical Working Memory Tests and Their Prediction of Fluid Intelligence. *Intelligence*. 2009;37(3):283. doi:10.1016/j.intell.2008.11.005	**Discussion page 15, line 367**
3.	There are other issues that cannot be changed but which need to be specifically cited as limitations and discussed: age at time of evaluation differs (19 vs. 26 years of age), and there was a 10 year difference in time of birth	**In the discussion we address this point. We agree year of birth and age of assessment are important factors. However, rather than considering this as a limitation, we consider it as a strength. If the reported effects are robust and can be generalised, we would expect to find the results replicated between cohorts who**	**Discussion page 12, line 296.**

	raising the problem of differences in medical care.	**are born in different eras of neonatal care and assessed at different age. That is what we found. So far, there is no evidence in the literature that the quality of survival in terms of cognitive outcome has increased in successive eras of neonatal care despite the well documented increases in survival rate[2,3].** **2. Cheong JLY, Anderson PJ, Burnett AC, et al. Changing Neurodevelopment at 8 Years in Children Born Extremely Preterm Since the 1990s. Pediatrics. June 2017. doi:10.1542/peds.2016-4086** **3. Twilhaar ES, Wade RM, Kieviet JF de, Goudoever JB van, Elburg RM van, Oosterlaan J. Cognitive Outcomes of Children Born Extremely or Very Preterm Since the 1990s and Associated Risk Factors: A Meta-analysis and Meta-regression. JAMA Pediatr. 2018;172(4):361-367. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.5323**	
4.	The relationship between EF and IQ is somewhat controversial in general, and this has direct implications for research question #2. (The authors are aware of this and mention it on p 13.). There is also the 'what is ADHD and what is EF?' question, and this seems to depend on what authors decide which is which in different studies.	**The EF literature is relatively heterogenous in regard to what tasks/behaviours are considered EFs. We followed Diamond's definitions of which behaviours are EF while following Willcutt's framework of EF being the primary deficit of ADHD/attention problems. These are both well supported, mainstream viewpoints in the literature. In regard to IQ and EF, failing to control for general cognitive ability would lead to the potentially spurious conclusion that a specific EF deficit causes attention problems. If EF is the specific and primary correlate or "cause", adult EF measures should be unaffected after controlling for general cognitive ability in childhood.**	**Introduction, page 2 line 44.**
5.	The TRAB-AS interrater reliability in the BLS is moderate at best and this would add variability in the measurement of attention.	**We found that on the 9-point scale of attention span, the two observers never differentiated by more than 1 point when assessing a participant, demonstrating a large degree of agreeableness. Additionally, a kappa of 0.67 is considered a**	**Method, page 5, line 128**

		substantial amount of interrater reliability according to Cohen[4]. **4. Cohen J. 1960: A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. Educational and Psychological Measurement 20, 37–46. 1960.**	
6.			
	Reviewer #1		
7.			
8.	This study investigated the role of executive and other cognitive functions in explaining attention problems in adults born very preterm or extremely preterm. The study utilized data from two longstanding studies, the Bavarian longitudinal study and the EPICure Study. The samples from both of these studies are well-marked with respect to descriptors and associated data collection, and the authors chose to use them in a test and validate fashion. The study is nicely organized and well written, and the associated statistical analyses were well done. While I had a high enthusiasm for this paper, particularly given the relative dearth of evidence-based literature with respect to adult outcomes from these respective populations, there are several items that should be addressed prior to publication.	**Thank you**	
9.	The authors move back and forth between the terms ADHD and attention problems. I understand what they are doing here, but the	**We now use the term attention problems throughout and use ADHD/TRAB-AS when we are talking specifically about those measures**	**Throughout**

	analyses clearly go after ADHD. Are they studying ADHD, ADHD symptoms, or attention problems? This will require additional clarification and the use of more consistent terminology throughout the paper.		
10.	The authors report using the two large samples in a sequential fashion such that the BLS is the discovery sample, and the EPICure study served as the replication sample. This requires mention in the Abstract as I initially thought that they might be combining samples.	**In order to clarify, in the abstract it now states specifically that the BLS is the discovery sample and EPICure is the replication sample and that all analyses are performed separately. In the abstract:** **"Performed separately in each cohort, hierarchical regression analyses were used to assess whether the association of preterm birth status with attention problems remained after accounting for executive functioning (inhibitory control and working memory) in adulthood, childhood IQ or sex."** **And** **"In the discovery cohort of the BLS, significant differences were found between VP/VLBW adults and controls for parent rated inattention ($p<0.001$). However, for self-reported measures of ADHD, no significant differences were found in the BLS or in the replication cohort of EPICure."**	**Abstract page 1, line 11**
11.	The issue of IQ is an important one, particularly given the findings obtained and reported in this paper. In the Introduction on page 3, the authors present an argument that EF and IQ are correlated, but this may have more to do with the measures used to represent these constructs than any actual relationship. Relatedly, using childhood IQ probably does not address this issue; but, rather, it likely is more due to differences in measurements (e.g., different IQ measures use differing tasks to arrive at IQ, and the same for EF subcomponents and associated EF measures). I	**In regard to IQ and EF, failing to control for general cognitive ability would lead to the potentially spurious conclusion that a specific EF deficit correlates with or "causes" attention problems. If EF is the primary factor, adult measures should be unaffected after controlling for general cognitive ability in childhood. However we have further elucidated on this argument in the discussion. We additionally retested the analysis using the adult IQ scores from both cohort as to test whether the K-ABC produces dramatically different results to Wechsler adult IQ measures. We found significant associations between adult IQ and attention measures in both cohorts that replicate the findings when using the K-ABC.**	**Discussion page 14, line 328**

	am not sure that the rationale provided is valid and this should be addressed not only in the Introduction, but in the Discussion section as well. Additionally, this issue is accentuated by the use of the K-ABC, which is inherently a different measure than the Wechsler scales or the Stanford-Binet. I am not against the use of the K-ABC, but more discussion is warranted here as to how the use of the K-ABC may have informed this pattern of results.		
12.	Reliability and validity for the ADHD Adult Rating Scale is warranted, particularly given that these were major outcome variables of the study	**Thank you for your suggestion here is the information, which is also now in text:** **BLS Parent Reported ADHD consisted of 18 items(α= 0.88)** **BLS Self-Reported ADHD consisted of 18 items(α= 0.75)** **EPICure Self-reported ADHD consisted of 18 Items(α= 0.85)**	**Method, page 5, line 114**
13.	I would recommend that the authors provide a correlation matrix for the ANT and the attention ratings. In fact, one could argue that attention is a part of a larger EF construct, and that the EF measures incorporated into this study are doing little more than predicting themselves in the data analyses. A correlation matrix of all of the variables would help to address this question as well as to show the degree of collinearity of the data	**We thank you for your suggestion, we have put the correlation matrices in the supplementary material=. As expected, many of the attention domains were correlated with the EF measures and IQ. However, the strength of the correlations between EF measures and attention measures were generally small to medium (coefficients between 0.2 and 0.4), suggesting little evidence of predicting themselves.**	**Results, page 10, line 224 + Supplementary material**
14.	Another measurement issue pertains to the equating of the working memory tasks. While I would agree that both the LNS and Digits Reversed task are aligned with working memory, the LNS actually may be more complex than DR. This should be mentioned as a possible limitation in the study as they may	**See response to editor's comments (Point number 2). We have added this concern to limitations. We have also further discussed how task difficultly may be important in the discussion.**	**Discussion page 15, line 367**

	not be pulling for the same level of complexity for working memory		
15.	I appreciated the comparison of adults who participated versus those who did not participate in this study; however, they need to add some additional verbiage to say whether they have a biased sample or note, particularly given the differences in socioeconomic status and the associated findings	**We have added in the limitations that the selective drop out regarding socioeconomic status may have resulted in bias. However simulation studies have suggested that this effect on regression analyses is minimal[5].** **5. Wolke D, Waylen A, Samara M, et al. Selective drop-out in longitudinal studies and non-biased prediction of behaviour disorders. The British Journal of Psychiatry. 2009;195(3):249-256. doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.108.053751**	**Discussion page 15, line 364**
16.	Controlling for IQ in the data analyses is always a question. The authors make the assumption earlier in the paper that IQ and EF are correlated, so controlling for IQ actually may minimize the impact of EF on the outcomes (see Dennis et al., 2009, Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society). The authors may want to re-run their analyses with and without IQ, and report one model and discuss the other.	**This would only be the case if in the hierarchical regression IQ would be entered before EF. But we allow for the variance explained by EF (also the variance due to association of EF with IQ) to be accounted first and then enter IQ to assess its additional contribution to explaining the differences between VP/VLBW or EP and controls in attention problems**	**Discussion page 14, line 328**
17.	Tables 1 and 2 would benefit from some additional footnotes explaining the abbreviations and terms	**Further notes have been added as to make sure the table is as clear as possible**	**Table 1 and 2**
	Reviewer #2: Review JDBP19-203		
18.	This manuscript reports on attention, executive function (EF), and intelligence in two samples of individuals born preterm (PT) and their full term (FT) controls, all of whom have been followed to adulthood. The PT population and the relations among attention, executive function, and cognitive ability/intelligence are of high interest to the readers of this journal. A study	**Thank you**	

	of youth and young adults born PT provides needed guidance for planning the transition of such individuals to adulthood. The use of the two samples (Bavarian or BLS and EPICure or EP), with the BLS serving as the discovery sample and the EP as the replication sample, is in line with current thinking about the importance of reproducibility in scientific studies.		
19.	Despite these positive features, several methodological weaknesses dampen enthusiasm for the paper. First, there are several differences between the cohorts. The EP sample was born almost 10 years after the BLS sample and medical care had shifted in that time window.	**See response to editor's comments (point number 3). We have addressed this potential issue in the discussion.**	**Discussion page 12, line 293**
20.	The EP participants were all extremely premature whereas the BLS sample included very and extremely premature participants. This important difference is included in the discussion. Both samples showed high attrition. Less than half of the BLS and only about one-third of the EP sample completed self-reports of ADHD and direct measures of EF for this study. Importantly, the BLS sample is 26 years old at the time of testing whereas the EP sample is 19. The age difference may be pertinent because the development of EF and the continued maturation of frontal lobes into young adulthood suggests that the status of EF in the two groups may be different.	**In regard to differences in age of assessment, see response to editor's comments (point number 3). We have added this point to the discussion. In regard to age of assessment for development of the frontal lobes, this would be particularly important if preterms were thought to have a developmental delay rather than an impairment, however this is currently not thought to be the case[6]. The effect of drop out is addressed in point number 15. Overall, the differences in cohorts may be considered a strength of the study due to increased generalizability.** **6. Anderson PJ. Neuropsychological outcomes of children born very preterm. Seminars in Fetal and Neonatal Medicine. 2014;19(2):90-96. doi:10.1016/j.siny.2013.11.012**	**Discussion page 12, line 296**

