

# ADHD and Women: The Hidden Disorder

By Mrs. Rivka Schonfeld

**Grade Level:** Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle School, High School, Special Ed, Adult, Administration

## **Description:**

This article discusses how ADHD presents itself in both girls and women and explains why this disorder is often not diagnosed, or is misdiagnosed, among females. Suggestions for prevention and treatment are glossed upon here as well. Although the article is written for parents, it is a very helpful resource for educators as well.

What to download

- Download the print-ready PDF file (includes lesson plan/instructions).
- OPTIONAL: Download the editable Word file (does not include lesson plan/instructions).

Please note: When choosing an editable file, depending on the version of the program that you are using, and the fonts that you have, the document may not appear exactly as it was originally intended and/or it may not exactly match the PDF that we provide.

## **Goals/Objectives:**

Teachers will read through the article to educate themselves about a disability they may encounter along their teaching career or as a means of better understanding a student/s in their classroom and how to best relate to him/them.

## **Instructions:**

1. Read through the article.
2. If you have concerns about a particular student, discuss them with your principal.
3. Give this article to parents of a female child whom you suspect of ADHD (if appropriate).

## **Additional Tips:**

This article is a very useful addition to a school newsletter.

ADHD and Women: The Hidden Disorder  
By: Rifka Schonfeld, Director S.O.S (Strategies for Optimum Success)

Picture this: A child is jumping around the room, arms flailing, interrupting the teacher.

Is the child male or female?

Chances are, you imagined a boy.

Why? For years, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has been diagnosed as a predominantly male syndrome. While it's true that the majority of those suffering from ADHD are male, there are a surprising amount of women who deal with ADHD. According to one study at Harvard University, about forty percent of those with ADHD are women – except that many women with ADHD are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed.

*Symptoms: Boys and Girls*

Many theorize that girls are less likely to be diagnosed with ADHD because their symptoms differ greatly from those of boys. Whereas many boys with ADHD cause disruptions in the classroom, girls with ADHD simply stare straight ahead at the teacher but have no idea what she is trying to say. These girls underfunction throughout elementary school, even though they are bright. Many do not receive a diagnosis and simply believe that they are “not good at school.”

Instead, girls with ADHD are labeled as “chatty,” constantly telling animated stories to their friends. Alternatively, girls with ADHD might be thought of as “daydreamers.” “Girls with ADHD remain an enigma--often overlooked, misunderstood and hotly debated,” says Ellen Littman, PhD, a psychologist who focuses on gender differences in ADHD and advocates for a reexamination of the disorder.

So, what happens when these girls finish school without a diagnosis? What does it mean to be a woman living with ADHD?

*ADHD and the Home*

In our community, whether or not they have a career, women do not simply act as mothers, they are also responsible for planning many aspects of home life. On a typical day, a woman needs to keep track of her children's afterschool activities and playdates, the grocery list, the dinner menu, and the laundry. Keeping tabs on all of these moving pieces can be overwhelming for anybody, let alone for a woman suffering from undiagnosed ADHD. For many women with ADHD, these tasks seem impossible as they consistently fail to maintain order in their lives. As a

consequence, their self-esteem suffers because they feel that their failure is a reflection on their capabilities.

### *The Mommy Link*

Many women do not realize they have ADHD until they bring their child in for an evaluation. On occasion, after her child has finished testing, a mother will ask to speak to me privately. Often she will explain that through her child's testing, she realized that she shares many of the same symptoms as her child. It is only then that she realizes that perhaps her inability to keep track of her complex life has nothing to do with her intentions and everything to do with ADHD. Together, we then work out a plan to aid her in combating the disorder.

For women, there are specific issues that coincide with undiagnosed ADHD:

- Anxiety and depression. Many women with ADHD do not understand why they cannot just live the way the rest of the world seems to function. This deflated sense of self is often linked to anxiety or depression.
- Obesity and eating disorders. Research has correlated women with ADHD and a higher chance of being overweight or having an eating disorder. Since organization is used to plan a healthy diet and make time to exercise, women with undiagnosed ADHD tend to grab quick meals or look to food to provide comfort.

### *Prevention and Treatment*

Early intervention is the best way to avoid these coinciding problems for girls with ADHD. Therefore, getting a diagnosis is key. However, if as you are reading this article, many of these issues feel a little too close to home, just know that it is not too late to organize all those overwhelming tasks. Diagnosis is the first step. Who knows – perhaps in a few months – you will have figured out how to do a load of laundry, cook dinner, review homework, return phone calls, and plan a birthday party. But, maybe that's asking too much of the modern mother! That's a thought for another article...

*An acclaimed educator and education consultant, Mrs. Rifka Schonfeld has served the Jewish community for close to thirty years. She founded and directs SOS, a widely acclaimed remedial educational program.*