

# New study on ADHD in adults with recurrent depression

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Researchers from the Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health have undertaken work to investigate the prevalence and impact of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in recurrently depressed adult women.

The study, led by Dr Victoria Powell, found that 12.8% of women with a history of recurrent depression also had elevated ADHD symptoms. Additionally, a small percentage of the women sampled met the diagnostic criteria for ADHD, but none of the women had received a diagnosis of ADHD from a medical professional.

Dr Powell said: "In a sample of women in mid-life taken from a UK-based prospective cohort of adults with a history of recurrent depression, we investigated the prevalence of ADHD and the association of ADHD with clinical features of depression.

"Those with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder may be at risk of a more chronic and impairing depression compared to those with depression alone according to studies of young people. However, no studies to date have examined ADHD in recurrently depressed adults in mid-life.

"In our study, higher ADHD symptoms appear to mark a worse clinical presentation for depression. Clinical implications include that in women with early-onset, impairing and recurrent depression, the possibility of underlying ADHD masked by depression needs to be considered."

The study found that ADHD was associated with earlier onset, more impairing, and recurrent depression and that recurrently depressed women with elevated ADHD symptoms were more likely to be hospitalised than those without. The study also found that ADHD was associated with being on an antidepressant that is not a typical first choice antidepressant, suggesting that clinicians may have had difficulty finding an effective antidepressant medication for these women.

Dr Powell concluded: "We know those with ADHD can be at an increased risk of developing prolonged and impairing depression. This study is the first of its kind, with no studies to date, have examined ADHD and its impact on depression presentation in recurrently depressed adults in mid-life. The findings suggest that recurrent depression may in some cases mask ADHD symptoms in adult women.

"We hope that these findings will make a tangible difference in a clinical setting, particularly for women with recurrent depression that could potentially be masking underlying, undetected ADHD. I'm looking forward to continuing to work with colleagues here at the Wolfson Centre to undertake further studies that will have real-world implications and make a difference in the field of mental health research."

The research paper, *ADHD in adults with recurrent depression*, is published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* and is available to [view online](#).