21.	Another weakness is that the two cohorts had different assessments of working memory. The BLS completed the Letter-Number Sequencing Task while the EP group did backwards digit span.	**See response to editor's comments (point number 2). We have added this concern to limitations**	**Discussion page 15, line 367**
22.	In the data analysis, the primary techniques is hierarchical regression but the investigators did not include an interaction term. If the factors operate differently in the two populations, then the interaction term may be significant.	**As our analyses has 5 predictors for 3 different attention outcomes, the number of potential interactions is potentially very large. There was no theoretical reason prior to our results to test for interactions, however in the discussion we did briefly speculate that the effect of EF on attention problems may be greater in the general population than for preterms. Based on the feedback from reviewers, we did post hoc analyses to test for EF x Birth group interactions but we did not find evidence that EF predicts attention problems more for the general population than for preterms. Instead, 1 interaction suggested the opposite, that working memory predicts ADHD-I symptoms more for preterms than for controls. However, as we are testing 6 interactions, there is an increased possibility this is a chance finding.**	**No current change**
23.	Sex is the final factor in the hierarchical regression but the motivation for including sex is weak. Statistical testing does not correct for multiple comparisons. The group differences on reported symptoms of ADHD would not survive a correction for multiple comparisons.	**We thank you for this advice, we have added more information for why we are including sex as a factor and also adjusted for multiple comparison in the initial comparison between VP/VLBW and EP with their respective control group. As expected, this resulted in the self-reported inattention being no longer significant and the subsequent hierarchical was thus dropped.**	**Introduction page 2, line 39 and results page 9, line 210.**
24.	The results show a weak difference in self-reported ADHD Inattentive symptoms in the EP group only. Given that this group is included to validate the BLS findings, further analysis of this group difference is not well justified. Though parent-rated ADHD symptoms are significantly	**We have removed the self-reported ADHD-I regression from EPICure. However, we believe the difference in parent reported ADHD-I in BLS is important, especially the finding of IQ being a strong predictor which replicates the finding when using the observer rating of attention span as the outcome. Thus we have kept the analysis and in the discussion**	**results page 9, line 210.+ Discussion page 14, line 344/page 15 line 366.**

	different between the PT and control groups in the BLS sample, the EP sample did not include parent reports. So, again this set of findings is not very informative. The strongest group differences are in the observer ratings of attention. My recommendation would be to focus solely on these findings in the subsequent analyses (hierarchical regression).	**addressed that it is regretful we could not replicate the findings of parent reported ADHD-I in EPICure.**	
25.	It would be useful to know more about observed behaviors that the psychologists used to rate the participants in terms of attention. Were there any objective measures obtained, such as number of reminders to return to the task or time required to complete the tasks? If the authors want to use the self- and parent-reported data, it might be interesting to consider the strength of the correlation between self-reports and observer rating. Correlations may be positive even if group differences between preterm and full term are not significant.	**We have produced a correlation matrix for both cohorts so that the agreement between measures of attention can be considered and this is included in the supplementary material. Parent reported inattention was more strongly correlated with observer ratings (0.32) than self-reported measures (0.26) and both correlations were significant. Furthermore, here is the rating scale and information provided to the observers when they were asked to rate attention span:** **Attention/focus** **This scale concerns how long the person pays attention for during the tasks and tries to complete the exercises or works on the task. Here, the persistence of purposeful activity is being evaluated.** **1. Only interested in the given tasks for very short periods of time, hardly any purposeful effort, very short attention span.**	**Supplementary material**

		2. Between 1 and 3 **3. Interested in the tasks for short periods of time, makes purposeful attempts but easily gives up, little stamina, short attention span or fleeting interest in the task, shows little interest in solving mildly challenging tasks.** **4. Between 3 and 5** **5. Makes quite a persistent and purposeful effort or makes repeated attempts to reach a goal (e.g. to solve moderately difficult problems), medium attention span, does not give up in spite of failing at first to solve tasks.** **6. Between 5 and 7** **7. Lasting efforts to reach a goal or solve a problem, long attention span, makes repeated attempts to solve the task despite some failures, is absorbed in the task.**	

		8. Between 7 and 9 **9. Very long attention span, lasting immersion in a task, very persistent.** **10. N/A – unable to evaluate** **We are happy for this information to be included as an appendix if requested.**	
26.	The main finding is that in both the discovery sample and the replication sample, observed differences in attention in young adulthood is best explained by IQ at 6. The amount of variance accounted is similar and moderate. This findings is surprising and interesting. The discussion might include other papers that show that compared to full term comparison groups, neuropsychological functions in children born PT are more likely to be	**We agree fully. We have further added to the discussion suggesting a strong link between cognitive performance and behavioural outcomes for VP children**	**Discussion page 14, line 340**

	associated with a general measure, such as IQ. This finding is worthy of reporting		
27.	Title: The use of the word "Explaining" in the title implies a design that can be used to determine cause and effect. The title should be changed	**We agree that cause and effect could be implied from the previous title, thus it has been revised to: The role of executive and general cognitive functioning in the attention problems of very and extremely preterm adults**	**Page 1, line 1**
28.	Introduction: The first sentence introduces ADHD. It seems more appropriate for this article to launch with a statement about adults born PT. Because the phenotype of ADHD in individuals bon PT may be distinctive, it may not be as disabling as the first sentence states.	**We have revised the first paragraph of the introduction to address this point.**	**Page 2, line 32**
29.	Line 32, page 3: The issue of sex as contributing to the model comes out of the blue. Justification for looking at sex as a factor should be included in the Introduction	**We have revised the first paragraph of the introduction to also address this point.**	**Page 2, line 39**

The role of executive and general cognitive functioning in the attention problems of very and extremely preterm adults

ABSTRACT

Objective—To investigate the role of executive and cognitive functioning in explaining attention problems in adults born very preterm/very low birthweight (VP/VLBW; <32 weeks' gestation/ <1500g) or extremely preterm (EP; <26 weeks' gestation).

Method— Cohorts of VP/VLBW (the Bavarian longitudinal study (BLS)) and EP (the EPICure Study) participants were followed from birth to early adulthood, each also following a respective control group. Adult ADHD symptoms were assessed via self-report in both cohorts and additionally by parent-report in the BLS. Participants in both cohorts also had their attention span rated by trained observers. Performed separately in each cohort, hierarchical regression analyses were used to assess whether the association between preterm birth status and attention problems remained after accounting for executive functioning (inhibitory control and working memory) in adulthood, childhood IQ or sex.

Results— In the discovery cohort of the BLS, significant differences were found between VP/VLBW adults and controls for parent-rated inattention ($p<0.001$). However, for self-reported measures of ADHD, no significant differences were found in the BLS or in the EPICure replication cohort. In both cohorts, observer-rated attention spans were lower for VP/VLBW and EP participants in comparison to their respective control groups ($p<0.001$). In final models for the BLS, inhibitory control and childhood IQ were significantly associated with parent-rated inattention symptoms ($p<0.006$). Whereas working memory and childhood IQ were significantly associated with observer-rated attention span ($p<0.001$). The effect of childhood IQ on observer-rated attention span was replicated in EPICure.

Conclusions—VP/VLBW and EP adults are at increased risk of observer-rated attention problems. These problems were predominantly associated with poorer general cognitive ability in early childhood and somewhat with adult executive functioning.

Key Terms

Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder; Preterm; attention; executive functioning; intelligence

INTRODUCTION

In comparison to term born controls, those born very preterm or at very low birthweight (<32 weeks' gestation or <1500g, VP/VLBW) have been found to have greater attention problems[1]. In childhood, this has been found when assessed via parent report,[2] teacher rating[3] and observer rating of attention span[4]. VP/VLBW individuals are also at increased risk of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis in childhood[1] and adulthood[4]. In particular, a preterm specific phenotype of ADHD, consisting of increased number of inattention symptoms (ADHD-I) with relatively few problems of hyperactivity/impulsivity (ADHD-H)[2] has been proposed. While males are more likely to have ADHD symptoms or diagnosis in the general population, this sex difference has not been consistently found within VP/VLBW groups[1] .

Attention problems have been primarily associated with deficits in executive functioning, a set of higher-order neurocognitive processes required for decision making and goal orienting.[5] While there is discussion over which behaviours and tasks best measure executive functioning, Diamond's (2013) framework states that two main components are the ability to hold and manipulate information in mind - working memory - and the ability to selectively attend and suppress attention to stimuli - inhibitory control[6]. In comparison to controls, VP/VLBW children and adolescents show deficits on a range of executive functioning tasks[7], which may explain the attention problems seen in VP/VLBW children. For example, working memory has been found to mediate the relationship between VP/VLBW birth and teacher-rated inattention[3]. Similarly, impulse control, a component of inhibitory control, has been associated with attention scores in VP/VLBW children and controls[8]. Thus, the greater childhood attention problems seen in VP/VLBW when compared to term borns may be partly explained by executive functioning. However, whether these specific executive functions explain differences in adulthood has not yet been explored.

Alternatively, it has been suggested that the differences in attention between VP/VLBW individuals and term born controls may be explained by VP/VLBW individuals have, on average, lower intelligence scores (IQ)[2]. However, scores on tests of IQ and executive function are correlated with poor executive functioning being partially responsible for poor IQ scores[9]. This is especially true for adult IQ tests that have working memory as a subtest for the calculation of full-scale IQ, meaning the two constructs are not independent. To reduce this issue, childhood IQ can be used to control for general cognitive ability while being less correlated with current abilities in executive function. Overall, if adult inattention is primarily a result of specifically poor executive function, then concurrent measures of executive function should provide the best ability to explain differences in attention between groups, over and above the effect of childhood IQ scores.

