



**A Qualitative Study on the Need for Inclusive Education for ADHD Students at the
College Level**

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Abstract

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders. Earlier it was thought that this condition only lasts till adolescence, however, recent studies indicates that the symptom of the disorder persists into adulthood. Schools have been successful in introducing inclusive education, where all students no matter what kind of disability study together in one classroom. For the same reason schools have structure, continuous guidance and support for the students with ADHD but as they enter college, they either drop out or do not even enroll in higher education. Studies indicate that the poor academic performance at college level of students with ADHD can be due to the inability of these institutes to help these students. There is a need for inclusive education, continuous guidance, support and developing a more student centric approach even at college or university level to help the young adults with ADHD in a better way. This approach can be supported by various kinds of behavioral and pharmacotherapeutic interventions to increase the impact. Additionally, this all can help the students with their symptoms of ADHD like inattention, and lead to significant improvements in their academic performance.

Key Words: *Inclusive education, ADHD, university students*

Introduction

Indian college students with ADHD deal with serious issues that prevent them from succeeding academically and socially. Their inability to focus during lectures, manage their time well, and fulfill deadlines frequently results in subpar academic performance. These children's social isolation or misinterpretation by teachers and classmates might exacerbate their stress and anxiety. These difficulties are made worse by the dearth of specialized support services, such as academic accommodations and mental health resources. ADHD students have a higher chance of dropping out without the right therapies, which has an adverse effect on their general well-being and future employment opportunities. It is crucial to address these issues through inclusive education.

According to Abecassis, Isquith and Roth (2017) ADHD in emerging adults is associated with a variety of negative outcomes, including academic and occupational difficulties, social and relationship problems, and substance use disorders. Additionally, Wasserstein (2005) asserts that core childhood symptoms of hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity shift with development, meaning that symptoms may present differently in young adults than they do in children. One of the most important concerns about dealing with the issue is creating awareness about the cause training the teachers in identifying the symptoms and giving the required support to everyone.

Another concern that must be dealt with are the assumptions or myths surrounding the disability like students will ask for help when they need, these students are not interested to study, are happy with lower grades or are irresponsible. Some individuals even think that inclusive education may disturb other students in class, the tools used for special education are very expensive and keeping these students apart from mainstream classrooms is more effective (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). These myths must be catered to create a more progressive educational environment.

Yuval et al. (2004) invited faculty to incorporate a series of inclusive practices such as using digital and audio formats, books, notebooks, building teamwork, online tests, etc. The results of self-report questionnaires found that students who studied in classes that implement inclusive practices scored more on concentration in classrooms and examination, memory, understanding

and describing ideas when compared to the groups who inculcated fewer inclusive methods of teaching.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their neighborhood schools to receive high-quality instruction, interventions, and support that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum (Bui, et al., 2012)

According to UNESCO (1994), “Inclusion is seen as the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation, a process of addressing and responding to the learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education” (Booth, 1996). It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. Stainback (1992) adds that inclusion facilitates integration in school systems when general and special education personnel, as well as curriculum and instructional procedures, are combined to provide educational experiences to meet the needs of the students in an integrated setup. Inclusive education means creating a climate in class wherein all the educational necessities are addressed including the children with special needs (CWSN).

Inclusion focuses not on treating the concern but on making every child feel like they are no less than their peers despite their disability. The child's differences are accepted and respected by everyone in the classroom. To help the students the regular education teachers work in collaboration with the special educators and counselors. This helps in developing and designing the curriculum, activities, and programs in such a way that each child can participate equally. The diversity among children with special needs may include academic, social, physical, emotional, or cognitive differences.

Making children with disabilities study in the mainstream classroom has proven to increase their achievement levels and develop better skills through inclusive teaching and in addition to this their classmates who do not have a disability benefit too (Bui, et al., 2010; Dupuis, et all, 2012)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ADHD is a developmental disorder associated with an ongoing pattern of inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity. The symptoms of ADHD can interfere significantly with an individual's daily activities and relationships. ADHD begins in childhood and can continue into the teen years and adulthood (NIMH,2021). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a “disorder of childhood and adolescence characterized by a pattern of extreme pervasive, persistent and debilitating inattention, overactivity and impulsivity” (Hoseini et al., 2014). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is one of the most prevalent childhood neurodevelopmental disorders. In this condition children generally struggle with focusing their attention on tasks, to sit still and control their behavior. The disorder is usually diagnosed in childhood only and often it continues in adulthood.

The diagnostic criteria of ADHD as explained in DSM V TR.

Inattention: Student generally fail to pay attention in the classroom and is easily distracted. The teachers generally complain that the child doesn't seem to listen when they are giving instructions. They find it difficult to complete tasks which include organization and avoid the activities which require them to sustain attention for a long time.

Hyperactivity and Impulsivity: Children who exhibit these symptoms generally fidget a lot, find it difficult to sit on the chair, and they may even squirm. These kids are generally defined as ‘driven by motor’ by people who observe them. They may blurt out answers in class, find it difficult to wait for their turn, fail to ask for permission to use something or interrupt while others are speaking.

