Reviewer's report

Title: Experienced consequences of being diagnosed with ADHD as an adult - a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Amos Fleischmann

Reviewer's report:

General remarks
The research topic is important. Very few studies ask how adults experience the meaning of an ADHD diagnosis. The authors mention two such studies in the literature review: Young et al. [1] and Fleischmann and Fleischmann [2]. Therefore, another article may explain what previous articles left unclear. The authors, however, do not explain adequately what the current study contributes and what novelties it offers. To understand the contribution of the current study, one must examine previous research for lacunae or vagueness in order to determine in what respect and for what purpose an additional investigation is required. The authors, however, fail to do this properly. Since they do not explain the shortcomings in previous research, they do not explain how their study intends to correct them. In my judgment, the literature review does not properly lead into the Findings and Discussion sections. For example, it does not describe additional studies that ask how adults (for example, 3, 4, 5, and 6) and young people (for example, 7 and 8) cope with ADHD, from which one may appreciate the importance of the diagnosis. This is somewhat bewildering because the authors do mention several of these articles in the Discussion (for example, 3 and 6).

A. Major Compulsory Revision
They need to improve their review of previous research.

The authors also fail to adequately explain the findings in previous studies about the advantages and disadvantages of an ADHD diagnosis. They need to correct this so that their own findings might be more effectively assessed. As stated, the authors explain two previous studies that offer a focused description of the significance of experiencing a ADHD diagnosis in adulthood (1, 2). These studies, the authors claim, offer a structured model. The authors describe their own study as focusing solely on the research subjects’ experience. I presume that by saying this they did not mean to imply that their study is different from those described and is justified for this reason.

B. Major Compulsory Revisions
If this really is their argument, they need to elucidate it more effectively. They should explain why their phenomenological approach yields different results from those elicited by the previous studies. They should also explain why the previous
studies do not completely describe the experience of being diagnosed with ADHD and in what respects their contribution is likely to find expression. In the Discussion, the authors should explain what is novel about their study and how it corrects the lacunae in previous research. They must tell the reader whether their results clash with or complement those of previous studies or whether their study clarifies vague or disputed issues. The rationale offered in the Discussion about the importance of the current article—that it does not rely on theories—is insufficient. To the best of my understanding, previous studies do describe the experiences of those diagnosed even though they are based on theories [1–8].

In sum, the authors need to do a better job of explaining, in both the literature review and the discussion, how their study is important and what new findings it may have to offer.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The authors could have defined the research question/goal more effectively or, at least, explained their intention more cautiously than in the description they offer on Line 80:

"The aim was to explore the subjects’ own experiences and perceptions of being diagnosed with ADHD, without interpreting these in any medical, psychological, or sociological framework" (Major Compulsory Revision).

It seems to me that by expressing the goal in this manner, the authors are trying to distinguish their study from previous research on the experience of being diagnosed with ADHD [17, 18]. To the best of my understanding, the authors of a scientific article, including one that describes qualitative research, need to explain the significance of their findings. Such an explanation must base itself on previous studies and knowledge and use concepts relying on theories, even if those who use these concepts are not aware of it.

It is true that the phenomenological approach, which the authors intend to represent, avoids prior assumptions about the findings. This is because it describes the substance and meaning of a human experience from the point of view of those who experience it. In practice, however, many writers, including self-defined fans of the phenomenological approach, interpret their findings on the basis of previous studies and help their cause by using scientific concepts that have theoretical significance. The authors themselves do this, using theory-intensive concepts such as “learning situation,” “strong motivating factor,” “comorbid conditions,” “self-worth,” “stigma,” “stigmatization,” and “identity.”

C. Major Compulsory Revision

If so, they should circumscribe their argument and state:

The aim was to explore the subjects’ own experiences and perceptions of being diagnosed with ADHD, within the narrowest medical, psychological, or sociological framework possible.

Obviously, if this is their choice, they must explain in the literature review why it is a worthy goal and, in the Discussion, explain more persuasively that they have
indeed attained it and that their approach has yielded valuable new results.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The method is appropriately explained.

D. Major Compulsory Revision
The sampling should be explained more effectively. Why were the twenty-three diagnosed persons chosen? Did the sample include all persons who were diagnosed at the Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic in Mölndal, Sahlgrenska University Hospital during the research period? If not, why were the chosen ones preferred?

3. Are the data sound?
The researchers appear to have done well in describing the contents of the raw material (interviews) that they gathered. They describe advantages (mainly) and drawbacks of the diagnosis.

E. Major Compulsory Revision
Since most of the categories are static, they make processes hard to find.
For this reason, the authors must shed more emphatic light on the processes that the interviewees went through. For example, the interviewees felt that they were not being helped enough because they had prior expectations of receiving help. How did these expectations change? The researchers describe interviewees’ perceptions of ADHD as an advantage. The reader does not know whether these perceptions were elicited by a process that matured after the interviewees adjusted to the idea that they have ADHD or that appeared immediately after the diagnosis. Also, questions relating to identity may need further development.

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?
The article does not contain figures.

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
The data are reported in a manner that is conventional in qualitative research. The authors use sensible categories that create a unified whole, although, as stated, they need to place stronger emphasis on processes. The category headings fit the contents of the descriptions of the findings and the authors’ wording fits the quotations. Similarities and dissimilarities among the interviewees are described.

Discretionary Revisions
In my opinion, the Findings section could be shortened somewhat.

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The discussion is adequately supported by the findings.

7. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
The limitations are adequately stated.

8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   It appears to me that they do.

9. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   The title and the abstract do convey the contents of the article.

10. Is the writing acceptable?
    Yes.

Sources


Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.