

# *Underachievement or ADHD?*

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Much has been written about the relationship of giftedness and ADHD, as well as the relationship between ADHD and underachievement. The purpose of the present study was to determine whether students who were identified as gifted underachievers were more likely to manifest symptoms of attention deficit disorder.

## *Sample*

The sample for this study consisted of 178 students who were taking part in a national research study of gifted underachievers. The students ranged in age from 9-16 years old. The mean age of the participants was 12 years old; over 94% of the sample were between the ages of 10-14. Approximately two-thirds of the underachievers were male; one-third were female. We had access to IQ scores for approximately half of the students in the sample ( $n=84$ ). The mean IQ score for those students was 130.6; the standard deviation was 8.9 points. Approximately 64% of the students were white, 10% were Latino, and 4% were African American.

## *Instrumentation*

The *ADHD-IV Rating Scales* (Du Paul, Power, Anastopolous, & Reid, 1998) consist of an 18-item home version and an 18-item school version. Both the home version and the school version of the ADHD rating scales contain two 9-item subscales: inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity. The ADHD-rating scales have undergone extensive validation. The reliability estimates for scores in this sample are- Inattention/Teacher=.88, Impulsivity/Teacher=.91, Inattention/Parent=.93, Impulsivity/Parent=.89.

## *Methods*

Du Paul et al. determined prevalence rates of ADHD in their normative sample using the *DSM-IV* criteria. Du Paul et al. proposed that an item score of 2 or 3 (occurs often or very often) indicated presence of a symptom. The *DSM-IV* defines ADHD as meeting six of nine symptoms of inattention, and/or six of nine symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity. Therefore, they categorized students as meeting the criteria for an ADHD subtype if they had scores of 2 or 3 on at least six of nine items. We used the same criteria with our sample of gifted underachievers and compared the prevalence rates within our sample to the prevalence rates in Du Paul's normative population.

## *Results*

For the ADHD-Home scale, the prevalence rate in our sample was over 4 times higher than the prevalence rate in the norm sample. For the ADHD-School scale, the prevalence rate in our sample was over twice as high as the prevalence rate in the norm sample. However, for both the parent and teacher rating scales, the prevalence of clinically significant hyperactive/impulsivity behavior was actually lower in our sample

than it was in the norm group. However, the prevalence of inattention was over 4 times as high using the teacher rating scales and over 7.4 times as high using the parent rating scales. This suggests that while the prevalence of hyperactivity and impulsivity within the underachieving sample appears to be similar to that of a typical school aged population, the prevalence of inattention is much higher. Over half of the students in our sample met the criteria for ADHD-primarily attentive type based on teacher reports, and almost a third of the students in our sample met the criteria for ADHD-primarily attentive type based on parent reports.

Approximately 18.9% of the gifted underachievers were identified as ADHD on both the home scale and the school scale. Only 38.5% of the students were not identified as ADHD on either the home or school *ADHD-IV* scale.

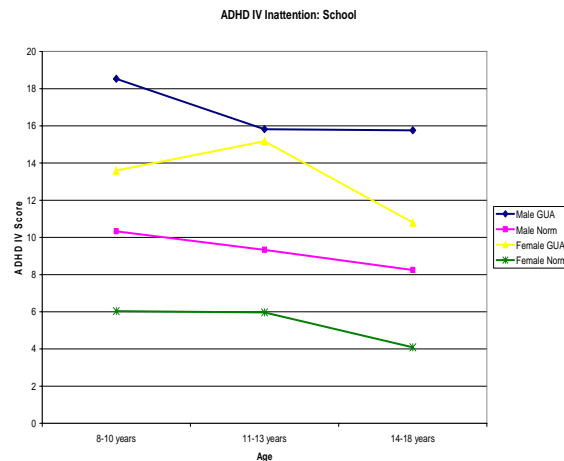
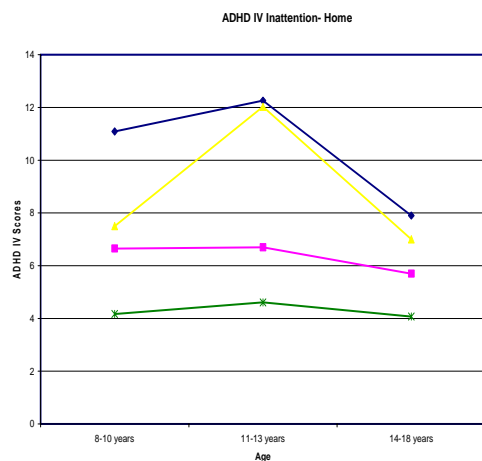
While a large proportion of the students in our sample met the diagnostic criteria for ADHD-inattentive type on the *ADHD IV* rating scale, they may or may not meet the full diagnostic criteria for ADHD. In other words, while these elevated levels of inattentive behavior are certainly cause for concern, these results do not indicate that all of the students who screened positive for ADHD on these rating scales would actually meet the full diagnostic criteria for ADHD, as determined by a medical or psychological professional. Further, it is important to remember that the results of this research are correlational. It is impossible to determine from this data whether students who exhibit inattentive behaviors become underachievers or if underachievers exhibit inattentive behaviors.

ADHD IV Home Rating Scales- Parent

Type	% in GUA Sample	% in Norm Group
Inattentive	23.7	3.2
Hyperactive	0	2.1
Combined	6.7	2.2
Overall prevalence	30.4	7.5

ADHD IV School Rating Scales- Teacher

Type	% in GUA Sample	% in Norm Group
Inattentive	41.4	10
Hyperactive	1.7	3.2
Combined	10.9	8.4
Overall prevalence	54.0	21.6



Send correspondence regarding this study to either Betsy McCoach (betsy.mccoach@uconn.edu) or Del Siegle (del.siegle@uconn.edu).