

Stigma, Strength, and Success: Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Medical Professions

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Abstract

Background: Medical professionals who live with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and have earned a doctorate in their scope of practice face multiple obstacles throughout their lives. These obstacles can include emotional dysregulation, limited data on diagnosed medical professionals, and difficulty recognizing ADHD symptoms, which may prevent some individuals from seeking diagnosis. This study aims to explore the experiences of medical professionals with ADHD and identify factors that contribute to seeking a clinical diagnosis. The study also included medical professionals who are undiagnosed with intention to explore the reasons they chose not to pursue a diagnosis. The primary goal of our study is to explore the stigma surrounding ADHD, gathering participants' perspectives on its impact, and their suggestions for breaking it. The study's secondary goals are to support aspiring medical professionals, inspire individuals with ADHD to pursue higher education, and promote greater awareness and education about ADHD.

Methods: This qualitative research focuses on medical professionals obtaining doctorates in various scopes of practice including physicians, pharmacists, and dentists. The inclusion criteria for this study was to have a doctorate in the participants scope of practice who were clinically diagnosed or experience symptoms of ADHD. The co-investigators interviewed each participant with a set list of eight questions. The questions were separated into two different sets based on if the participant was diagnosed or undiagnosed. The co-investigators used the "snowball sampling" recruitment method. Recruitment took place over one week via text, email, and phone calls.

Results: Our study included interviews from eight participants, four of which were diagnosed and 4 undiagnosed. The diagnosed participants reported managing their symptoms through stimulants, organization tools, and exercise. They identified multitasking, empathy, and hyperfocus as advantages, and racing thoughts, task-switching struggles, and memory issues as disadvantages to having ADHD. The study revealed that among participants diagnosed with ADHD, two reported feeling less comfortable discussing their diagnosis at work than with family and friends. Undiagnosed participants cited stigma, professional concerns, and medication apprehensions as reasons for not pursuing diagnosis. Both groups recommended increasing ADHD awareness within medical communities to reduce stigma. When asked if a support group would be beneficial, we received mixed responses. However, some recommended an online social media platform as the most effective format.

Conclusion: The study revealed that among participants diagnosed with ADHD, two reported feeling less comfortable discussing their diagnosis at work than with family and friends, with no elaboration as to why. The study was to inspire people who live with ADHD symptoms that it is possible to obtain a higher educational degree. We believed we achieved this goal by recruiting sixteen individuals within one week. We believe that these findings can be used to benefit further research and support/inspire people who experience ADHD symptoms.