The aim of this study was to investigate whether the greater attention problems seen in VP/VLBW as compared to term born adults are best explained by specific executive functioning deficits, general cognitive abilities or sex. The discovery sample is the Bavarian Longitudinal Study (BLS) and replication was conducted in the EPICure study of extremely preterm participants (EP, <26 weeks' gestation). It was hypothesised that the poorer attention seen in VP/VLBW and EP adults would be significantly associated with poor executive functioning, as measured by inhibitory control and working memory, and that these effects would remain after controlling for other potential risk factors of low childhood IQ and male sex.

METHOD

Participants

Bavarian Longitudinal Study (BLS). Details of the design of the BLS have been previously reported[10], as have the details of the assessments at 26 years of age [11]. Briefly, of

682 VP/VLBW infants born alive between January 1985 and March 1986 in Southern Bavaria, Germany, and who required admission to a children's hospital within the first 10 days after birth, 411 were alive and eligible for the 26-year follow-up assessment. 260 participated (63%) with 194 (47%) completing measures of self-reported ADHD and experimental measures of executive functioning. Three hundred and fifty eligible healthy term-born controls born in the same hospitals, matched for sex and socioeconomic status, served as controls and were also followed from birth. In adulthood, 308 controls were eligible for inclusion, 229 (74%) participated with 197 (64%) completing self-reported ADHD and executive functioning measures at 26 years and are thus included in this study. Of the 194 VP/VLBW participants and 197 controls, 172 (89%) and 181 (93%) also had data available for parent-reported ADHD symptoms at 26 years of age. The participant flow chart for the BLS is presented in Supplemental Digital Content 2. Informed consent was obtained from parents and participants, ethical approval was obtained from University Hospital Bonn.

EPICure. Details of the design of EPICure have been previously reported [12] as have the details of the assessments at 19 years of age [13]. Briefly, EPICure included EP infants who were born in the United Kingdom and Ireland from March through to December 1995. Of the 315 alive at hospital discharge, 306 EP participants were eligible for the 19-year follow-up assessment of which 129 (42%) participated. Of these, 107 (35%) completed measures of self-reported ADHD symptoms and tests of executive functioning. A stratified comparison group of 160 children were initially recruited at age 6 with 43 further recruited at 11 years. Of the full-term control group at 11 years (N: 153), 65 (42%) took part at 19 years of age, with 60 (39%) completing measures of self-reported ADHD symptoms and tests of executive functioning. The participant flow chart for EPICure is presented in Supplemental Digital Content 2. Informed consent was obtained from participants, ethical approval was obtained from the South Central – Hampshire A Research Ethics Committee.

Measures

Adult ADHD Symptoms. Both EPICure and BLS participants completed Kooij's DSM-IV based ADHD adult rating scale[14]. This 23 item scale is considered a valid and reliable measure of ADHD in adulthood[14]. The scale determines a participant as having a symptom if the participant responds 'often' or 'very often' to items such as 'I fail to give close attention to details in work'. Two subscores assessing 9 ADHD-I symptoms and 9 ADHD-H symptoms, ranging from 0 (no ADHD sub score symptoms present) to 9 (maximum number of ADHD sub score symptoms present) are calculated with the combined ADHD symptoms (ADHD-C) calculated by totalling the two subscores. In both cohorts, the self-reported ADHD scales had good internal reliability (BLS α= 0.75, EPICure α= 0.85). In the BLS cohort only, parents also assessed their child's ADHD symptoms using the same questionnaire, with a similarly good internal reliability(α= 0.88).[4] All ADHD-I, ADHD-H and ADHD-C symptom scores were then converted into Z scores based upon the mean and standard deviation of each cohort's respective control group.

Tester Rating of Adult Behaviour - Attention Span (TRAB-AS). In both cohorts, psychologists rated the individual's attention on a scale from 1 (very short attention span) to 9 (very long attention span)[15]. Assessments were made three times across the assessment day: (1) during the cognitive assessment, (2) during the afternoon session, and (3) at the end of the assessment day. The means of these three time points were then combined to produce an overall assessment of attention span which were then converted into Z scores based upon the mean and standard deviation of each cohort's respective control group. Within the BLS, Tester Rating of Adult Behaviour - Attention Span (TRAB-AS) showed moderate inter-rater reliability (Kappa=0.67). For EPICure, all assessments were made by a single psychologist.

Adult Executive Functioning: Inhibitory control. Inhibitory control was measured using the Attention Network Task (ANT) [16]. The ANT measures alerting, orienting and executive control. For this study, executive control was of interest as a measure of inhibitory control. Consisting of 128 trials, the ANT requires participants to determine the direction of a central target arrow as accurately and as quickly as possible while ignoring flanker arrows. Inhibitory control was calculated by taking the mean reaction time on trials when the flanker arrows were incongruent and subtracting the mean reaction time when the flanker arrows were congruent. Scores were measured in milliseconds with a larger inhibitory control score indicating greater difficulty with inhibiting extraneous stimuli. See Supplemental Digital Content 1 for a diagram demonstrating the sequence of events in an ANT trial and a detailed description of how the ANT was performed in both cohorts using identical procedure.

Adult Executive Functioning: Working Memory. For BLS participants, the working memory assessment comprised a Letter-Number Sequencing task, a subtest of Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale III [17]. Participants heard sequences of numbers and letters and then repeated back the numbers in ascending order and the letters in alphabetical order. EPICure participants partook in a different verbal working memory assessment, the backwards digit recall task a subtest of Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale IV[18]. Participants listened to sequences of numbers and then repeated them back in reverse order, a working memory assessment found to be closely related to the Letter-Number Sequencing task [19]. Scores in both cohorts were standardised based upon each cohort's respective control group with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15.

Childhood IQ. At 6 years of age, the IQ of participants was assessed with the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children Mental Processing Component, comprising of 8 subtests, 5 subtests to measure simultaneous processing and 3 subtests to sequential processing [20–22]. Scores in both cohorts were standardised based upon each cohort's respective control group with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. If IQ data were missing at 6 years, IQ scores from the next available cognitive assessment at either 8 years (BLS) or 11 years (EPICure) were used (N:41, 7% of all participants).

Statistical Analysis

SPSS version 24 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY) and R version 3.4.2 were used to analyse the data. The comparison of demographic data in EP/VP/VLBW and control samples was assessed using chi-squared tests in both cohorts. Participants with complete data for measures of executive functioning, self-reported ADHD symptoms and TRAB-AS were included for analysis. All analyses were performed separately for each cohort; first in the BLS and then subsequently replicated in EPICure, allowing for the robustness of findings to be explored.

To test for differences between VP/VLBW participants or EP participants and controls, independent samples t-tests were first used to compare self-reported ADHD symptoms, parent-reported ADHD symptoms (BLS only), TRAB-AS, inhibitory control, working memory and IQ at 6 years for each cohort. Adjustment for multiple comparisons were made using Hochberg's procedure[23] . Effect sizes are reported as Cohen's d: 0.20 = small, 0.50 = medium, 0.80 = large[24].

When significant differences in attention problems were found between VP/VLBW or EP participants and controls, hierarchical regressions were performed to identify which factors reduced and explained these differences. This was performed first in the discovery sample of the BLS and replicated when possible in EPICure. Hierarchical regressions were used to determine whether deficits in executive function explained the greater attention problems in VP/VLBW and EP individuals, above and beyond the effect of IQ or sex. Each hierarchical regression added at step 1 the binary variable of birth group (VP/VLBW or control for BLS, EP or control for EPICure). At step 2, measures of executive function were added. IQ at 6 years was added at step 3 while male sex, a common risk factor for attention problems, was added at step 4. At each step in the hierarchical regression, the importance of each variable was assessed in two ways. Firstly, by the R-square change of the overall model fit for the ADHD-I symptoms or TRAB-AS outcome, determining how each step improves the prediction of attention problems in adulthood. At step 4, the final model was assessed to determine the predictive ability of each variable upon consideration of all other variables in the model and the total variance explained. Additionally, the estimated adjusted means for VP/VLBW(or EP) and controls were calculated at each step in the hierarchical regression. This assessed the importance of inhibitory control, working memory, IQ at 6 years and sex by their effect on the differences in means between the VP/VLBW(or EP) groups and their respective controls. If for example, the reason for poor attention in VP/VLBW and EP adults was a result of poor executive functioning, then the adding of executive functioning measures at step 2 should cause the difference in estimated adjusted means between VP/VLBW and controls to diminish, becoming no longer statistically significant.

RESULTS

Demographic Data and Drop-out Analysis

Information regarding demographic data and loss to follow-up into adulthood have been reported previously for the BLS [11] and in EPICure [13]. VP/VLBW and EP participants in both cohorts were more likely to be of higher socioeconomic status than dropouts from their respective cohorts (*p* = 0.003 in BLS, *p* = 0.004 in EPICure*)*. Participating EPICure EP individuals were also more likely to be female than EP participants lost to follow up (*p* = 0.039*)*. The only significant difference within both cohorts comparing demographic data of VP/VLBW and EP to controls was that BLS controls were more likely to have higher socioeconomic status than BLS VP/VLBW individuals (*p* = 0.030*).*

Differences between EP/VP/VLBW adults and controls in ADHD symptoms, executive function and IQ

Between group differences in ADHD symptoms, attention span, executive function and IQ are shown in Table 1. In the discovery sample, the BLS, VP/VLBW participants did not self-report significantly higher ADHD-I, ADHD-H or ADHD-C symptoms than controls. Similarly, after adjustments for multiple comparisons were made[23], there were no significant differences in self-reported ADHD between EP and controls in the replication sample of EPICure. Parents of the BLS VP/VLBW participants reported their adult children as having significantly higher ADHD-C symptoms than controls, which was primarily due to differences in ADHD-I symptoms rather than ADHD-H symptoms. Finally, in the BLS VP/VLBW participants were found to have considerably shorter attention spans than controls when rated by observers using the TRAB-AS, which was replicated in EPICure (Table 1).

