

Studies find individuals with ADHD have communicative difficulty

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People with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are less able to consider the perspective of their conversational partner, says research from the University of Waterloo. The findings may lead to new remediation that can improve the way individuals with the disorder interact and communicate with others.

The research appears in two published studies, one in the *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* is focused on children, the other addresses adults and appears in the *Journal of Attention Disorders*.

"In conversation, individuals need to pay attention to the knowledge and perspective of one another," said Professor Elizabeth Nilsen, co-author of the studies. "The ability to see the perspective of the other is essential for successful communication, allowing each speaker to modify their response or reaction accordingly."

In one study, researchers examined children with and without a diagnosis of ADHD, and in the other study undergraduate students with varying levels of ADHD symptoms participated. Participants had to follow instructions on how to move objects in a display case based on direction from another person who had an obstructed view of some of the items. Video cameras captured where the participants were looking as they heard the instructions, showing that the participants with ADHD made more errors interpreting which items they were asked to move based on their partner's limited view of the objects.

"These studies suggest the more severe ADHD symptoms individuals have, the less they use the perspective of the speaker to guide their interpretation of basic statements," said Professor Nilsen.

The ability to consider another's perspective during conversation requires cognitive resources such as retaining information for a temporary period and the ability to suppress a response. These skill areas tend to be weaker for individuals with ADHD, and may be why their communicative behaviour is often more egocentric, or based on their own perspective.

The researchers are interested in how these findings may relate to other social behaviours, potentially providing better understanding of ADHD-related difficulties in more complex social situations.

"Our findings are important because they allow us to think about possible remediation strategies," said Professor Nilsen. "Social skills training programs for children with ADHD often don't show substantial benefits when children return to their social environments, and if we have a better sense of what is causing the difficulties in communication and then target remediation at these particular skills, intervention programs may be able to achieve more beneficial outcomes."

Provided by University of Waterloo

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