



Dr Anthony  
**MANDER**

## ADHD Newsletter 2 The Misrepresentation of ADHD

I think this is a useful opinion piece from Sarah Gill, Fairfax Media Columnist. I have edited it slightly including removing the lead researcher's name. The tragedy is that the condition continues to be unrecognised and untreated in vast numbers of Australian's leading to underperformance, significant impairment and unrealised dreams.

"How would it go over, I wonder, if the mainstream media, egged on by politician's or rogue researchers, came out and declared that clinical depression was a scam? A collusion between drug companies and doctors, aided and abetted by families of the afflicted, to hoodwink the community and generate profits? A fabricated disorder that does not need to be diagnosed, much less medicated? Can you imagine it? Me neither. But this is precisely the narrative that is routinely peddled about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a condition that affects about 5% of Australians, and reiterated in the news media with monotonous regularity. National media coverage of the study by a team of Western Australian researchers, alleging that children are unnecessarily treated with psychostimulant medication because they are immature, is just the latest instalment in what has become a wearisome saga of exaggeration, conspiracy and misinformation. Sadly, those very ingredients seem to be what makes the topic of ADHD so singularly irresistible.

The study, published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, supports the hypothesis that ADHD is "misdiagnosed" and that stimulants are overprescribed. It is an argument that has been running in the State for more than a decade, despite statistics from the WA Department of Health suggesting that stimulants may, in fact, be under-utilised when prescribing rates are viewed alongside prevalence for the disorder. It is suggested that ADHD is a concoction by the "ADHD industry" to pathologise essentially normal behaviour of children who are either lacking in love, discipline, or both.

According to other Western Australian research, parents agonise over whether to medicate their children, and typically experience a period of denial and grief in the wake of a child's diagnosis; an experience exacerbated by the lurid depiction of ADHD in the media, and its periodic portrayal as a myth or a fraud. As for the architects of that portrayal, they are seemingly unconcerned with the anguish caused to families and sufferers. They line up to condemn, and point the finger at the adverse effects of stimulant medication, which are, for the most part, manageable, while being largely silent on the downsides of not treating, which I could tell you about. The consequence of that option, the other side of the coin when it comes to the stimulant debate, is not a child who is bouncing off the walls or out of control, ill-disciplined, misunderstood, or unloved. It is this: A bright child who sits staring at a blank page for hours because he simply cannot

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focus for long enough to finish, or even start, the task at hand. It is a quiet child who despairs before she even puts on her shoes in the morning, which itself takes quite a while, contemplating the day ahead, who has to be reminded a dozen times to finish her breakfast. It is the creative, the dynamic, the curious and the charismatic who struggle to control their impulses, to impose order on the chaos, and who mysteriously fail at every turn. And it's those who have just stopped trying altogether. There is little doubt we need more research into ADHD. We need to better understand the role of dopamine and molecular genetics. We need to unpick why it happens and how to cure it or at least how to make the world more friendly for the ADHD brain. We also need to adopt more flexible instructional methods, more creative teaching and place greater value on divergent thinking.

But every time I read another disavowal of ADHD, here is what I think: Perhaps we are being deceived, and let down, after all. Not by doctors, or the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, the standard classification of mental disorders used by mental health professionals, or by other clinicians who are doing their level best in a diabolically complex medical area. Maybe, instead, we are being betrayed by all those with a story to sell or axe to grind who have not spared a thought for the damage they are inflicting on the people they profess to care about, and who persist in telling us that our struggles are not real, that our experiences, or those of our children, are just a fiction”.

**Food for thought I think you would agree. ADHD is present in my family and I would add one thing to Sarah's description. Only one third of children grow out of the condition by the time they are 18, so there are many undiagnosed adults out there**

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