For executive function, BLS's VP/VLBW participants demonstrated poorer performance in both domains, with larger response times for inhibitory control and lower working memory scores in comparison to controls. On the measure of IQ at 6 years of age, VP/VLBW participants scored considerably lower than their respective control group. In the replication sample of EPICure, a robustly similar set of findings regarding executive and general cognitive functions were found. However, the magnitude of difference between the EP participants and controls was slightly larger than the difference found between the VP/VLBW and controls in the BLS (Table 1). A correlation matrix for attention measures, executive functioning and general cognitive functioning is also provided in supplementary material 3.

Hierarchical regressions explaining ADHD-I symptoms and TRAB-AS differences in VP/VLBW or EP adults and controls

For BLS parent-reported ADHD-I symptoms, the estimated adjusted means for VP/VLBW and controls at each hierarchical step are shown in figure 1. Initially at step 1, the VP/VLBW group had an ADHD-I symptom z score 0.95 greater than the controls, 95% confidence interval 0.49 to 1.41. When inhibitory control and working memory were entered at step 2, both executive functioning measures were significantly associated with ADHD-I symptoms, with the difference in estimated adjusted means between VP/VLBW and controls reducing to z=0.50 (0.04, 0.95). It was not until step 3, when IQ at age 6 years was added, that the estimated mean differences between groups became statistically insignificant, reducing to a difference of z=0.03 (-0.43, 0.50). At step 4, the variable of sex did not significantly increase R^2 and only minimally influenced the estimated adjusted means 0.01(-0.46, 0.48). From the initial differences between VP/VLBW and controls at step 1 being z=0.95, the difference in estimated adjusted means between VP/VLBW and controls in the final model was reduced to a difference of z=0.01. The final model for BLS parent-reported ADHD-I symptoms explained 22% of the variance and was predominantly explained by IQ at 6 years of age and inhibitory control in adulthood (Table 2).

For TRAB-AS in the BLS, the estimated adjusted means between groups at each hierarchical step are shown in figure 2. Initially at step 1, the VP/VLBW groups' attention span ratings were z= -0.48 (-0.70, -0.25) lower than controls. At step 2, both inhibitory control and working memory were found to be significantly associated with TRAB-AS rating, with the difference in adjusted means between groups reducing to z=-0.21 (-0.43, 0.01) and no longer statistically significant. At step 3, IQ at 6 years old was also found to be significantly associated with TRAB-AS rating, further reducing the estimated adjusted means to a difference of z=-0.04(-0.26, 0.19). While at step 1, the difference in estimated adjusted means between VP/VLBW and controls was found to be 0.48, this reduced to 0.04 at step 4, (see figure 2). The final model for predicting TRAB-AS in the BLS explained 23% of the variance with working memory and IQ at 6 years old the only factors remaining significantly associated with attention span rating (Table 2).

For TRAB-AS in EPICure, the estimated adjusted means between groups at each hierarchical step are shown in figure 2. Initially at step 1, the EP groups' attention span ratings were z= -1.14 (-1.73, -0.55) lower than controls. At step 2, working memory and inhibitory controls significantly diminished the effect of birth group on attention span rating to z= -0.58(-1.21,0.06). At step 3, adding the measure of IQ at 6 years old, both executive functioning variables were no longer statistically significant and resulted in controls having an adjusted attention span of z=0.14 (-0.55, 0.83) lower than EP participants. While at step 1, the estimated difference in adjusted means found the EP group to have a deficit of z= -1.14, at step 4 with sex also introduced the difference had switched to controls having a deficit of z= 0.11 (see figure 2). The final model for TRAB-AS in EPICure explained 26% of the variance, with IQ at 6 years of age being the only remaining significant predictor (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

In the discovery sample of the BLS, we observed evidence of greater attention problems for VP/VLBW adults, as demonstrated by greater parent-reported ADHD-I symptoms and poorer attention span in comparison to controls. In contrast, we found no self-reported difference in ADHD between VP/VLBW and controls. These results were found to be robust, being replicated in the EPICure sample in which EP adults had shorter observer rated attention span but no self-reported differences in ADHD. Our hypothesis, that differences in attention would be explained by executive functioning was only partially supported. In the BLS, measures of inhibitory control and working memory in adulthood partially explained the effect of VP/VLBW birth. However, after childhood IQ was accounted for, inhibitory control only remained significantly associated with parent-reported ADHD-I symptoms, while working memory only remained significantly associated with TRAB-AS ratings. For EPICure, while the effect of EP birth on TRAB-AS rating was explained by inhibitory control and working memory, neither factor remained significant after accounting for childhood IQ. The results from both cohorts indicate that while specific executive functioning measures can aid in explaining why VP/VLBW or EP adults show more attention problems than controls, childhood IQ explains a larger amount of the difference between groups.

The pattern of results from adulthood is largely in concordance with past research looking at attention problems in preterm children, suggesting specific problems of inattention rather than hyperactivity/impulsivity. Additionally, the greater relative differences found between EP and controls in EPICure than between the VP/VLBW and controls in the BLS may result from a "gestational gradient", whereby the risk of attention problems increases as gestational age at birth decreases[1]. The findings are consistent with this exposure-response effect of gestation as the EPICure EP group were born on average 6 weeks more preterm than the BLS VP/VLBW group. Consistent with this interpretation are the greater relative differences in TRAB-AS scores, the poorer performances on measures of executive functioning and the larger deficit in general cognitive ability between EPICure's EP adults and controls than between BLS's VP/VLBW adults and controls. As well as gestational age; year of birth

(1985 vs 1995) and age of assessment (26 vs 19 years old) differed between the discovery sample of the BLS and the replication sample of EPICure, both factors that may influence findings. However, the fact that our results were found to be robust across cohorts despite these differences should provide further confidence in the findings. This is consistent with previous reports[25,26] which suggest that while survival of very preterm born babies has increased due to improvements in neonatal care, there is no evidence of improved cognitive outcome across eras.

Within the general population and in VP/VLBW children, attention problems have been primarily associated with deficits in executive functioning[5,8,27], however, we found inconsistent evidence for this after we controlled for childhood IQ. Our results are in line with Willcutt et al's (2005) postulation that deficits in executive function are important but are not the sole factor causing ADHD symptoms[5]. Alternatively, as our VP/VLBW and EP participants demonstrated a behaviourally distinct phenotype, composed primarily of inattention rather than hyperactivity/impulsivity, it may be that this phenotype has a different primary factor. The attention problems of VP/VLBW and EP adults, as shown here, would appear to be due to a general cognitive deficit rather than the specific executive functioning deficit seen in the general population. However, if inattention is a result of a specific executive functioning deficit it is also possible that our measures were not sensitive to those specific deficits. In childhood, inattention within the general population but also in VP/VLBW and EP participants has been found to be more closely related to visuo-spatial working memory rather than verbal working memory[27–29] . As our measures of working memory were verbal, it may be that we failed to assess the correct specific measures of executive functioning. While future studies should look to address this, the current results are in line with recent research suggesting the limited efficacy of working memory interventions on attention and working memory performance itself for VP/VLBW children[30]. If verbal working memory is both impervious to intervention and only partially related to inattention in VP/VLBW and EP adults, it suggests that interventions for VP/VLBW and EP children may be focused elsewhere.

The fact that childhood IQ was significantly related to attention problems in both cohorts, regardless of how attention was assessed, and partially explained the effect of being born VP/VLBW or EP is pertinent. It can still be debated whether IQ is independent of executive function in childhood. However, failing to control for general cognitive ability would lead to the potentially erroneous conclusion that a specific executive functioning is responsible for attention problems when it is instead part of a more general cognitive deficit. Regardless, if early identification of VP/VLBW or EP children at risk of long-term attention problems is of primary importance, then IQ testing appears a relatively straightforward approach to do so. VP/VLBW and EP individuals have been found to be at increased risk of brain injury, such as reduced cholinergic basal forebrain integrity and decreased white and grey matter, which has been found to mediate the relationship between preterm birth and poorer IQ[31,32]. It may be that IQ scores in childhood act as an indicator of overall poor brain growth. This poor brain growth may result in long term behavioural deficits in domains such as inattention, but less so for behaviours regarding hyperactivity and impulsivity. The finding of a strong association between general cognitive ability and inattention are consistent with evidence from EPICure in childhood,[2] as well as other research finding strong links between general cognitive performance and behavioural difficulties for VP/VLBW children.[8,33]

Another important finding from this research is that the method for assessing attention problems is key, with non-significant differences by self-report but larger differences when assessed through parent report or observer rating. When BLS VP/VLBW behaviour was rated by their parents or observer, more attention problems were found but this was not found for self-report. In EPICure parent report was unavailable but the results found a similar disparity between self-report and observer ratings. Overall, our results support other research into attention in extremely low birthweight adults and controls, finding no significant difference for self-reported ADHD of any subtype[34,35]. We can speculate that the VP/VLBW and EP groups reporting of fewer symptoms as compared to parents is compatible with Festinger's theory of social comparison[36]. VP/VLBW and EP adults have been found to have a lower educational level and are more likely to be in manual employment [37]. An individual's primary comparison is with those they socialise with mostly, i.e. peers. Compared to peers in their social circle, VP/VLBW and EP adults may not consider themselves to have attention problems. In contrast, parents are more likely to compare their offspring to their birth cohort (i.e. all adults) and thus use a different comparison level and report more attention problems, similar to observation measures of attention. Self-report measures of ADHD may thus underestimate symptoms in VP/VLBW and EP adults.

There are clear strengths to this study. These include the use of two prospectively studied cohorts allowing for replication of findings. The use of identical measures for ADHD symptoms, observer rating of attention span, inhibitory control and child IQ in both cohorts reduces the influence of methodological issues in interpreting results. However, there are also limitations. Firstly, the rate of attrition was moderate to high, with remaining participants found to be of higher socioeconomic status in both cohorts. This potential bias is unlikely to have had an impact on our results, as regressions models are only marginally affected by selective dropout[38]; nevertheless, bias cannot be excluded. Additionally, the lack of parent report in EPICure and the difference in working memory assessments between the cohorts limited how robustly we could replicate the findings from the BLS. Though the two measures of verbal working memory have been found to be closely related[19], the letter number sequencing task may be more associated with attention ratings due to its greater complexity.[39]Future research should look to address the importance of task complexity as well as assessing visuo-spatial working memory, which as previously noted may be more linked to attention deficits. Finally, while our study was able to assess multiple possible predictors of inattention, it had the limitation that we were unable to directly assess other important cognitive factors such as processing speed equivalently for both cohorts, as it has been noted as a core deficit for inattention in the general population and VP/VLBW children[28,40]. While working memory performance is thought to be at least partially reliant on processing speed[41], directly testing whether this lower level ability is key to adult inattention could be pivotal for future interventions.

