

Two Dozen Reasons ADHD is Overdiagnosed¹

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At the Sixth Annual Virginia Beach Conference: Children and Adolescents with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, four different papers (Bachelder, 2 papers; Federici; and Tishler & Katz) focused on the serious problem of overdiagnosis of ADHD, a neurological disorder. In separate conversations, Tishler & Katz and Federici estimated that at least 50% of diagnosed children and adults are misdiagnosed. Judged in light of the writer's clinical experience, the figure of 50% is conservative. In the worst case, misdiagnosis and the wrong treatment or intervention results in active harm to the client. This workshop aims to improve diagnostic practices by discussion of the many reasons the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Syndrome (ADHS) is so often misdiagnosed as ADHD. Special attention is paid to specific ways to reduce the rate of misdiagnosis. The workshop begins and focuses on the four main reasons for misdiagnosis: (a) the failure to do proper differential diagnosis as specified in DSM-IV; (b) the erroneous belief that a positive response to medication confirms the ADHD diagnosis; (c) the principle, "When your only tool is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail;" and (d) patterns of positive and negative consequences which foster overdiagnosis.

¹ In Mills, G.M., Al-Mateen, C.S., & Freeman, E.B. (1997). *Children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders: Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Virginia Beach Conference*. Richmond, VA: Commonwealth Institute for Child and Family Studies, Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University.