

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms and disordered eating in the English general population

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Int J Eat Disord. 2018 Sep 6.
doi: 10.1002/eat.22934.

Abstract

OBJECTIVE:

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms and eating problems often coexist, but many of the previous studies have not taken into account key variables which may be important in this association. Thus, the goal of this study was to assess the association between ADHD symptoms and disordered eating, while taking into account of a variety of factors.

METHOD:

This study used cross-sectional, nationally representative data from 7,403 people aged ≥ 16 years from England who participated in the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS). ADHD symptoms were assessed with the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale (ASRS) Screener. Questions from the five-item SCOFF screening instrument were used to identify possible ED. Multivariable logistic regression analyses were conducted.

RESULTS:

The prevalence of possible eating disorder (ED) was much higher among those with ADHD symptoms (ASRS score ≥ 14) compared to those without ADHD symptoms (19.2 vs. 5.7%). ADHD symptoms were associated with possible ED (odds ratio [OR] = 3.48; 95% confidence interval [CI] = 2.56-4.72) after adjustment for age, sex, and ethnicity. After further adjustment for alcohol dependence, drug use, intelligence quotient, stressful life events, perceived stress, impulsivity, depression, anxiety disorder, and borderline personality disorder (BPD) traits, the OR was attenuated to 1.32 (95% CI = 0.82-2.13). Anxiety and BPD were the factors that led to the largest degree of attenuation.

DISCUSSION:

A high prevalence of disordered eating in individuals with ADHD was observed. Factors such as co-existing anxiety and BPD traits may be particularly important in this association. Future research should focus on the factors involved in the association between ADHD symptoms and disordered eating behavior.