To conclude, this study provides further evidence for specific attention problems in early adulthood for VP/VLBW and EP in comparison to controls, replicating findings from childhood. While we found that adult executive functioning measures were associated with attention problems in adulthood, childhood IQ was a stronger and more consistent predictor in both the discovery and replication sample. Early assessment of cognitive ability would allow for early identification of VP/VLBW and EP children at risk for long term attention problems.

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Figure Legends

*Figure 1: D*ifferences in parent reported ADHD-Inattention symptomology between VP/VLBW and controls at each step of the hierarchical regression for the Bavarian Longitudinal Study. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals

Figure 2: Differences in Tester Rating of Adult Behaviour-Attention span (TRAB-AS) between VP/VLBW and EP with their respective control group at each step of the hierarchical regression for the Bavarian Longitudinal Study and EPICure. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals

The role of executive and general cognitive functioning in the attention problems of very and extremely preterm adults

ABSTRACT

Objective—To investigate the role of executive and cognitive functioning in explaining attention problems in adults born very preterm/very low birthweight (VP/VLBW; <32 weeks' gestation/ <1500g) or extremely preterm (EP; <26 weeks' gestation).

Method— Cohorts of VP/VLBW (the Bavarian longitudinal study (BLS)) and EP (the EPICure Study) participants were followed from birth to early adulthood, each also following a respective control group. Adult ADHD symptoms were assessed via self-report in both cohorts and additionally by parent-report in the BLS. Participants in both cohorts also had their attention span rated by trained observers. Performed separately in each cohort, hierarchical regression analyses were used to assess whether the association between preterm birth status and attention problems remained after accounting for executive functioning (inhibitory control and working memory) in adulthood, childhood IQ or sex.

Results— In the discovery cohort of the BLS, significant differences were found between VP/VLBW adults and controls for parent-rated inattention (p<0.001). However, for self-reported measures of ADHD, no significant differences were found in the BLS or in the EPICure replication cohort. In both cohorts, observer-rated attention spans were lower for VP/VLBW and EP participants in comparison to their respective control groups (p <0.001). In final models for the BLS, inhibitory control and childhood IQ were significantly associated with parent-rated inattention symptoms (p<0.006). Whereas working memory and childhood IQ were significantly associated with observer-rated attention span (p<0.001). The effect of childhood IQ on observer-rated attention span was replicated in EPICure.

Conclusions—VP/VLBW and EP adults are at increased risk of observer-rated attention problems. These problems were predominantly associated with poorer general cognitive ability in early childhood and somewhat with adult executive functioning.

Key Terms

Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder; Preterm; attention; executive functioning; intelligence

INTRODUCTION

In comparison to term born controls, those born very preterm or at very low birthweight (<32 weeks' gestation or <1500g, VP/VLBW) have been found to have greater attention problems[1]. In childhood, this has been found when assessed via parent report,[2] teacher rating[3] and observer rating of attention span[4]. VP/VLBW individuals are also at increased risk of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis in childhood[1] and adulthood[4]. In particular, a preterm specific phenotype of ADHD, consisting of increased number of inattention symptoms (ADHD-I) with relatively few problems of hyperactivity/impulsivity (ADHD-H)[2] has been proposed. While males are more likely to have ADHD symptoms or diagnosis in the general population, this sex difference has not been consistently found within VP/VLBW groups[1] .

Attention problems have been primarily associated with deficits in executive functioning, a set of higher-order neurocognitive processes required for decision making and goal orienting.[5] While there is discussion over which behaviours and tasks best measure executive functioning, Diamond's (2013) framework states that two main components are the ability to hold and manipulate information in mind - working memory - and the ability to selectively attend and suppress attention to stimuli - inhibitory control[6]. In comparison to controls, VP/VLBW children and adolescents show deficits on a range of executive functioning tasks[7], which may explain the attention problems seen in VP/VLBW children. For example, working memory has been found to mediate the relationship between VP/VLBW birth and teacher-rated inattention[3]. Similarly, impulse control, a component of inhibitory control, has been associated with attention scores in VP/VLBW children and controls[8]. Thus, the greater childhood attention problems seen in VP/VLBW when compared to term borns may be partly explained by executive functioning. However, whether these specific executive functions explain differences in adulthood has not yet been explored.

Alternatively, it has been suggested that the differences in attention between VP/VLBW individuals and term born controls may be explained by VP/VLBW individuals have, on average, lower intelligence scores (IQ)[2]. However, scores on tests of IQ and executive function are correlated with poor executive functioning being partially responsible for poor IQ scores[9]. This is especially true for adult IQ tests that have working memory as a subtest for the calculation of full-scale IQ, meaning the two constructs are not independent. To reduce this issue, childhood IQ can be used to control for general cognitive ability while being less correlated with current abilities in executive function. Overall, if adult inattention is primarily a result of specifically poor executive function, then concurrent measures of executive function should provide the best ability to explain differences in attention between groups, over and above the effect of childhood IQ scores.

The aim of this study was to investigate whether the greater attention problems seen in VP/VLBW as compared to term born adults are best explained by specific executive functioning deficits, general cognitive abilities or sex. The discovery sample is the Bavarian Longitudinal Study (BLS) and replication was conducted in the EPICure study of extremely preterm participants (EP, <26 weeks' gestation). It was hypothesised that the poorer attention seen in VP/VLBW and EP adults would be significantly associated with poor executive functioning, as measured by inhibitory control and working memory, and that these effects would remain after controlling for other potential risk factors of low childhood IQ and male sex.

METHOD

Participants

<u>Bavarian Longitudinal Study (BLS)</u>**.** Details of the design of the BLS have been previously reported[10], as have the details of the assessments at 26 years of age [11]. Briefly, of

682 VP/VLBW infants born alive between January 1985 and March 1986 in Southern Bavaria, Germany, and who required admission to a children's hospital within the first 10 days after birth, 411 were alive and eligible for the 26-year follow-up assessment. 260 participated (63%) with 194 (47%) completing measures of self-reported ADHD and experimental measures of executive functioning. Three hundred and fifty eligible healthy term-born controls born in the same hospitals, matched for sex and socioeconomic status, served as controls and were also followed from birth. In adulthood, 308 controls were eligible for inclusion, 229 (74%) participated with 197 (64%) completing self-reported ADHD and executive functioning measures at 26 years and are thus included in this study. Of the 194 VP/VLBW participants and 197 controls, 172 (89%) and 181 (93%) also had data available for parent-reported ADHD symptoms at 26 years of age. The participant flow chart for the BLS is presented in Supplemental Digital Content 2. Informed consent was obtained from parents and participants, ethical approval was obtained from University Hospital Bonn.

EPICure. Details of the design of EPICure have been previously reported [12] as have the details of the assessments at 19 years of age [13]. Briefly, EPICure included EP infants who were born in the United Kingdom and Ireland from March through to December 1995. Of the 315 alive at hospital discharge, 306 EP participants were eligible for the 19-year follow-up assessment of which 129 (42%) participated. Of these, 107 (35%) completed measures of self-reported ADHD symptoms and tests of executive functioning. A stratified comparison group of 160 children were initially recruited at age 6 with 43 further recruited at 11 years. Of the full-term control group at 11 years (N: 153), 65 (42%) took part at 19 years of age, with 60 (39%) completing measures of self-reported ADHD symptoms and tests of executive functioning. The participant flow chart for EPICure is presented in Supplemental Digital Content 2. Informed consent was obtained from participants, ethical approval was obtained from the South Central – Hampshire A Research Ethics Committee.

Measures

Adult ADHD Symptoms. Both EPICure and BLS participants completed Kooij's DSM-IV based ADHD adult rating scale[14]. This 23 item scale is considered a valid and reliable measure of ADHD in adulthood[14]. The scale determines a participant as having a symptom if the participant responds 'often' or 'very often' to items such as 'I fail to give close attention to details in work'. Two subscores assessing 9 ADHD-I symptoms and 9 ADHD-H symptoms, ranging from 0 (no ADHD sub score symptoms present) to 9 (maximum number of ADHD sub score symptoms present) are calculated with the combined ADHD symptoms (ADHD-C) calculated by totalling the two subscores. In both cohorts, the self-reported ADHD scales had good internal reliability (BLS α= 0.75, EPICure α= 0.85). In the BLS cohort only, parents also assessed their child's ADHD symptoms using the same questionnaire, with a similarly good internal reliability(α= 0.88).[4] All ADHD-I, ADHD-H and ADHD-C symptom scores were then converted into Z scores based upon the mean and standard deviation of each cohort's respective control group.

Tester Rating of Adult Behaviour - Attention Span (TRAB-AS). In both cohorts, psychologists rated the individual's attention on a scale from 1 (very short attention span) to 9 (very long attention span)[15]. Assessments were made three times across the assessment day: (1) during the cognitive assessment, (2) during the afternoon session, and (3) at the end of the assessment day. The means of these three time points were then combined to produce an overall assessment of attention span which were then converted into Z scores based upon the mean and standard deviation of each cohort's respective control group. Within the BLS, Tester Rating of Adult Behaviour - Attention Span (TRAB-AS) showed moderate inter-rater reliability (Kappa=0.67). For EPICure, all assessments were made by a single psychologist.

