Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and disordered eating behaviour: A systematic review and a framework for future research

Panagiota Kaisari, Colin T Dourish, Suzanne Higgs

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Abstract

Preliminary findings suggest that Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may be associated with disordered eating behaviour, but whether there is sufficient evidence to suggest an association between ADHD and specific types of disordered eating behaviour is unclear. Furthermore, it is uncertain whether specific features associated with ADHD are differentially associated with disordered eating behaviour. A systematic review of seventy-five studies was conducted to evaluate the potential association between ADHD symptomatology and disordered eating behaviour and to provide an estimate of the strength of evidence for any association. Overall, a moderate strength of evidence exists for a positive association between ADHD and disordered eating and with specific types of disordered-eating behaviour, in particular, overeating behaviour. There is consistent evidence that impulsivity symptoms of ADHD are positively associated with overeating and bulimia nervosa and more limited evidence for an association between hyperactivity symptoms and restrictive eating in males but not females. Further research is required to assess the potential direction of the relationship between ADHD and disordered eating, the underlying mechanisms and the role of specific ADHD symptoms in the development and/or maintenance of disordered eating behaviour. We propose a framework that could be used to guide the design of future studies.