The functioning and behaviour of biological parents of children diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, attending the outpatient department at Weskoppies Hospital, Pretoria


Background:
ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) is gradually being acknowledged as a functionally impairing disorder across the lifespan, underscored by heritability. Nonetheless, lack of ADHD (adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) data from South Africa is alarming which could be due to either the unawareness of ADHD symptoms or underutilisation of available screening measures. Undiagnosed ADHD may influence family- and working lives unpleasantly. Parenting a child with ADHD may intensify parental stress through functional impairment notwithstanding the diagnosis of ADHD.

Methods:
Eighty-one biological parents of children diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder were screened using self-reporting measurements. ADHD self-report scale (ASRS-V 1.1) identified either positive or negative subgroups; the Weiss functional impairment rating scale (WFIR-S) for functional impairment and the Jerome driving questionnaire (JDQ) for risk-taking behaviour specifically driving.

Results:
Of the 39 (48%) parents who experienced impairment in all seven areas of functioning, 23 (59%) screened negative for ADHD, while 16 (41%) screened positive. A significant association was found between parents who screened either positive or negative for ADHD and functional impairment across five of the seven individual categories namely family, work, self-concept, life-skills and social functioning.

Conclusion:
This study emphasised the high incidence of functional impairment in parents of ADHD children. Although a substantial number of parents screened negative for ADHD, they still reported impairment in functioning; probably due to undiagnosed ADHD with comorbid psychiatric disorders, and/or parental stress due to the complex behaviour of the child. Parents of children diagnosed with ADHD should be screened for functional impairment followed by referral for psychiatric assessment and parent management training to achieve better clinical outcomes.