

ADHD in girls and women



The impact of gender on diagnosis and experiences

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a natural variation in brain wiring that can be found in all genders. Historically, ADHD has been associated mainly with boys, but girls and women also have ADHD, often in ways that differ from boys and men. Recognising and understanding these differences is crucial for accurate identification and effective support.

What is the prevalence rate of ADHD in girls and women?

Understanding the prevalence of ADHD in girls and women is essential for recognising the extent of its impact and the importance of early diagnosis and support.

- ADHD is diagnosed in boys approximately 3 times more often than in girls during childhood.
- By adulthood, the diagnosis ratio approaches closer to equal between men and women.

Does ADHD look different in girls and women?

The gender gap in ADHD diagnosis is influenced by a variety of factors that can lead to underdiagnosis and misdiagnosis in females.

- ADHD in females is often underdiagnosed due to less overt differences and the use of compensatory strategies that mask their ADHD.
- Women are more likely to present as the inattentive subtype compared to men who are more likely to present as the combined or hyperactive/impulsive subtype.
- Clinicians may overlook experiences in girls because they are less likely to exhibit disruptive behaviours commonly associated with ADHD in boys.
- Societal norms and gender expectations may lead to biases in recognising ADHD in girls and women.

- Higher rates of co-occurring conditions such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders in females can complicate the identification of ADHD.
- Girls are more often referred for emotional experiences rather than behavioural differences, leading to delays in ADHD diagnosis.

Life experiences of girls and women with ADHD

The life experiences of girls and women with ADHD can be significantly impacted by their condition, affecting their self-esteem, academic performance, social interactions, and overall well-being. For example, they:

- ADHD in females is often underdiagnosed due to less overt. Often report low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and higher levels of stress and anxiety.
- Commonly experience academic underachievement and face significant challenges in employment.
- Can be more likely to experience peer rejection, victimisation, and difficulties in maintaining stable relationships.
- May develop maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as substance use or risky behaviours, leading to further complications.

Receiving a diagnosis can provide relief, understanding of struggles, and foster self-acceptance, helping improve symptoms and relationships.