



Disability Documentation for College Students with ADHD: Shortcomings and Recommendations for Improvement

Robert Weis, Denison University; Christina H. Till, Duquesne University; and Celeste P. Erickson, Tufts University

Purpose

Recent federal regulations identify ADHD as a potential disabling condition that could merit accommodations in college.¹

Impairment is an essential component of the psychiatric definition of ADHD and legal definition of a disability.

DSM-5 requires an individual with ADHD to show “clear evidence that symptoms interfere with social, academic, or occupational functioning.”²

The ADA defines ADHD as a disability when it “substantially limits the ability of an individual to perform a major life activity as compared to most people in the general population.”³

Academic accommodations are designed to mitigate impairment so students with ADHD can learn and demonstrate their learning similar to their classmates without ADHD.⁴ Evidence of impairment, therefore, is necessary for effective accommodation decision-making and monitoring.⁵

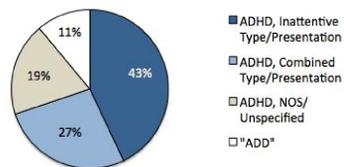
Do clinicians provide evidence of impairment in the reports they submit to college disability specialists?

Method

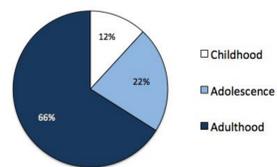
Participants

- Undergraduates ($N = 159$) attending a private, liberal arts college
 - 52.7% male, 47.3% female
 - 17 - 21 years of age ($M = 18.5$, $SD = 5.5$)
 - White (89.0%), African American (4.8%), Latino (2.1%), Asian American (1.4%), Other (2.7%)
- All diagnosed with ADHD and receiving academic accommodations

Primary Diagnosis



Age of Diagnosis



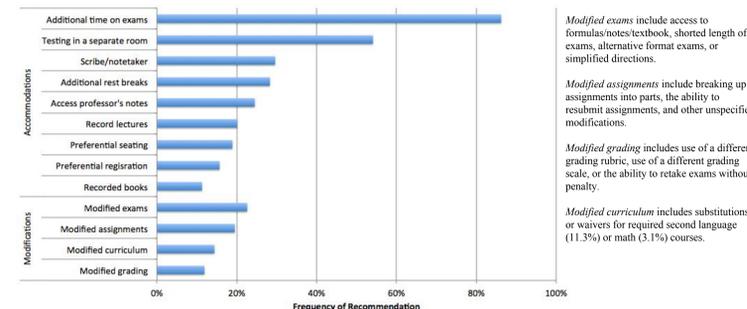
Comorbid conditions: learning disability (22.0%), anxiety disorder (17.9%), mood disorder (13.8%), communication disorder (1.4%)

Procedure

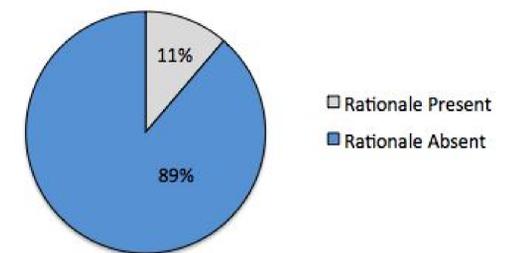
- Reviewed reports and documentation submitted by psychologists (84.2%) or school psychologists (15.8%) for each student.
- Examined evidence of impairment based on (1) student self-report, (2) other informant report, (3) rating scale, or (4) educational/medical records.

Results

1. All clinicians recommended at least one academic accommodation. One-third also recommended a modification to students' assignments, exams, curricula, or methods of evaluation.

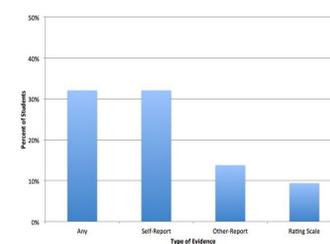


2. Most (65%) clinicians did not specify the amount of additional time needed or provide a rationale for the accommodations they recommended (89%).

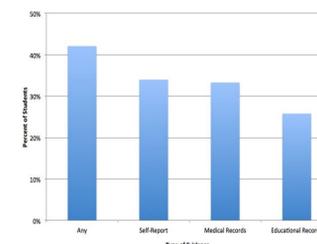


3. Only 32% of clinicians described current impairment; only 42% described previous impairment.

Current Impairment



Previous Impairment



Self-Report: Student reported current impairment; *Other-Report:* Another informant indicated that student experienced impairment; *Rating Scale:* Elevated scores on a self- or other-informant impairment rating scale.

Self-Report: Student reported impairment prior to college; *Medical Records:* Documentation showed impairment, ADHD diagnosis, or ADHD medication prior to college; *Educational Records:* Documentation showed impairment, referral for ADHD evaluation, ADHD diagnosis, 504 Plan, IEP, SOP, or any academic accommodations prior to college.

4. Most students receiving specific accommodations or modifications had no evidence of current or previous impairment.

Table 1. Percent of students receiving specific accommodations with evidence of impairment

Accommodation	Current Impairment				Previous Impairment			
	Self-Report	Other-Report	Rating Scale	Any Evidence	Self-Report	Medical Records	Educational Records	Any Evidence
Additional time on exams	34.3%	15.3%	10.9%	34.3%	35.8%	33.5%	27.0%	43.8%
Separate room	33.7%	19.8%	11.6%	33.7%	34.9%	34.9%	27.9%	45.3%
Scribe/notetaker	34.0%	14.9%	12.8%	34.0%	38.3%	38.3%	27.7%	46.8%
Additional rest breaks	35.6%	20.0%	11.1%	35.6%	42.2%	40.0%	28.9%	46.7%
Access professor's notes	28.2%	12.8%	10.3%	28.2%	25.6%	25.7%	23.1%	30.8%
Record lectures	37.5%	18.8%	15.6%	37.5%	40.6%	34.4%	31.3%	46.9%
Preferential seating	43.3%	30.0%	16.7%	43.3%	43.3%	40.0%	40.0%	56.7%
Preferential registration	27.0%	16.7%	22.2%	27.0%	38.9%	38.9%	22.2%	38.9%
Recorded books	27.8%	16.7%	22.2%	27.8%	38.9%	38.9%	22.2%	38.9%
Modifications								
Modified exams	30.6%	16.7%	13.9%	30.6%	30.6%	30.5%	25.0%	38.9%
Modified assignments	35.5%	25.8%	16.1%	35.5%	48.4%	48.4%	35.5%	61.3%
Modified curriculum	63.2%	31.6%	0.0%	63.2%	34.8%	34.8%	13.0%	39.1%
Modified grading	26.1%	13.0%	8.7%	26.1%	52.6%	52.6%	31.6%	68.4%

Discussion

- Impairment is an essential component of the psychiatric definition of ADHD and the legal definition of a disability. Evidence of impairment is necessary to plan and monitor accommodations.
- Unfortunately, few clinicians described current or previous impairment or provided a rationale for their recommended accommodations.
- A lack of evidence of impairment in clinicians' reports reduces their usefulness to college disability specialists.
- Clinicians could assist disability specialists by providing a thorough assessment and description of impairment using multi-method/multi-informant data.^{6,7}

References

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For additional information, please contact

Robert Weis, Department of Psychology, Denison University
neuropsychology.denison.edu