

Girls with autism or ADHD symptoms not taken seriously

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When girls with symptoms of autism or ADHD seek professional medical help, their problems are often played down or misinterpreted, and there is a real risk that they will not get the help or support they need. As such, more training is needed in this area, particularly in the public sector, reveals a thesis from the University of Gothenburg.

The thesis focuses primarily on 100 girls who, before reaching adulthood, went to the doctor on account of difficulties with social interaction and/or concentration at school or elsewhere. They were then referred to the paediatric neuropsychiatric clinic at Sahlgrenska University Hospital between 1999 and 2001.

"We could see that their parents had been concerned about the girls' behaviour or development during their first few years of life," says Svenny Kopp, a doctoral student at the Institute of Neuroscience and Physiology at the Sahlgrenska Academy, and consultant paediatric psychiatrist at the Queen Silvia Children's Hospital. "They had also asked for help at an early stage, but hadn't been given a proper diagnosis."

When subsequently given a thorough psychiatric and psychological examination, nearly half of the girls proved to have [autism](#) or other [autism spectrum disorders](#), and just as many had ADHD as their main diagnosis. Compared with the control group of 60 girls without any known serious problems, the 100 girls' performance

was severely impaired in all areas studied, including psychological, motor and social function.

It also emerged that the girls with autism and ADHD had additional psychiatric and developmental neurological disorders. For example, anxiety, depression, social behaviour

disorders and difficulties reading and writing were common in both groups. Half of the girls with autism spectrum disorders or ADHD had been bullied, were frequently truant and avoided sport at school. The study also showed that girls with ADHD smoked more frequently and more overall than the control group.

"The results are particularly disturbing given that these girls did not generally have a disadvantaged social background and were mostly of normal intelligence," says Kopp.

She concludes that the healthcare system does not take girls with symptoms of autism or ADHD seriously enough. "It's a shame as we now have effective treatments for both autism and ADHD. We therefore need more training across the public sector on [girls](#) with mental problems, [social interaction](#) difficulties and/or attention problems," she stresses.

More information: References:

Journal: Journal of Attention Disorders, 2010 Sept; 14(2):167-81.

Authors: Kopp, S., Berg-Kelly, K., and Gillberg, C. (in press).

Title: Girls with social and/or attention deficits: a descriptive study of 100 clinic attenders.

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Journal: Research in Developmental Disabilities, 31, 350-361.

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Title: Developmental coordination disorder and other motor control problems in girls with autism spectrum disorders and/or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

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