Objective: To test explanations for the underrecognition of female ADHD by examining differences in adult ratings of boys and girls matched for levels of directly observed ADHD behaviors.

Method: In a secondary analysis of a population-based sample, 3- to 4-year-olds (n = 153, 79 male) and 8- to 9-year-olds (n = 144, 75 male) were grouped according to levels of directly observed ADHD behaviors (low/moderate/high). Groups were then compared with parent/teacher ADHD ratings.

Results: There were no sex differences in levels of directly observed ADHD behaviors within groups. For preschoolers, parents’ ratings of males, but not females, significantly increased across groups—mirroring levels of observed behaviors. For older children, both parent and teacher mean ratings were significantly higher for males than females across groups.

Conclusion: Identified differences in adult ratings of males and females matched for directly observed behaviors may contribute to understanding the substantial ADHD underrecognition in females.