

The Lived Experiences and Coping Strategies of Women with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

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Abstract : PROJECT OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND: Over one million Australians are affected by ADHD at an economic and social cost of over \$20 billion per annum. Despite health outcomes being significantly worse compared with men, women have historically been overlooked in ADHD diagnosis and treatment. While research suggests physical activity and other non-prescription options can help with ADHD symptoms, the frontline response to ADHD remains expensive stimulant medications that can have adverse side effects. By interviewing women with ADHD, this research will examine women's self-directed approaches to managing symptoms, including alternatives to prescription medications. It will investigate barriers and affordances to potentially helpful approaches and identify any concerning strategies pursued in lieu of diagnosis. SIGNIFICANCE AND INNOVATION: Despite the economic and societal impact of ADHD on women, research investigating how women manage their symptoms is scant. This project is significant because although women's ADHD symptoms are markedly different to those of men, mainstream treatment has been based on the experiences of men. Further, it is thought that in developing nuanced coping strategies, women may have masked their symptoms. Thus, this project will highlight strategies which women deem effective in 'thriving' rather than just 'hiding'. By investigating the health service use, self-care and physical activity of women with ADHD, this research aligns with a priority research areas as identified by the November 2023 senate ADHD inquiry report. APPROACH AND METHODS: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with up to 20 women with ADHD. Interviews will be conducted in person and online to capture experience across rural and metropolitan Australia. Participants will be recruited in partnership with the peak representative body, ADHD Australia. The research will use an intersectional framework, and data will be analysed thematically. This project is led by an interdisciplinary and cross-institutional team of women with ADHD. Reflexive interviewing skills will be employed to help interviewees feel more comfortable disclosing their experiences, especially where they share common ground. ENGAGEMENT, IMPACT AND BENEFIT: This research will benefit women with ADHD by increasing knowledge of strategies and alternative treatments to prescription medications, reducing the social and economic burden of ADHD on Australia and on individuals. It will also benefit women by identifying risks involved with some self-directed approaches in lieu of medical advice. The project has an accessible impact plan to directly benefit end-users, which includes the development of a podcast and a PDF resource translating findings. The resources will reach a wide audience through ADHD Australia's extensive national networks. We will collaborate with Charles Sturt's Accessibility and Inclusion Division of Safety, Security and Well-being to create a targeted resource for students with ADHD.

Keywords : ADHD, women's health, self-directed strategies, health service use, physical activity, public health

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