Intentional inattention: Detecting feigned attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder on the Personality Assessment Inventory.


Abstract

Given the increasing number of college students seeking Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnoses as well as the potential secondary gains associated with this disorder (e.g., access to stimulant medication, academic accommodations), the detection of malingered symptom presentations in this population is a major concern. The present study examined the ability of validity indicators on the widely used Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI; Morey, 1991) to distinguish between individuals experiencing genuine ADHD symptoms and individuals instructed to present with ADHD symptomatology for secondary gain. Sixty-six participants who successfully simulated ADHD (based on elevations on the Conners' Adult ADHD Rating Scale; Conners, Erhardt, & Sparrow, 1998) were compared with a sample of undergraduate students meeting diagnostic criteria for ADHD (N = 22) and an archival sample of adults who received an ADHD diagnosis at a university psychology clinic following a comprehensive psychological evaluation (N = 41). Successful simulators obtained significantly higher scores on all relevant PAI validity indicators compared with the clinical and archival comparison samples, with the Rogers Discriminant Function demonstrating the highest predictive accuracy (AUC = .86). Traditional cut scores on the Negative Impression (NIM) validity scale used to designate probable malingering, however, were not sensitive to simulated ADHD symptoms, although they did demonstrate excellent specificity. The PAI may be informative as an indicator of potentially exaggerated or malingered symptom presentation, but alternative cut scores for symptom validity indicators may be necessary to maximize its utility in these particular types of psychological evaluations.