Study offers clue to increased anxiety, stress, autism, bipolar disorder, and obesity in humans over the past thirty years.

When pregnant rats are exposed to a common crop chemical, their descendants three generations later show more anxiety and stress than the offspring of unexposed peers, US researchers said.

The study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences suggests that the animal model may provide an explanation for the mounting number of cases of anxiety disorders, autism and obesity among humans in recent years.

"We are now in the third human generation since the start of the chemical revolution, since humans have been exposed to these kinds of toxins," said lead author David Crews of the University of Texas.

"There is no doubt that we have been seeing real increases in mental disorders like autism and bipolar disorder," he added.

"It's more than just a change in diagnostics. The question is why? Is it because we are living in a more frantic world, or because we are living in a more frantic world and are responding to that in a different way because we have been exposed? I favor the latter."

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