

Hyperactivity could be a sign of mental illness

Symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are more pronounced in children and hard to diagnose in adults, leaving it untreated and affecting lives, Lifian N. Magezi writes

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a chronic mental condition characterised by non-episodic (constant) symptoms of hyperactivity (being very active), impulsivity (being impulsive) and inattentiveness, explains Prof. Salomeo Rataname, a psychiatrist at the Soroti Makotoho Health Sciences Faculty in Western, South Africa.

Rataname made the remarks at the joint scientific conference for psychiatrists at the Silver Springs Hotel in Kampala recently.

Rataname noted that because few studies have been done about the condition in Africa, there are no reliable statistics for the continent. However, in the US, prevalence stands at between 9% and 8% among children, while the World Health Organisation (WHO) puts worldwide prevalence at 6%.

Rataname said studies have shown that boys are more affected than girls at a ratio of 2:1, but there is no scientific explanation. He explained that although the disorder is known to affect adults, for a long time, it has been mainly linked to children because it is hard to diagnose in adults.

Rataname noted that in the US, the condition affects 4% of adults and, according to the WHO, its worldwide prevalence among adults is at 3.4%.

Dr Hillary Irmaso, a psychiatrist, says the disorder is usually diagnosed when a child is below 12 years.

Signs/symptoms in children
Jacqueline Nakintende, a clinical psychologist, says symptoms are easier to identify in children and these are grouped under hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattentiveness.

Rataname explains that children with ADHD exhibit more symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsivity than inattentiveness. They usually show six or more of the following for at least six months:

- Hyperactivity**
- Often fidgets/squirm
 - Often leave their seats
 - Often run around/ climb excessively
 - Unable to play quietly
 - Always on the go
 - Talk excessively

- Impulsivity**
- Often blur out answers before questions are completed
 - Have difficulty waiting for turns (keeping in a queue)
 - Interrupt or intrude while others are talking
- Inattention**
- Do not listen
 - Cannot organise or plan and so they fail to do well at school and might repeat a grade or get bored and drop out of school

Nakintende explains that in some patients, the disorder diminishes as they grow, but in many, if left untreated, it persists into adulthood.

Rataname noted that 60% of children with the disorder grow up with it into adulthood. However, the condition cannot start in adulthood if one did not have it as a child.

He explains that having subtle symptoms means it is hard for the disorder to be diagnosed in adults. Therefore, Rataname says it is often missed, misdiagnosed and left untreated, which causes significant impairment in one's functioning in all spheres of life such as social, academic and occupational, which then leads to a decreased quality of life. Nakintende says such people are usually referred to as difficult, spoilt or hard to deal with.

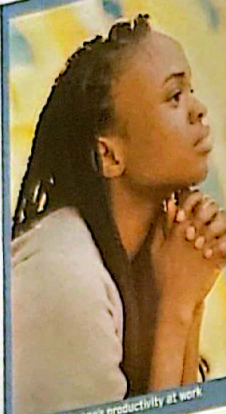
Just like in children, ADHD in adults is characterised by inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity. However, Rataname says hyperactivity or impulsivity may be less obvious and symptoms of inattention are more prominent. When it comes to inattention, an adult will exhibit six or more of the following for at least six months:

Procrastination
Such people have trouble starting a task, especially one that requires a lot of attention, and they often put off doing things until the last minute.

Such people are more likely not to be happy with their jobs, thus perform poorly and change jobs a lot.

Hyperactivity

- Being talkative, assertive, argumentative, talking in a loud voice or just shouting at anything and not wanting to be corrected when in the wrong
- Problems with controlling emotions (anger); such people are quick to explode over minor problems. They could also present with mood swings, anxiety and irritability. They are unable to tolerate stress and frustration.
- Being restless and having trouble relaxing.
- Being unable to concentrate.
- Engaging in constant activity
- Having a tendency towards active jobs and they do not enjoy sitting jobs
- They also struggle with chronic boredom, depression, low self-esteem and low motivation, which usually leads them to



Kasibante found teaching demanding, stressful and boring

At 38, Jennifer Kasibante has never been able to hold down a job for more than a year. A graduate with a bachelor's degree in education, she decided during teaching practice that teaching was not her calling. She says she found it very stressful, demanding and not fulfilling. In addition, everything had to be done according to a timetable, which was boring.

