

2021 Study Looked at Hormone-Related Mood-Disorder Symptoms in ADHD Women



Research Spotlight highlights scientific research focused on girls and women with ADHD and informs non-scientists about the research process. This Spotlight breaks down “Prevalence of hormone-related mood disorder symptoms in women with ADHD,” published in January 2021.

What were the goals of this study?

- To measure how many of the sampled women diagnosed with ADHD also had hormone-related mood problems
- To informally compare the rates of the mood problems in this sample of women with ADHD to the rates that other scientists have measured in the general population

What is already known about this topic?

- Women with ADHD are at higher risk for mood disorders, such as depression, compared to women without ADHD.

Terms to know

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD): Experienced by some women during the premenstrual week, this psychiatric condition – also known as premenstrual disorder, or PMS – is characterized by marked symptoms of depression and anxiety.

PMDD symptoms also can include feeling overwhelmed, poor concentration, low energy, irritability, appetite changes and sleep changes.

Postpartum depression (PPD): This psychiatric disorder refers to the depression that can develop after women give birth.

Climacteric mood symptoms: Climacteric syndrome – which some women develop during perimenopause – can include mood problems.

Although this study examined only anxiety and depression, women with climacteric syndrome also can experience vasomotor symptoms such as “hot flashes” and other physical symptoms.

- Very little research has looked at the association between hormone-related mood problems and ADHD in women.

How was this study done?

- 209 adult females with ADHD were recruited from an ADHD clinic in the Netherlands. The women answered questions about their symptoms related to mood and hormonal changes, and voluntarily shared information from their medical charts.
- 85 of the women had given birth at some point in their lives.
- 35 of the women were in perimenopause or menopause at the time of the study.

What were the study findings?

- More than 45 percent of the women in this study – all of whom had ADHD diagnoses – reported having symptoms suggestive of PMDD.
 - Previous studies cited in this article have found, however, that about 30 percent of women in the general population have PMDD.
 - Although its population prevalence varies quite a bit depending on how PMDD is defined, the central point is that PMDD seems to be more common among women with ADHD.
- Other research has found general population rates of postpartum depression range from about 15-20 percent.
 - In this study, though, more than 57 percent of women who had given birth recalled having symptoms consistent with postpartum depression.
- Women in the ADHD group of this study rated their perimenopause symptoms as being more severe and problematic than they were in women from a previous non-ADHD sample asked the same questions.

Why are these findings important?

If further research confirms these preliminary findings, females with diagnosed ADHD and the clinicians who treat them might consider the tips below.

Women with ADHD should:

- Keep PMDD in mind as a possible co-occurring condition if they notice themselves having mood-related challenges that seem to relate to their menstrual cycles.
- Consider tracking mood symptoms throughout their menstrual cycles and sharing this information with their care teams, which may include a gynecologist and a mental health provider.
- Consider using a PMDD symptom tracker to easily monitor symptoms over the course of a month. The International Association for Premenstrual Disorders offers a free online one.



Clinicians conducting ADHD evaluations or providing ADHD treatment should:

- Be aware that their patients may be more prone to premenstrual dysphoria, at higher risk for postpartum depression and have more mood-related symptoms associated with menopause. 📱