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Is there truth to the “overexcitable genius” stereotype? A multinational survey among members of the MENSA society

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Intelligence is well-established to be positively associated with health and longevity, among various other “positive life outcomes”. Recent findings have added a potential caveat to this evidence, suggesting that individuals with exceptionally high intelligence are disproportionately afflicted by a specific set of physical and mental health conditions, so-called overexcitabilities. Thus far, the literature has focused on the gifted community in the USA. Here, we aimed to replicate and expand the previous findings in a preregistered survey among European members of MENSA, the world’s largest high-IQ society. 615 (307 female) members from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom participated. We found considerably elevated levels of some conditions, such as autism spectrum disorders (2.11 % observed vs. 0.94% population prevalence), or irritable bowel syndrome (5.04 % observed vs. 1.34% population prevalence). Nevertheless, other previous findings could not be replicated, such as elevated levels of asthma or allergies. We suggest that while some aspects of the “overexcitable genius” stereotype may be based in fact, others require more scrutiny.

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