Kasibante, who studied history and economics as her teaching subjects, decided before she even graduated that she would try to pursue a career as a banker. Upon graduation, she started looking for jobs in banks. In a meantime, her brother, who is a statistician, used to get her short-term research projects he was connected to. However, he always got the same

complains, she says. She did not keep her mind on the job, she never listened to her supervisor. Kasibante has spent about three years without a job and since her brother got a job out of the country, it is becoming hard for him to connect her to projects that need data officers.

Kasibante, who is a mother of two, now spends most of her time in church.

She says about a year ago, she talked to her pastor about the challenges she faced in life and her need for a job and the pastor counselled her.

The pastor also advised her to talk to a psychologist who would help her organise her life and start leading a purpose-driven life as intended by God.

Kasibante says during the first consultation with the counselling psychologist, she intimated that Kasibante could have what she

referred to as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The psychologist explained that this could be the reason why she was not able to hold down a job for a long time and why she kept on getting bored with work and life generally.

The counsellor told Kasibante that she will not treat her with medicine, but promised to work with her to help her organise her life and change her behaviour. She encouraged her to honour subsequent appointments and they drew up a plan of how to help her organise her life.

Kasibante says she has so far attended one more session with the counsellor, adding that it was really helpful.

She says she will go back when she gets enough money because the psychologist charges \$140,000 per session.

ADHD affects one's productivity at work

2:1
The boys to girls ratio of ADHD prevalence

Distraction
One easily gets distracted, often daydream and they have difficulty sustaining attention, for example, when reading or performing a task.

This can cause under-performance on the job, especially in noisy or busy offices, where phone calls or emails can derail one's attention.

- One does not give close attention to detail.
- This prone to making mistakes
- Does not listen or has poor listening skills
- Does not follow instructions
- Poor planning and finds difficulty in organising tasks and carrying out in organising tasks such as paying bills or responsibilities such as paying bills or looking after children
- One avoids or dislikes tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Loses things unnecessary
- Being forgetful, for example, forgetting appointments
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Poor time management (one is always late and does not meet deadlines)
- One has trouble multi-tasking

3.4%
The worldwide prevalence among adults, according to the World Health Organisation

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12
The disorder is diagnosed when a child is below the age of 12

Hyperactivity

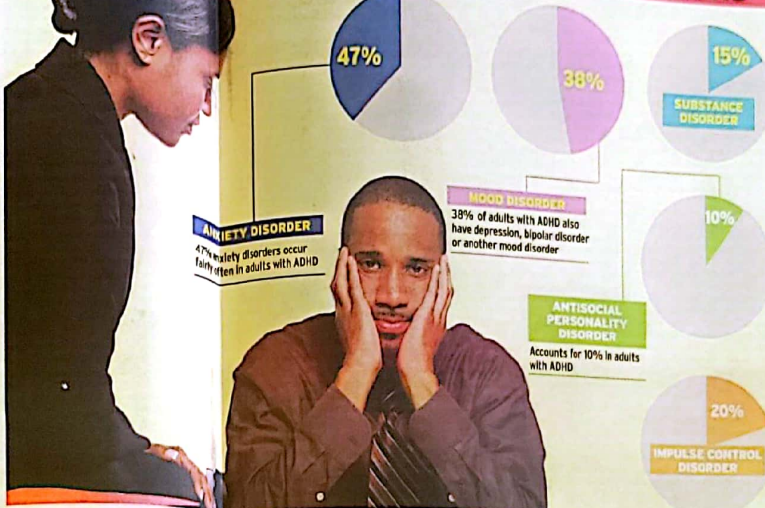
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6
The number of months symptoms of ADHD can be observed

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OTHER MENTAL ILLNESS THAT CAN EXIST WITH ADHD



abusing or getting addicted to alcohol, drugs and other such substances.

Cause
Experts at the conference noted that the exact cause of ADHD is unknown, however, risk factors include:

Genetic factors: ADHD, like other mental health conditions, is highly heritable and studies have shown that 75% of patients have a close relative with similar

symptoms. Therefore, the condition runs in families, and studies indicate that genes may play a role.

Environmental factors: Exposure to toxins, such as lead, as a child may also increase one's risk. Lead is found mainly in paint and pipes in older buildings.

