

## **ATTENTION DEFICT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER MAY BE UNDER-DIAGNOSED IN GIRLS**

**David Lowenstein, Ph.D.**  
**Psychologist**

A missing symptom may derail the diagnosis in girls of a behavioral disorder that is more often detected in boys. Although girls with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) exhibit the same inattentiveness, impetuosity and hyperactivity as boys, they are less likely to be as disruptive, according to a new research study. It was found that the behavioral symptom called disruptiveness that typically drives a parent to seek medical help that leads to the ADHD diagnosis is not fully examined with females. Reporting in the August issue of the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, these researchers compared the psychiatric well-being of 140 girls, ages 6 to 18, who had been diagnosed with ADHD, with that of 122 girls of the same age who did not have ADHD. Participants and their parents were interviewed to determine traits including disruptive behavior. As expected, the ADHD girls were approximately nine times more likely than the non-ADHD group to demonstrate symptoms of inattention such as "difficulty following instructions" and being "easily distracted." They were also significantly more likely than the non-ADHD group to express manifestations of hyperactivity and impulsivity such as "difficulty playing quietly," "fidgeting" and "difficulty waiting turn." When these researchers looked at conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder — two determinants of disruptive behavior — they found that 35% of the ADHD girls matched criteria for this diagnosis, versus 4% of the non-ADHD group. Although the difference between the groups was significant, an earlier study found that the rate of disruptive behavior among ADHD boys was twice as high, the authors noted. Girls with ADHD, like boys, were also found to be significantly more likely, than the non-ADHD participants, to be depressed, anxious and have phobias and sleeping disorders. Girls with ADHD are typically more compliant than their male counterparts and hence more difficult to spot. Among females, ADHD can manifest itself in a variety of seemingly contradictory symptoms. For example, the girl who is quiet in the classroom, daydreams constantly and seems distracted may have ADHD. Yet the tomboy who climbs trees, plays soccer and seems to enjoy risk-taking activities may also have ADHD. A third profile of the ADHD girl is the "chatty Kathy" type who may seem silly, hyper-talkative and over-emotional. Girls in the third category chatter constantly in the classroom, interrupt others and have

## **ATTENTION DEFICT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER MAY BE UNDER- DIAGNOSED IN GIRLS**

difficulty staying on track during conversation. These researchers advise parents of daughters to suspect ADHD if there are frequent complaints from teachers about punctuality, lack of concentration and procrastination. Figures from the Bethesda-based National Institutes of Health (NIH) show that ADHD affects approximately 3 to 5 percent of school-age children. The NIH states that children with ADHD face long-term problems that impact their education, working life and mental health.