The symptoms may be combined with each other or maybe present separately in some individuals. The severity of the disorder can be mild, moderate or severe. The disorder is present in both males and females, but the prevalence is reported more in the males. Though girls display more symptoms of inattention. But the research in this area has been limited as girls are referred less as compared to boys which leads to referral bias (Rucklidge, 2010). The symptoms of ADHD can have a serious negative effect on social relationships and academic achievement.

ADHD in Adults

Earlier it was thought that ADHD doesn't go beyond adolescence, but recent studies have proven that the symptoms of the disorder persist even in adulthood (Wilens, et al. 2004). As the

individuals get older the symptoms might show some changes, like the adults can display restlessness, have anger issues, procrastinate their tasks, easily get bored of their routine, fail to be punctual or have problems in staying organized in their life (WebMD, 2024). Adults with ADHD may depict a few additional concerns such as being antisocial, high anxiety and depressive symptoms. Furthermore, they can experience lack of success at school, occupational issues and accidents. However, still there is a lot of uncertainty regarding the persistence of the disorder as the results of the follow up studies have been ambiguous (Faraone et al., 2000).

College Students and ADHD

A college student is a young adult who pursues higher education after completing their high school. Though the education institutions in India have offered huge support to children with ADHD by introducing measures like hiring counselors and special educators, giving them concessions such as scribe and extra time. This support is however only limited to schools. Because of this, these students have difficulty pursuing higher education and may choose to drop out of colleges and universities or fail to enroll themselves. A study reveals young adults in the UK and Ireland do not pursue further studies, even if they do they fail to graduate along with their peers. Though ADHD is associated with poor results in the academic front, it can also be due to the inability of the higher institutes to cater these students (Sedgwick, 2018)

Research was conducted on college health care professionals to understand their viewpoints regarding the students who suffer from ADHD. The study discovered that the professionals do realize the importance of treatment of ADHD, but they were uncomfortable while diagnosing and treating ADHD which acts as an obstacle in the care of college students (Thomas et al., 2014). Additionally, the problems of ADHD scholars increase at college level due to the lack of external structure and the rise in availability of immediate rewards, this makes it difficult for them to self-regulate their behavior. The children with ADHD are already vulnerable in this aspect of life (Fleming & McMahon, 2012).

Self-report study on college students with ADHD indicates that these students are more vulnerable to anxiety disorders and are at a risk of developing anxiety related symptoms. (O'Rourke et al., 2017) Another self-report-based study reported that the college students with ADHD symptoms have a need for having greater autonomy, more concentration and reasoning.

They also faced difficulties in building relationships with classmates and there was little information provided by majors (de Oliveira & Dias, 2017).

Interventions

For creating a supportive and equitable educational environment for college level students with ADHD there is a requirement for inclusive education. To help these students reach their potential, they need the right kind of help. This could lead to a better rate of enrollment of ADHD individuals in higher education institutes, reduce the dropout rates and positively impact their chances of getting employed in good companies.

As ADHD is now considered to be a lifespan concern, the academic difficulties faced by these students may continue up to young adulthood. Studies on college students discovered that behavioral and pharmacotherapeutic interventions can help the students with their inattention and improve their educational achievement (Prevatt & Young, 2014).

A study investigated the impact of support services on the GPA of college students with Learning disability (LD) and ADHD over a period of 5 years. The results revealed that children who opted for receiving coaching support, displayed improvement in their academics. Particularly learners with ADHD improved significantly in terms of GPA because of the help extended to them (DuPaul et al., 2017).

Research was conducted to study the effects of time management, organization skills and planning as an intervention for students with ADHD who displayed academic impairment, and the results were compared with another group who received no intervention. They were promised psychology course credit in exchange for their participation. The results discovered that the intervention group displayed significant improvement in terms of their ADHD symptoms and academic impairment as compared to the other group. The intervention also led to the refinement of their organization, time management, and planning skills relative to their baseline observations (LaCount et al., 2015).

The student-centered perspective in development can include coaching them with elements such as making use of open-ended questioning, building a safe space for students who face difficulties in regulation of their behavior and executive functions. The teachers can also use the approach of keeping these individuals accountable for their actions (D'Alessio & Banerjee, 2016).

Most of the colleges lack structure to help the students with ADHD to meet their academic goals. A comprehensive care model called “SUCCEEDS” which stands for “*Students Understanding College Choices: Encouraging and Executing Decisions for Success*” was initiated at college level. The results indicated that most of them experienced significant improvement in their organizational skills. In addition to this, the students who had comorbid symptoms such as depression or alcohol abuse at the baseline also reported some improvement (Meinzer et al., 2020).

To facilitate the students with disabilities at college level the institutions must work on their physical as well as nonphysical environment. The colleges must have proper management, physical space and architecture. The students must be allowed to interact freely and in a friendly manner with others who are not suffering from any disability to help build a student friendly ecosystem at their campus (Amka, 2018).

Conclusion

There is an urgent need to resolve the issue by offering the students with ADHD specialized assistance and accommodations at college level. The lecturers can offer support by giving them access to counseling, mentorship programs, helping them in goal setting, flexible deadlines, and individualized education. It is also very crucial to first sensitize the professors and staff to identify and address the needs of students with ADHD. Higher education institutes may foster a more sympathetic and compassionate academic environment by raising awareness and understanding about the cause.

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