



SEXUAL SENSATION-SEEKING, HYPERSEXUALITY AND RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIORS BETWEEN ADULTS WITH AND WITHOUT ADHD SYMPTOMS

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INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder defined by disabling levels of inattention, disorganization and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that may interfere in diverse areas of functioning across various stages of the human development. Impulsivity emerges as an important long-term symptom in ADHD – having a strong genetic basis with evidence of altered reward processing and dopaminergic dysfunction – and may increase sexual risk behavior during adulthood [1,2]. Although some studies have shown adolescents with ADHD to exhibit more sexual risk behavior and higher levels of sensation-seeking and impulsivity, a lack of similar studies in the adult population exists [3].

The objective of this study was to compare sexual sensation seeking, hypersexuality and sexual risk behaviors in adults with and without symptoms of ADHD.

METHODS

Participants

Non-probabilistic sampling was used (i.e., snowball method) to recruit adults from the Portuguese-speaking general population. An online survey allowed to collect data from March to April of 2020.

A total of 602 individuals consented to participate in the study and provided valid answers to the survey. The population had an average age of 37.3 years (SD=10.5) and was mainly female (68.6%).

Based on the cut-off score of the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale, 85 (14.1%) of the individuals presented with ADHD symptoms (symptoms in 4 out of 6 questions of the Part A sub-scale). Key sociodemographic and clinical characteristics of the population, stratified by the presence of ADHD symptoms, can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Key sociodemographic characteristics

Sociodemographic characteristic	No ADHD Symptoms (N=517)	ADHD Symptoms (N=85)	p-Value
Age, mean (SD)	37.7 (10.3)	34.9 (11.5)	0.04*
Gender, n (%)			
Female	355 (68.7)	58 (68.2)	0.82§
Male	159 (30.8)	26 (30.6)	
Other	3 (0.6)	1 (1.2)	
Education, n (%)			
Basic education	29 (5.6)	3 (3.5)	0.02§
Secondary education	116 (22.4)	31 (36.5)	
Higher education	372 (72.0)	51 (60.0)	
Psychological/psychiatric therapy, n (%)			
Yes, in the past	144 (27.9)	34 (40.0)	<0.01§
Yes, currently	37 (7.2)	18 (21.2)	
Never	336 (65.0)	33 (38.8)	
Psychological/psychiatric diagnosis, n (%)			
Any diagnosis	209 (40.4)	60 (70.6)	<0.01§
ADHD	0 (0.0)	1 (1.7)	

*Two sample t-test; §Chi-square test

Instruments

- Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale (ASRS) [4]
- Sexual Sensation-Seeking Scale (SSSS) [5]
- Hypersexual Behavior Inventory (HBI) scale [6]
- Sexual Risk Behavior (SRB) scale, adapted from the World Health Organization STEPS Sexual Health Module [7]

RESULTS

Individuals with ADHD symptoms had a higher level of sexual sensation-seeking than those without ADHD symptoms (Table 2). The ADHD group also presented increased hypersexual behavior compared to the non-ADHD group (Table 3). No statistically significant difference was found in SRB between groups (Table 4).

TABLE 2 Sexual Sensation-Seeking Scale

Scale	No ADHD Symptoms (N=517)	ADHD Symptoms (N=85)	p-Value
SSSS	25.2 (5.9)	27.5 (5.6)	<0.01*

*Two sample t-test

TABLE 3 Hypersexual Behavior Inventory Scale

Scale	No ADHD Symptoms (N=517)	ADHD Symptoms (N=85)	p-Value
HBI Total	25.2 (8.2)	32.1 (15.9)	<0.01*
Control	10.1 (3.6)	12.9 (6.7)	<0.01*
Coping	10.4 (4.2)	13.2 (7.4)	<0.01*
Consequences	4.8 (1.7)	6.0 (3.1)	<0.01*

*Two sample t-test

TABLE 4 Sexual Risk Behavior (SRB)

Sexual Risk Behavior	No ADHD Symptoms (N=517)	ADHD Symptoms (N=85)	p-Value
Age at first sexual intercourse	17.8 (3.7)	18.3 (2.7)	0.15*
Nº of individuals had sexual intercourse with over last 12 months (oral, vaginal, anal)	2.4 (5.5)	4.4 (11.2)	0.12*
Frequency of sexual intercourse with condom over the last 12 months			
Had no sexual intercourse	33 (6.4)	5 (5.9)	0.98§
Always	81 (15.7)	16 (18.8)	
A lot of times	58 (11.2)	9 (10.6)	
Sometimes	70 (13.5)	10 (11.8)	0.67§
Rarely	47 (9.19)	7 (8.2)	
Never	228 (44.1)	38 (44.7)	
History of STD	53 (10.3)	10 (11.8)	0.76§
Unplanned pregnancy due to lack of protection during intercourse	114 (22.1)	20 (23.5)	
Sexual intercourse under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs	130 (25.1)	27 (31.8)	

*Two sample t-test; §Chi-square test; STD: sexually transmitted disease

CONCLUSIONS

ADHD symptoms seem to be presented frequently in comorbidity with sexual problems, such as hypersexuality. Sexual sensation-seeking might also play a role in sexual activity of ADHD people, evidencing the importance of including these factors in the assessment and treatment of people with ADHD. However, none of these factors seemed to increase sexual risk behaviors in our participants, which might be explained by further potential background mechanisms behind sexual risk behaviors and the fact that no clinical sample was used.

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