Adult Executive Functioning: Inhibitory control. Inhibitory control was measured using the Attention Network Task (ANT) [16]. The ANT measures alerting, orienting and executive control. For this study, executive control was of interest as a measure of inhibitory control. Consisting of 128 trials, the ANT requires participants to determine the direction of a central target arrow as accurately and as quickly as possible while ignoring flanker arrows. Inhibitory control was calculated by taking the mean reaction time on trials when the flanker arrows were incongruent and subtracting the mean reaction time when the flanker arrows were congruent. Scores were measured in milliseconds with a larger inhibitory control score indicating greater difficulty with inhibiting extraneous stimuli. See Supplemental Digital Content 1 for a diagram demonstrating the sequence of events in an ANT trial and a detailed description of how the ANT was performed in both cohorts using identical procedure.

Adult Executive Functioning: Working Memory. For BLS participants, the working memory assessment comprised a Letter-Number Sequencing task, a subtest of Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale III [17]. Participants heard sequences of numbers and letters and then repeated back the numbers in ascending order and the letters in alphabetical order. EPICure participants partook in a different verbal working memory assessment, the backwards digit recall task a subtest of Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale IV[18]. Participants listened to sequences of numbers and then repeated them back in reverse order, a working memory assessment found to be closely related to the Letter-Number Sequencing task [19]. Scores in both cohorts were standardised based upon each cohort's respective control group with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15.

Childhood IQ. At 6 years of age, the IQ of participants was assessed with the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children Mental Processing Component, comprising of 8 subtests, 5 subtests to measure simultaneous processing and 3 subtests to sequential processing [20–22]. Scores in both cohorts were standardised based upon each cohort's respective control group with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. If IQ data were missing at 6 years, IQ scores from the next available cognitive assessment at either 8 years (BLS) or 11 years (EPICure) were used (N:41, 7% of all participants).

Statistical Analysis

SPSS version 24 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY) and R version 3.4.2 were used to analyse the data. The comparison of demographic data in EP/VP/VLBW and control samples was assessed using chi-squared tests in both cohorts. Participants with complete data for measures of executive functioning, self-reported ADHD symptoms and TRAB-AS were included for analysis. All analyses were performed separately for each cohort; first in the BLS and then subsequently replicated in EPICure, allowing for the robustness of findings to be explored.

To test for differences between VP/VLBW participants or EP participants and controls, independent samples t-tests were first used to compare self-reported ADHD symptoms, parent-reported ADHD symptoms (BLS only), TRAB-AS, inhibitory control, working memory and IQ at 6 years for each cohort. Adjustment for multiple comparisons were made using Hochberg's procedure[23] . Effect sizes are reported as Cohen's d: 0.20 = small, 0.50 = medium, 0.80 = large[24].

When significant differences in attention problems were found between VP/VLBW or EP participants and controls, hierarchical regressions were performed to identify which factors reduced and explained these differences. This was performed first in the discovery sample of the BLS and replicated when possible in EPICure. Hierarchical regressions were used to determine whether deficits in executive function explained the greater attention problems in VP/VLBW and EP individuals, above and beyond the effect of IQ or sex. Each hierarchical regression added at step 1 the binary variable of birth group (VP/VLBW or control for BLS, EP or control for EPICure). At step 2, measures of executive function were added. IQ at 6 years was added at step 3 while male sex, a common risk factor for attention problems, was added at step 4. At each step in the hierarchical regression, the importance of each variable was assessed in two ways. Firstly, by the R-square change of the overall model fit for the ADHD-I symptoms or TRAB-AS outcome, determining how each step improves the prediction of attention problems in adulthood. At step 4, the final model was assessed to determine the predictive ability of each variable upon consideration of all other variables in the model and the total variance explained. Additionally, the estimated adjusted means for VP/VLBW(or EP) and controls were calculated at each step in the hierarchical regression. This assessed the importance of inhibitory control, working memory, IQ at 6 years and sex by their effect on the differences in means between the VP/VLBW(or EP) groups and their respective controls. If for example, the reason for poor attention in VP/VLBW and EP adults was a result of poor executive functioning, then the adding of executive functioning measures at step 2 should cause the difference in estimated adjusted means between VP/VLBW and controls to diminish, becoming no longer statistically significant.

RESULTS

Demographic Data and Drop-out Analysis

Information regarding demographic data and loss to follow-up into adulthood have been reported previously for the BLS [11] and in EPICure [13]. VP/VLBW and EP participants in both cohorts were more likely to be of higher socioeconomic status than dropouts from their respective cohorts (p = 0.003 in BLS, p = 0.004 in EPICure). Participating EPICure EP individuals were also more likely to be female than EP participants lost to follow up (p = 0.039). The only significant difference within both cohorts comparing demographic data of VP/VLBW and EP to controls was that BLS controls were more likely to have higher socioeconomic status than BLS VP/VLBW individuals (p = 0.030).

Differences between EP/VP/VLBW adults and controls in ADHD symptoms, executive function and IQ

Between group differences in ADHD symptoms, attention span, executive function and IQ are shown in Table 1. In the discovery sample, the BLS, VP/VLBW participants did not self-report significantly higher ADHD-I, ADHD-H or ADHD-C symptoms than controls. Similarly, after adjustments for multiple comparisons were made[23], there were no significant differences in self-reported ADHD between EP and controls in the replication sample of EPICure. Parents of the BLS VP/VLBW participants reported their adult children as having significantly higher ADHD-C symptoms than controls, which was primarily due to differences in ADHD-I symptoms rather than ADHD-H symptoms. Finally, in the BLS VP/VLBW participants were found to have considerably shorter attention spans than controls when rated by observers using the TRAB-AS, which was replicated in EPICure (Table 1).

For executive function, BLS's VP/VLBW participants demonstrated poorer performance in both domains, with larger response times for inhibitory control and lower working memory scores in comparison to controls. On the measure of IQ at 6 years of age, VP/VLBW participants scored considerably lower than their respective control group. In the replication sample of EPICure, a robustly similar set of findings regarding executive and general cognitive functions were found. However, the magnitude of difference between the EP participants and controls was slightly larger than the difference found between the VP/VLBW and controls in the BLS (Table 1). A correlation matrix for attention measures, executive functioning and general cognitive functioning is also provided in supplementary material 3.

Hierarchical regressions explaining ADHD-I symptoms and TRAB-AS differences in VP/VLBW or EP adults and controls

For BLS parent-reported ADHD-I symptoms, the estimated adjusted means for VP/VLBW and controls at each hierarchical step are shown in figure 1. Initially at step 1, the VP/VLBW group had an ADHD-I symptom z score 0.95 greater than the controls, 95% confidence interval 0.49 to 1.41. When inhibitory control and working memory were entered at step 2, both executive functioning measures were significantly associated with ADHD-I symptoms, with the difference in estimated adjusted means between VP/VLBW and controls reducing to z=0.50 (0.04, 0.95). It was not until step 3, when IQ at age 6 years was added, that the estimated mean differences between groups became statistically insignificant, reducing to a difference of z=0.03 (-0.43, 0.50). At step 4, the variable of sex did not significantly increase R^2 and only minimally influenced the estimated adjusted means 0.01(-0.46, 0.48). From the initial differences between VP/VLBW and controls at step 1 being z=0.95, the difference in estimated adjusted means between VP/VLBW and controls in the final model was reduced to a difference of z=0.01. The final model for BLS parent-reported ADHD-I symptoms explained 22% of the variance and was predominantly explained by IQ at 6 years of age and inhibitory control in adulthood (Table 2).

For TRAB-AS in the BLS, the estimated adjusted means between groups at each hierarchical step are shown in figure 2. Initially at step 1, the VP/VLBW groups' attention span ratings were z= -0.48 (-0.70, -0.25) lower than controls. At step 2, both inhibitory control and working memory were found to be significantly associated with TRAB-AS rating, with the difference in adjusted means between groups reducing to z=-0.21 (-0.43, 0.01) and no longer statistically significant. At step 3, IQ at 6 years old was also found to be significantly associated with TRAB-AS rating, further reducing the estimated adjusted means to a difference of z=-0.04(-0.26, 0.19). While at step 1, the difference in estimated adjusted means between VP/VLBW and controls was found to be 0.48, this reduced to 0.04 at step 4, (see figure 2). The final model for predicting TRAB-AS in the BLS explained 23% of the variance with working memory and IQ at 6 years old the only factors remaining significantly associated with attention span rating (Table 2).

For TRAB-AS in EPICure, the estimated adjusted means between groups at each hierarchical step are shown in figure 2. Initially at step 1, the EP groups' attention span ratings were z= -1.14 (-1.73, -0.55) lower than controls. At step 2, working memory and inhibitory controls significantly diminished the effect of birth group on attention span rating to z= -0.58(-1.21,0.06). At step 3, adding the measure of IQ at 6 years old, both executive functioning variables were no longer statistically significant and resulted in controls having an adjusted attention span of z=0.14 (-0.55, 0.83) lower than EP participants. While at step 1, the estimated difference in adjusted means found the EP group to have a deficit of z= -1.14, at step 4 with sex also introduced the difference had switched to controls having a deficit of z= 0.11 (see figure 2). The final model for TRAB-AS in EPICure explained 26% of the variance, with IQ at 6 years of age being the only remaining significant predictor (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

In the discovery sample of the BLS, we observed evidence of greater attention problems for VP/VLBW adults, as demonstrated by greater parent-reported ADHD-I symptoms and poorer attention span in comparison to controls. In contrast, we found no self-reported difference in ADHD between VP/VLBW and controls. These results were found to be robust, being replicated in the EPICure sample in which EP adults had shorter observer rated attention span but no self-reported differences in ADHD. Our hypothesis, that differences in attention would be explained by executive functioning was only partially supported. In the BLS, measures of inhibitory control and working memory in adulthood partially explained the effect of VP/VLBW birth. However, after childhood IQ was accounted for, inhibitory control only remained significantly associated with parent-reported ADHD-I symptoms, while working memory only remained significantly associated with TRAB-AS ratings. For EPICure, while the effect of EP birth on TRAB-AS rating was explained by inhibitory control and working memory, neither factor remained significant after accounting for childhood IQ. The results from both cohorts indicate that while specific executive functioning measures can aid in explaining why VP/VLBW or EP adults show more attention problems than controls, childhood IQ explains a larger amount of the difference between groups.

