

Study Examines Effectiveness of Occupational Therapy Intervention for Women with ADHD

Research Spotlights *highlight scientific research focused on girls and women with ADHD and inform non-scientists about the research process. This Spotlight breaks down [Effectiveness of a Tailored Intervention for Women with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\) and ADHD Symptoms: A Randomized Controlled Study](#) published in January/February 2020.*

Study Goal

- To evaluate whether a seven-week functional occupational therapy (OT) intervention for women with ADHD can reduce perceived stress levels and self-reported ADHD symptoms, and improve performance in daily activities.

What is already known about the topic?

- Women with ADHD experience unique challenges that impact many parts of their lives, such as employment, parenting, school, and social/relational engagement.
- Some of these challenges may be due to executive functioning difficulties, such as planning, organizing, time management, task prioritization, and establishing routines.
- Past ADHD research has focused primarily on children and adolescents and/or medication treatment, with limited non-medication treatment research that considers the unique needs/difficulties of women with ADHD.

How was this study done?

- 25 women (ages 20-55) with self-reported ADHD were randomly assigned to receive an OT intervention or to a control group that did not receive the intervention.
- The intervention included seven, one-hour individual OT sessions focused on organization, routine creation, time management, stress management, and sensory regulation across roles in the home and community.
- Sessions focused on five components of daily functioning, specific to individuals' priorities and roles:
 - Creating routines for daily activities across roles
 - Organizing personal spaces (homes, work, etc.)
 - Improving time management
 - Managing sensory input (e.g., noise, light, movement)
 - Enhancing stress management techniques

Terms to know

Occupation: *Meaningful activities or tasks that individuals engage in daily (e.g., self-care, work, leisure, social participation) and are central to well-being, identity, and health.*

Occupational Therapy (OT): *A form of intervention that helps individuals engage in activities they want and need to do each day, even when they face challenges (e.g., illness, disability, life transitions, environmental changes).*

- All study participants completed self-report questionnaires measuring ADHD symptoms, stress, and occupational performance before the study began and one week after the study ended.

What were the findings?



- After seven weeks, women with ADHD who participated in occupational therapy self-reported a significant improvement in their ADHD symptoms, stress levels, and general functioning compared to those

who did not receive occupational therapy.

Study limitations and future research

- The study's small sample size means results may not apply to all women with ADHD. Participants self-reported their ADHD and some were on medication, which could have influenced results. Lastly, there was no follow-up to confirm long-term benefits of the intervention.
- Future research should focus on testing different lengths of the intervention to see if a longer program might cover more of participants' needs and collect follow-up data to see if the benefits last over time.

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Why are these findings important?

- This intervention may offer an effective option for women with ADHD to manage the impact of their symptoms on daily functioning.
- OT may be especially helpful as a complement to evidence-based interventions for ADHD in adulthood, such as medication and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for ADHD.
- More research with larger samples is needed to clarify the long-term effectiveness of OT interventions in supporting women with ADHD.

However, the current paper suggests:

For clinicians who assess and treat ADHD:

- Educate clients on ADHD-related executive function challenges and recommend practical strategies such as environmental modifications (e.g., specific places for all belongings) and structured routines (e.g., planned, consistent sleep schedules).
- Consider referring adult patients with ADHD to OT for structured interventions targeting executive function challenges like routine building, organization, time management, and sensory regulation.

For women with ADHD:

- Think about your whole self: ADHD affects employment, school, parenting, and daily activities. Recognizing these challenges can help develop successful strategies.
- Consider working with an Occupational Therapist. OT can help with routine establishment, organization, time management, stress management, and sensory regulation to improve daily functioning.
- Consider combining non-medication and medication strategies. Approaches like establishing routines, organizing spaces, managing sensory input, and reducing stress can enhance daily life, on their own and in conjunction with ADHD medication, which can improve quality of life for women with ADHD. 🧘