



## Media Release September 28 2021

### Girls and Women with ADHD: our missed, forgotten and, most vulnerable

Girls and women with ADHD remain undiagnosed, misdiagnosed, or diagnosed much later in life, causing many to remain untreated for decades with devastating consequences. A recent CADDAC survey of Canadian women with ADHD found that 46% were misdiagnosed with another disorder prior to being diagnosed with ADHD, with 60% stating that their treatment had been delayed by two or more decades due to this misdiagnosis.

For this year's ADHD Awareness Month, The Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada, CADDAC, a national charity supporting those with ADHD, has released a [paper](#) highlighting the urgent need for Canadian medical professionals and governments to help build awareness of ADHD in girls and women, increase training on female ADHD for family and mental healthcare providers, and support research dollars into better screening and assessment tools for female ADHD. Dr. Sara Binder, a consulting psychiatrist at the Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary said, "While ADHD is left untreated females experience significant impairment in terms of social, emotional and cognitive functioning. It is imperative that we increase the awareness of this discrepancy in diagnosis and treatment. We must educate schoolteachers, physicians and mental health practitioners regarding the varied presentation of ADHD in girls and adolescents. Females being treated for comorbid conditions should be assessed for ADHD and appropriately managed in order to protect them from years of unnecessary suffering and functional impairment."

Three recent Canadian studies, lead by, Professor Esme Fuller-Thomson PhD, Director of the Institute for Life Course & Aging at the University of Toronto, highlighted this urgent need for action. The 2020 study, found that 24% of Canadian women with ADHD had attempted suicide compared to only 3% for women without ADHD and 9% of men with ADHD. A second study, released just this year, found that half of young adults with ADHD had a substance abuse disorder in their lifetime while a past 2016 study discovered that women with ADHD have triple the prevalence of insomnia, chronic pain, suicidal ideation, childhood sexual abuse and generalized anxiety disorder and double the rate of substance use, smoking, depressive disorder, severe poverty, and childhood physical abuse compared to women without ADHD. "These findings underline the extreme economic and mental health challenges facing many women with ADHD" said Fuller-Thomson. "The good news is that there are excellent interventions available to address these problems. Unfortunately, far too few women with ADHD are provided with these programs." Fuller-Thomson said.

While the lack of diagnosis and treatment would in of itself increase the detrimental effects of ADHD, we do not yet fully understand why females with ADHD have such increased rates of vulnerability to physical and mental health disorders as well as increased childhood adversity. Possible reasons have been suggested, such as the internalizing nature of ADHD seen in women, the impact of socialization on females resulting in their need to fit in and meet expectations and the additional hormonal impact on ADHD symptoms.

While more research is needed, we do know that early diagnosis along with multimodal treatments can have a significant impact on the trajectory of the lives of those with ADHD. We also know that there are ways to help rectify the continued under referral of girls and women for assessment, improve our resources to assess females, use better strategies to mitigate the increased vulnerabilities for women with ADHD and better flag those who may be affected by these risks.

“Considering this recent Canadian data, it is very frustrating that more attention is not being paid to the impact of ADHD on suicidality, addiction, mental and physical health in general and specifically in females”, states Heidi Bernhardt the Director of Education and Advocacy for CADDAC. CADDAC is strongly urging medical professionals and mental health communities to learn about ADHD, pay particular attention to females with ADHD, while asking the government to invest more into healthcare for those with ADHD and research on ADHD.

**To arrange for Interviews with Dr. Binder, Dr. Thomson-Fuller, Heidi Bernhardt and/or women with ADHD across Canada please contact:**

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