

Expanded Summary: Psychological Assessment of Adults with ADHD

Based on the chapter by J. Russell Ramsay in Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (4th Edition, edited by Russell A. Barkley, Guilford Press)

Introduction

The assessment of adult ADHD requires a **comprehensive, multi-method approach** that integrates clinical interviews, self-report measures, and objective cognitive tests. Unlike childhood ADHD, adult presentations involve **adaptive impairments, executive dysfunction, and co-occurring disorders** that require careful differentiation. The complexity of adult ADHD demands a clinician's ability to gather information from multiple sources and consider various factors that contribute to an individual's cognitive and functional difficulties.

Key Components of Adult ADHD Assessment

1. Clinical Interview & Developmental History

A thorough clinical interview remains the cornerstone of an accurate ADHD diagnosis. Since ADHD is a **lifelong condition**, retrospective assessment of childhood symptoms is essential.

- **Retrospective symptom review:** Evaluating childhood ADHD symptoms using structured tools (e.g., Wender Utah Rating Scale) or parental recollections.
- **Current functional impairments:** Examining difficulties in professional, academic, and social domains to assess the impact of ADHD.
- **Collateral information:** Input from family members, partners, or colleagues to verify symptom consistency and severity.
- **Medical history:** Screening for conditions that may contribute to attentional or executive function deficits, such as traumatic brain injury, thyroid dysfunction, or sleep disorders.

2. Diagnostic Criteria & Differential Diagnosis

- Use **DSM-5 criteria** for ADHD, emphasizing symptoms that persist into adulthood and cause impairment in multiple areas.
- Differentiate ADHD from **mood disorders, anxiety, personality disorders, learning disabilities, and substance use disorders**.
- Rule out conditions that mimic ADHD symptoms (e.g., inattention due to major depressive disorder, executive dysfunction due to generalized anxiety disorder, cognitive impairment from chronic substance use).
- Consider situational variability: ADHD symptoms should manifest in multiple settings (e.g., work, home, school), unlike conditions that cause impairment only in specific environments.