The pattern of results from adulthood is largely in concordance with past research looking at attention problems in preterm children, suggesting specific problems of inattention rather than hyperactivity/impulsivity. Additionally, the greater relative differences found between EP and controls in EPICure than between the VP/VLBW and controls in the BLS may result from a "gestational gradient", whereby the risk of attention problems increases as gestational age at birth decreases[1]. The findings are consistent with this exposure-response effect of gestation as the EPICure EP group were born on average 6 weeks more preterm than the BLS VP/VLBW group. Consistent with this interpretation are the greater relative differences in TRAB-AS scores, the poorer performances on measures of executive functioning and the larger deficit in general cognitive ability between EPICure's EP adults and controls than between BLS's VP/VLBW adults and controls. As well as gestational age; year of birth

(1985 vs 1995) and age of assessment (26 vs 19 years old) differed between the discovery sample of the BLS and the replication sample of EPICure, both factors that may influence findings. However, the fact that our results were found to be robust across cohorts despite these differences should provide further confidence in the findings. This is consistent with previous reports[25,26] which suggest that while survival of very preterm born babies has increased due to improvements in neonatal care, there is no evidence of improved cognitive outcome across eras.

Within the general population and in VP/VLBW children, attention problems have been primarily associated with deficits in executive functioning[5,8,27], however, we found inconsistent evidence for this after we controlled for childhood IQ. Our results are in line with Willcutt et al's (2005) postulation that deficits in executive function are important but are not the sole factor causing ADHD symptoms[5]. Alternatively, as our VP/VLBW and EP participants demonstrated a behaviourally distinct phenotype, composed primarily of inattention rather than hyperactivity/impulsivity, it may be that this phenotype has a different primary factor. The attention problems of VP/VLBW and EP adults, as shown here, would appear to be due to a general cognitive deficit rather than the specific executive functioning deficit seen in the general population. However, if inattention is a result of a specific executive functioning deficit it is also possible that our measures were not sensitive to those specific deficits. In childhood, inattention within the general population but also in VP/VLBW and EP participants has been found to be more closely related to visuo-spatial working memory rather than verbal working memory[27–29] . As our measures of working memory were verbal, it may be that we failed to assess the correct specific measures of executive functioning. While future studies should look to address this, the current results are in line with recent research suggesting the limited efficacy of working memory interventions on attention and working memory performance itself for VP/VLBW children[30]. If verbal working memory is both impervious to intervention and only partially related to inattention in VP/VLBW and EP adults, it suggests that interventions for VP/VLBW and EP children may be focused elsewhere.

The fact that childhood IQ was significantly related to attention problems in both cohorts, regardless of how attention was assessed, and partially explained the effect of being born VP/VLBW or EP is pertinent. It can still be debated whether IQ is independent of executive function in childhood. However, failing to control for general cognitive ability would lead to the potentially erroneous conclusion that a specific executive functioning is responsible for attention problems when it is instead part of a more general cognitive deficit. Regardless, if early identification of VP/VLBW or EP children at risk of long-term attention problems is of primary importance, then IQ testing appears a relatively straightforward approach to do so. VP/VLBW and EP individuals have been found to be at increased risk of brain injury, such as reduced cholinergic basal forebrain integrity and decreased white and grey matter, which has been found to mediate the relationship between preterm birth and poorer IQ[31,32]. It may be that IQ scores in childhood act as an indicator of overall poor brain growth. This poor brain growth may result in long term behavioural deficits in domains such as inattention, but less so for behaviours regarding hyperactivity and impulsivity. The finding of a strong association between general cognitive ability and inattention are consistent with evidence from EPICure in childhood,[2] as well as other research finding strong links between general cognitive performance and behavioural difficulties for VP/VLBW children.[8,33]

Another important finding from this research is that the method for assessing attention problems is key, with non-significant differences by self-report but larger differences when assessed through parent report or observer rating. When BLS VP/VLBW behaviour was rated by their parents or observer, more attention problems were found but this was not found for self-report. In EPICure parent report was unavailable but the results found a similar disparity between self-report and observer ratings. Overall, our results support other research into attention in extremely low birthweight adults and controls, finding no significant difference for self-reported ADHD of any subtype[34,35]. We can speculate that the VP/VLBW and EP groups reporting of fewer symptoms as compared to parents is compatible with Festinger's theory of social comparison[36]. VP/VLBW and EP adults have been found to have a lower educational level and are more likely to be in manual employment [37]. An individual's primary comparison is with those they socialise with mostly, i.e. peers. Compared to peers in their social circle, VP/VLBW and EP adults may not consider themselves to have attention problems. In contrast, parents are more likely to compare their offspring to their birth cohort (i.e. all adults) and thus use a different comparison level and report more attention problems, similar to observation measures of attention. Self-report measures of ADHD may thus underestimate symptoms in VP/VLBW and EP adults.

There are clear strengths to this study. These include the use of two prospectively studied cohorts allowing for replication of findings. The use of identical measures for ADHD symptoms, observer rating of attention span, inhibitory control and child IQ in both cohorts reduces the influence of methodological issues in interpreting results. However, there are also limitations. Firstly, the rate of attrition was moderate to high, with remaining participants found to be of higher socioeconomic status in both cohorts. This potential bias is unlikely to have had an impact on our results, as regressions models are only marginally affected by selective dropout[38]; nevertheless, bias cannot be excluded. Additionally, the lack of parent report in EPICure and the difference in working memory assessments between the cohorts limited how robustly we could replicate the findings from the BLS. Though the two measures of verbal working memory have been found to be closely related[19], the letter number sequencing task may be more associated with attention ratings due to its greater complexity.[39]Future research should look to address the importance of task complexity as well as assessing visuo-spatial working memory, which as previously noted may be more linked to attention deficits. Finally, while our study was able to assess multiple possible predictors of inattention, it had the limitation that we were unable to directly assess other important cognitive factors such as processing speed equivalently for both cohorts, as it has been noted as a core deficit for inattention in the general population and VP/VLBW children[28,40]. While working memory performance is thought to be at least partially reliant on processing speed[41], directly testing whether this lower level ability is key to adult inattention could be pivotal for future interventions.

To conclude, this study provides further evidence for specific attention problems in early adulthood for VP/VLBW and EP in comparison to controls, replicating findings from childhood. While we found that adult executive functioning measures were associated with attention problems in adulthood, childhood IQ was a stronger and more consistent predictor in both the discovery and replication sample. Early assessment of cognitive ability would allow for early identification of VP/VLBW and EP children at risk for long term attention problems.

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Figure Legends

*Figure 1: D*ifferences in parent reported ADHD-Inattention symptomology between VP/VLBW and controls at each step of the hierarchical regression for the Bavarian Longitudinal Study. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals

Figure 2: Differences in Tester Rating of Adult Behaviour-Attention span (TRAB-AS) between VP/VLBW and EP with their respective control group at each step of the hierarchical regression for the Bavarian Longitudinal Study and EPICure. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals

Table 1 and 2

Table 1: Univariate differences between VP/VLBW or EP participants and controls

	Bavarian Longitudinal Study				EPICure			
	Mean difference (VP/VLBW-Control)	Mean difference 95% CI	Adjusted P-Value	Cohen's D	Mean difference (EP- Control)	Mean difference 95% CI	Adjusted P-Value	Cohen's D
ADHD- Inattention Self-Reported symptoms – Z scored	0.12	[-0.09, 0.34]	0.522	0.11	0.39	[0.03, 0.75]	0.084	0.34
ADHD- Hyperactivity/impulsivity Self-Reported– Z scored	-0.16	[-0.36, 0.03]	0.340	-0.17	-0.06	[-0.40, 0.29]	0.739	-0.05
ADHD- Combined Self-Reported –Z scored	-0.05	[-0.26, 0.15]	0.597	-0.05	0.19	[-0.16, 0.54]	0.543	0.17
ADHD- Inattention Parent Reported – Z scored	0.95	[0.49, 1.41]	<0.001	0.44	-	-	-	-
ADHD-Hyperactivity/impulsivity Parent Reported – Z scored	0.20	[-0.05, 0.44]	0.34	0.17	-	-	-	-
ADHD- Combined Parent Reported – Z scored	0.51	[0.19, 0.84]	0.01	0.33	-	-	-	-
Observer rating of attention span(TRAB-AS) – Z scored	-0.48	[-0.70, -0.25]	<0.001	-0.42	-1.14	[-1.73,-0.55]	0.001	0.62
Inhibitory Control (ms)	27.53	[17.04, 38.01]	<0.001	0.52	41.86	[22.4, 61.33]	<0.001	0.69
Working Memory	-8.98	[-12.72, -5.24]	<0.001	-0.48	-10.37	[-14.77,-5.96]	<0.001	-0.75
IQ at 6 years	-16.49	[-19.81, -13.17]	<0.001	-0.99	-26.24	[-31.69, -20.79]	<0.001	-1.54

Note: ADHD(attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Inhibitory Control as measured by the Attention Network Task. Working memory as measured by the letter number sequencing task in the BLS and backwards digit recall task in EPICure. IQ at 6 years as measured by the K-ABC task. P values are Adjusted using Hochberg's correction. Z- scored indicates that raw scores are standardised based upon the mean and standard deviation of the respective control group.

Table 2: Final multiple regression models (step 4) predicting standardised parent reported ADHD-I symptoms and TRAB-AS ratings in the Bavarian Longitudinal Study (BLS) and EPICure.

Predictor	BLS ADHD-I PR		BLS TRAB-AS		EPICure TRAB-AS	
	Beta	P-Value	Beta	P-Value	Beta	P-Value
Birth Group(0 = Control, 1 =EP/VP/VLBW)	0.00	0.971	-0.02	0.712	0.03	0.759
Inhibitory Control	0.14	0.006	-0.07	0.149	-0.11	0.114
Working Memory	-0.07	0.213	0.24	<0.001	0.12	0.165
IQ at 6 years	-0.35	<0.001	0.26	<0.001	0.39	<0.001
Sex (0 = Female, 1=Male)	0.06	0.218	0.03	0.566	-0.11	0.119
Total R^2	0.22		0.23		0.26	

Note: ADHD-I PR: Parent reported ADHD-inattention symptoms , TRAB-AS: observer rating of attention span. Inhibitory Control as measured by the Attention Network Task, working memory as measured by the letter number sequencing task in the BLS and backwards digit memory task in EPICure. IQ at 6 years as measured by the K-ABC task.

