

One-third of women with ADHD have anxiety disorders, almost half have considered suicide

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Women with ADHD are much more likely to have a wide range of mental and physical health problems in comparison to women without ADHD, according to a new study from researchers at the University of Toronto.

"The prevalence of mental illness among [women](#) with ADHD was disturbingly high with 46% having seriously considered suicide, 36% having generalized anxiety disorder, 31% having major depressive disorder and 39% having substance abuse problems at some point in their life," reported Esme Fuller-Thomson, Sandra Rotman Endowed Chair at University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work and Director of the Institute for Life Course & Aging.

"These rates are much higher than among women without ADHD, ranging from more than four times the odds of suicidal thoughts and generalized anxiety disorders to more than twice the odds of major depressive disorder and substance abuse" said Fuller-Thomson

Investigators examined a representative sample of 3,908 Canadian women aged 20 to 39 of whom 107 reported that they had been diagnosed with ADHD. Data was drawn from the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey-Mental Health.

"We were surprised at the high levels of physical health problems that the women were experiencing" said Danielle A. Lewis, co-author of the study and a recent MSW graduate of the University of Toronto.

"More than one in four (28%) of these relatively young women said that physical pain prohibited some of their activities, which was much higher than the 9% of their peers without ADHD who had disabling pain. Insomnia was also more prevalent

in the women with ADHD in [comparison](#) to those without ADHD (43.9% vs 12.2%) as was smoking (41% vs 22%)" stated Lewis.

"Unfortunately, our study does not provide insight into why women with ADHD are so vulnerable. It is possible that some of the mental [health problems](#) may be caused by and/or contributing to financial stress" Fuller-Thomson suggested. The study also found, one in three of the women (37%) with ADHD reported they had difficulty meeting basic expenses such as food, shelter and clothing due to their inadequate household income. For women without ADHD, only 13% had this shortfall."

"Many people think of ADHD as primarily a boys' disorder which has little relevance for girls and women. Our findings suggest, to the contrary, that a large portion of women with ADHD are struggling with [mental illness](#), [physical health](#) concerns and poverty," said Fuller-Thomson.

"In light of these problems, it is important that primary health care providers are particularly vigilant in monitoring and treating their female patients with ADHD," suggested co-author Senyo Agbeyaka, a graduate student at the University of Toronto.

Provided by University of Toronto

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