Development factors

- Problems with the central nervous system at key moments in development may play a role.
- A mother smoking, drinking alcohol or using drugs

during pregnancy will increase the risk for the baby

- A mother experiencing stress, because stress affects infants when in the uterus.
- Babies born prematurely, having a low birth weight or suffering from infections during childhood

Psychosocial factors
These include poor nutrition and being born in dysfunctional families. People from families where parents are always quarrelling with each other are more prone to ADHD.

COPING TIPS

- For parents**
Dr Hillary Irmaso, a psychiatrist, advises parents who feel overwhelmed with children who perform poorly at school, are annoyingly hyperactive or cannot concentrate on any activity to contact a health professional and have the child evaluated.
- Jacqueline Nakintende, a clinical psychologist, encourages parents with such children to give them one instruction at a time, maintain the same routine for them and always honour their promises.
- "If they promise to punish them, they should do so, otherwise if the child does what you told them not to do and you forgive them, then you will confuse and frustrate them. Do not make threats you will not carry out."
- Employers**
Irmaso notes that patients can seem irritable by slight things, for

- example, giving them extra work than expected. So he encourages bosses to understand and be patient with them. He advises employers of such people to write down their instructions and provide a conducive environment.
- In addition, they should follow routines, give them polite reminders and prioritise important tasks for them to do first. He notes that such people can be as productive as any other staff member if given the necessary support.
- Spouses**
Give your spouse constant reassurance and support. Be calm and patient with them and always plan your life in detail and follow the plan so as to reduce stress on the person. For example, discuss your financial issues in detail and plan for expenditures so as to discourage patients from spending erratically.

Diagnosis

Irmaso says one challenge in the diagnosis of ADHD in adults is that it usually exists with another form of mental illness. Rataname says the most common ones are:

- **Anxiety disorders**
At 47%, anxiety disorders occur fairly often in adults with ADHD. Anxiety disorders may cause overwhelming worry and nervousness.
- **Mood disorder**
About 38% of adults with ADHD also have depression, bipolar disorder or another mood disorder.
- **Substance use disorder (15%)**
- **Antisocial personality disorder (10%)**
- **Impulse control disorders (20%)**

Many people have symptoms similar to ADHD. However, psychiatrists at the conference noted that for those with ADHD, the symptoms are severe, persistent and cause disruptions in several areas in their life, such as employment, education and relationships.

Therefore, Rataname and Irmaso explain that when carrying out a diagnosis, a mental health expert comprehensively evaluates one's life, finding out about their childhood and current behaviour, that of their parents and close relatives, in addition to ruling out other illnesses.

that they can function normally with the disorder while that they can achieve this through planning their daily tasks and other activities by having a schedule and timing these schedules so that they can be reminded of pending tasks by using calendars or alarm clocks. He also encourages patients to create and follow routines.

Nakintende notes that each patient is unique, so they draw up a treatment plan depending on the challenges faced by a patient. She explained that patients are guided to learn new ways of doing things in order to change their behaviour and organise their lives, for example, they are helped to keep a diary, schedule their activities and establish a routine.

They are also told to keep diaries, set alarm clocks to remind them to do things, draw to-do lists daily.

Patients are also taught how to relax, manage stress, handle relationships and people generally.

Patients are also encouraged to exercise to burn off extra energy and thus reduce symptoms of hyperactivity and restlessness.

Patients are also given tips on self-control and taught how to delay reactions.

Where to seek treatment

Irmaso says in Uganda, patients with ADHD are treated at Mulago Hospital, where there is a mental health unit and Butabika Hospital, which are both government facilities.

He added that after realising that many patients with severe conditions went to those health centres and some patients are afraid to seek treatment at such centres, psychiatrists set up the Kampala Mental Health Clinic. The move was to encourage patients to seek treatment in a place that did not have stigma attached to it.

Psychiatrists also opened up a Facebook page, Kampala Mental Health Clinic, where patients can contact them for consultation.

Irmaso notes that patients who seek psychiatric care are usually referred to them by other health professionals.

However, he added that psychiatrists are involved in increasing awareness about mental health issues to improve people's perception to mental illness and enabling them to easily identify symptoms and seek help.

"We would like to increase the number of patients who come directly to us as this would save on their time and money," he says.

Irmaso notes that patients who suffer with high levels of unemployment, low productivity at work, increased accidents, trauma and injuries.

They also struggle with failed relationships, substance abuse and the condition is associated with reduced educational level, suicide attempts and criminal activities.

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