Table 1 and 2 highlighted

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ADHD- Combined Parent Reported – Z scored	0.51	[0.19, 0.84]	0.01	0.33	-	-	-	-
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Note: ADHD(attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Inhibitory Control as measured by the Attention Network Task. Working memory as measured by the letter number sequencing task in the BLS and backwards digit recall task in EPICure. IQ at 6 years as measured by the K-ABC task. P values are Adjusted using Hochberg's correction. Z- scored indicates that raw scores are standardised based upon the mean and standard deviation of the respective control group.

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Inhibitory Control	0.14	0.006	-0.07	0.149	-0.11	0.114
Working Memory	-0.07	0.213	0.24	<0.001	0.12	0.165
IQ at 6 years	-0.35	<0.001	0.26	<0.001	0.39	<0.001
Sex (0 = Female, 1=Male)	0.06	0.218	0.03	0.566	-0.11	0.119
Total R^2	0.22		0.23		0.26	

Note: ADHD-I PR: Parent reported ADHD-inattention symptoms , TRAB-AS: observer rating of attention span. Inhibitory Control as measured by the Attention Network Task, working memory as measured by the letter number sequencing task in the BLS and backwards digit memory task in EPICure. IQ at 6 years as measured by the K-ABC task.

Figure 1

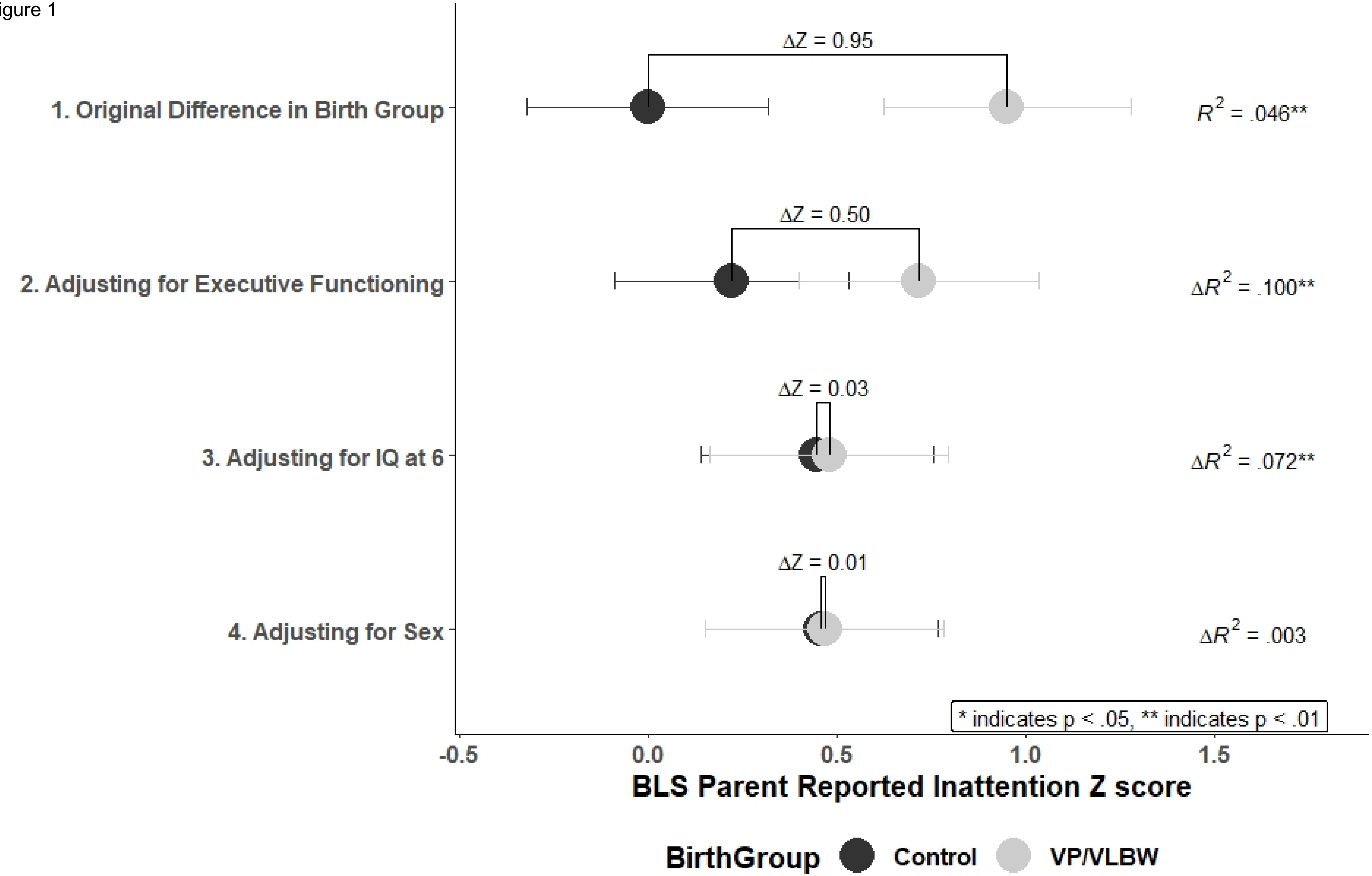
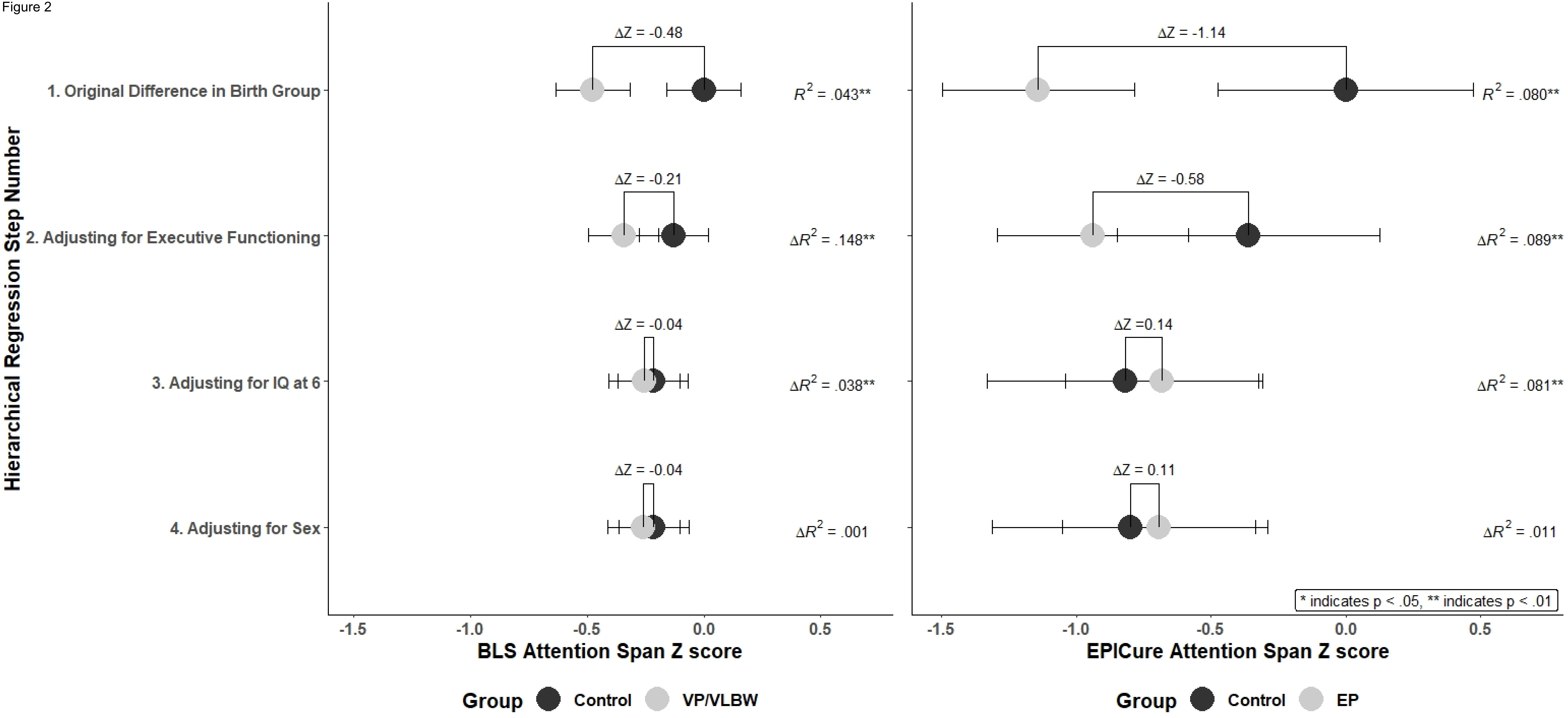

ΔZ = 0.95
1. Original Difference in Birth Group
R^2 = .046**
ΔZ = 0.50
2. Adjusting for Executive Functioning
ΔR^2 = .100**
ΔZ = 0.03
3. Adjusting for IQ at 6
ΔR^2 = .072**
ΔZ = 0.01
4. Adjusting for Sex
ΔR^2 = .003
* indicates p < .05, ** indicates p < .01
-0.5
0.0
0.5
1.0
1.5
BLS Parent Reported Inattention Z score
BirthGroup
Control
VP/VLBW

Figure 2



Hierarchical Regression Step Number
1. Original Difference in Birth Group
2. Adjusting for Executive Functioning
3. Adjusting for IQ at 6
4. Adjusting for Sex
ΔZ = -0.48
ΔZ = -0.21
ΔZ = -0.04
ΔZ = -0.04
R2 = .043**
ΔR2 = .148**
ΔR2 = .038**
ΔR2 = .001
-1.5
-1.0
-0.5
0.0
0.5
BLS Attention Span Z score
Group
Control
VP/VLBW
ΔZ = -1.14
ΔZ = -0.58
ΔZ =0.14
ΔZ = 0.11
R2 = .080**
ΔR2 = .089**
ΔR2 = .081**
ΔR2 = .011
* indicates p < .05, ** indicates p < .01
EPICure Attention Span Z score
Group
Control
EP

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