Performance and Symptom Validity Assessment in Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Base Rates of Invalidity, Concordance, and Relative Impact on Cognitive Performance

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Abstract

Objective: Differential diagnosis of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common referral questions for neuropsychological evaluation but is complicated by the presence of external incentives. Validity assessment is therefore critical in such evaluations, employing symptom validity tests (SVTs) and performance validity tests (PVTs) to assess the validity of reported symptoms and cognitive test performance, respectively. This study aimed to establish the base rate of symptom and performance invalidity in adults referred for ADHD, compare concordance between performance and symptom validity, and assess the impact of each type of validity on cognitive test performance.

Method: This consecutive case series included data from 392 demographically-diverse adults who underwent outpatient neuropsychological evaluation for ADHD. All patients were administered the Clinical Assessment of Attention Deficit-Adult (CAT-A) and a uniform cognitive test battery, including seven PVTs.

Results: Invalid symptom reporting and PVT performance were found in 22% and 16% of the sample, respectively. Sixty-eight percent had concordantly valid SVTs/PVTs and 6% had invalid SVTs/PVTs, whereas the remaining 26% had either invalid SVTs or PVTs (but not both). Invalid PVT performance resulted in a significant decrease across all cognitive test scores, with generally large effects (η_p^2=.01-.18). Invalid symptom reporting had minimal effects on cognitive test performance (η_p^2= ≤.04).

Conclusions: PVTs and SVTs are dissociable and therefore should not be used interchangeably in the context of adult ADHD evaluations. Rather, symptom and performance validity should continue to be assessed independently as they provide largely non-redundant information.

Keywords: Performance Validity; Symptom Validity; ADHD; Neuropsychological Assessment

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