

Why girls with ADHD aren't being diagnosed

Anxiety. Depression. School failure. Self-harm. Unemployment. Unplanned pregnancies. Even an increased risk of early death.

The risks and toll of suffering that can come with having attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, is huge, counted annually in [billions of dollars](#) in lost productivity and health care spending and in untold frustration and failure.

Yet despite more than a century of research and thousands of published studies, [ADHD — marked by distraction, forgetfulness and impulsivity — remains largely misunderstood by the public](#). This is especially true when it comes to girls and women.

Over the past few decades, pediatricians, teachers and parents have gotten a lot better at spotting ADHD in girls. In the 1990s, scientists believed it was as much as [nine times as common in boys](#), and very few girls were diagnosed. Today's diagnosis rate has narrowed to 2.5 boys to every girl.

The diagnosis of ADHD in the United States has surged in recent years, though current numbers are probably higher than its true prevalence. Estimates suggest that worldwide, 5 to 7 percent of youth have ADHD. The higher rates of diagnosis in the United States are probably due to several factors, including shifts in educational policies that emphasize student test scores and changes in medical benefits coverage.

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