

Study Summarizes Research on ADHD's Impact on Romantic Relationships

Research Spotlights *highlight scientific research focused on girls and women with ADHD and informs non-scientists about the research process. This Spotlight breaks down "Adult ADHD and romantic relationships: What we know and what we can do to help" published in January 2021.*

Study Goals

- To summarize research on how having ADHD may impact romantic relationships
- To identify factors associated with relationship problems in adults with ADHD
- To provide clinical recommendations for supporting couples in managing the impact of ADHD on relationships

What is already known about the topic?

- Mental health difficulties are often associated with interpersonal relationship problems, but adults with mental health disorders, including ADHD, benefit from having stable romantic relationships
- Relationship problems such as conflicts between partners are common in romantic relationships of adults with ADHD
- People who experience relationship challenges are at even more risk for developing depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders

What types of studies did this article review?

- The authors summarized research on ADHD and romantic relationships
- Some of the studies compared women with ADHD to men with ADHD, while others compared them to women without ADHD

Terms to know

Narrative review

A general summary of the findings from a set of research articles on a specific topic

Clinical recommendations

Recommendations for doctors or therapists to use in practice that are based on findings from research studies



Highlights from Select Studies

- **Women with ADHD vs without ADHD**
 - Women with ADHD experience more romantic relationship challenges
 - Women with childhood ADHD who also had low academic achievement were more likely to experience interpersonal violence than women with ADHD and high achievement, or women without ADHD histories
 - Women with a childhood history of ADHD, in particular those with ADHD symptoms that continue into adulthood, are at a higher risk of experiencing interpersonal violence
- **Women vs men with ADHD**
 - Overall, few differences were found between men and women with ADHD in terms of challenges in romantic relationships
 - However, women with ADHD are reported to have more difficulties socially and a higher divorce rate than men with ADHD
 - One study looked at how individuals without ADHD rated the impact of their partner's ADHD behaviors on their relationships. When considering the perspectives of partners without ADHD, males rated their female partner's ADHD-related behaviors as having a greater impact on relationships compared to ratings by females.

Why are these findings important?

- Success in romantic relationships is considered an important part of development in adulthood.
- Aspects of ADHD, such as creativity, can have a positive effect on relationships.
- However, the results from this narrative review indicate that people with ADHD often have more interpersonal impairments, more relationship conflict, and less stable relationships.
- In addition, female-identifying people with ADHD may be at increased risk for social and romantic relationship difficulties.
- Importantly, more research is needed on ADHD, gender, and relationships for LGBTQ+ individuals as well as non-White groups.

Based on these results:

Women with ADHD should:

- Be aware that ADHD symptoms may impact their social and romantic relationships both positively and negatively.
- Explore ways in which their relationship experiences might be impacted by their ADHD symptoms to help identify their support needs.
- Consider these supports for romantic relationships:
 - Read Melissa Orlov's book: [The ADHD Effect on Marriage: Understand and Rebuild Your Relationship in Six Steps](#).
 - Work with a couple's therapist to address relationship challenges.

Clinicians who work with women with ADHD who are experiencing relationship difficulties should:

- Consider focusing on the couple, rather than just the individual, and combine strategies from couple's therapy and adult ADHD treatment.
- Emphasize coping strategies specifically for partners of individuals with ADHD.
- Consider whether partners with ADHD who are raising children may benefit from behavioral parenting strategies to address child behaviors, which may in turn reduce stress and relationship difficulties. 🧠