

## *ADHD or ADHDon't? The controversy of diagnosis and treatment in the most common childhood neuropsychiatric disorder in the world.(1)*

ADHD is a heterogenous, multifactorial disorder which primarily impacts ability to focus, and impulse control.(2) It has been plagued with criticisms of its validity and existence as a condition, as well as the diagnostic and treatment practices.



There is a social belief that ADHD is a result of the medicalisation of typical childhood and adult behaviours.(1) This is likely due to the fact that many symptoms are also common experiences across the general population, such as forgetting where you put your keys, or avoiding starting tasks which may require sustained mental focus. As a result there are many instances of self-diagnosis, though research suggests that only a third of those people will meet the formal diagnostic criteria.(3) The general consensus among health professionals is that ADHD may result from inherent issues in the neurotransmission of dopamine.(4)

There are also brain scans which reveal underlying differences in the structure of ADHD brain physiology,(5) and studies which support genetic and environmental factors as potential influence on disorder development.(4)

The common diagnostic practice relies primarily on psychiatric evaluation and self-reported behaviour.(1) This is often critiqued as being too easy to falsify, and physicians are often wary of people seeking diagnosis in order to access stimulant medications.(6) A consequence of this is that those with ADHD may be treated with more suspicion than is warranted, further exacerbating the stigma around the condition.



Living with ADHD is associated with functional impairment around school and work experiences.(2) Diagnosis can fundamentally validate the struggles of those with ADHD, who now have access to treatment and support networks.

One factor which does no favours to those with ADHD is the significant rate of misuse, abuse, and diversion of prescription stimulant medications.(6) This occurs due to the perception that this medication can provide a 'high', or may be beneficial to students who take them in order to gain

greater focus. As a result many with ADHD experience stigma from physicians and the community who view them as drug-seeking rather than treatment-seeking.(7)



One way to complicate the lives of those living with a neurodevelopmental condition is to question how valid the condition itself is. It is quite unique that ADHD fits into this niche, where debate is continuous on the nature, diagnosis, and treatment of the condition. However, this adds to the stigma experienced where many will only selectively disclose their diagnosis, often experiencing self-stigma where people blame themselves for their symptoms.(2)

Unfortunately, there is a large amount of stigmatization for this condition. The attitudes of the public are important to help people feel included, and often will shape their thoughts and actions.(8) There is a general belief that ADHD is reflective of moral failings more so than a brain or mental health condition.(2)

There are implications for research as well, as it is likely that ADHD symptoms and severity lie upon a spectrum where people may not be so easily divided into the two categories of ADHD versus non-ADHD.



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*All images sourced from unsplash.com*

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