University students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): a literature review

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES:
To review existing literature about university students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

METHODS:
A framework for scoping studies and content analysis were used to source and review selected publications from PubMed, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar and relevant bibliographies.

RESULTS:
Seventy-four publications were reviewed and key findings were categorised under six core themes that represent the issues germane to university students with ADHD. These themes are: academic, social and psychological functioning, giftedness, new media technologies, treatment, substance misuse and the non-medical use of prescription stimulants, and malingering.

CONCLUSION:
In Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK) young people with ADHD are unlikely to enrol into further education, and of those who do go to university, few will graduate at the same time as their non-ADHD peers. ADHD is associated with poor educational outcomes and it may be a hidden disability within institutions of higher education (e.g. universities). Surprisingly, in this topic area, there is a paucity of research in Ireland and the UK. Most studies originate from North America were research activity in the field has been ongoing since the 1990s. These studies however, tend to use relatively small samples of college (university) students recruited at a single institution. It is difficult to generalise the findings of these studies to student populations in North America, let alone in Ireland and the UK. At the very least, these North American studies provide insights into key areas of concern. This topic area straddles education and psychiatry. This means an inter-disciplinary approach is required to examine, better understand and address the impact of ADHD on the educational outcomes of university students. The philosophies of difference, equity and self-realisation can offer a conceptual framework for conducting further research and/or developing services to deliver more personalised learning support for university students with ADHD.