# Study reveals misinformation about ADHD on TikTok



A new study conducted by a team of clinical psychologists has revealed widespread misinformation about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) on TikTok, highlighting its potential impact on young people's perceptions and understanding of the condition. The findings of the research, published in the journal *Plos One*, indicate that a significant portion of the claims made in the top 100 most viewed ADHD videos on the platform are not in line with clinical guidelines for diagnosing the disorder.

The study assessed nearly half a billion views of these popular videos, finding that fewer than half of the claims regarding symptoms were robust enough to meet the necessary clinical standards. Researchers noted that the more TikTok content related to ADHD a young adult consumes, the more likely they are to overestimate both the prevalence and severity of ADHD symptoms in the general population.

ADHD is characterised by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, leading individuals to struggle with maintaining focus on tasks or exhibiting extreme restlessness. The increasing consumption of ADHD-related content on social media has raised concerns, especially as prescriptions for medications for ADHD in England have surged by 18% year-on-year since the pandemic.

To analyse the content, researchers from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver evaluated the accuracy, nuance, and overall quality of the selected videos. The study involved surveying 2,843 undergraduate psychology students, including 421 who self-diagnosed with ADHD and 198 with a formal diagnosis. Findings revealed that despite the unreliability of the information, those who viewed more ADHD videos were more likely to recommend them to others.

Lead author Vasileia Karasavva emphasised that while TikTok can raise awareness and help reduce stigma around mental health issues, it also has certain drawbacks. "Anecdotes and personal experiences are powerful, but when they lack context, they can lead to misunderstandings about ADHD and mental health in general," Karasavva stated.

The psychologists involved in the study rated the most accurate ADHD videos with an average score of 3.6 out of five. In contrast, young adults rated them lower at 2.8. The least reliable videos scored significantly lower, with psychologists rating them at just 1.1 out of five, while young adults rated them at 2.3. This discrepancy indicates a concerning gap in the ability of young people to identify misinformation.

Researchers also highlighted the role of TikTok's algorithm, which prioritises user engagement to increase platform usage. This can lead to an "echo-chamber effect," where users are exposed to content that reinforces their existing beliefs, further complicating the issue of misinformation. TikTok creators often benefit financially from high view counts, incentivising the dissemination of content that may not be accurate.

Experts have urged caution among young adults when interpreting social media information related to health. Dr Blandine French from the University of Nottingham commented that while social media can provide essential support, it should not act as a diagnostic tool. Professor Philip Asherson from King’s College London noted that the study may not encompass all traits associated with ADHD experiences, suggesting that individuals with ADHD symptoms often seek information to manage their difficulties, and many who self-diagnose may identify with symptomatic traits without meeting the full clinical criteria.

In light of these findings, the study's authors recommend that young adults verify the information they consume on social media by consulting reputable medical sources and healthcare professionals. They also advise seeking professional medical guidance regarding ADHD and similar concerns, particularly considering other potential contributing factors such as stress and anxiety.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Wellness/tiktok-full-adhd-advice-half-misleading-study-finds/story?id=119955930> - This article supports the claim that nearly half of the most popular ADHD videos on TikTok share misleading claims about ADHD, and highlights the study's findings on the unreliability of ADHD content on the platform.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/adhd-symptoms-diagnosis-tiktok-kings-college-b2717907.html> - This article corroborates the study's findings that fewer than half of the claims about ADHD symptoms on TikTok align with clinical guidelines, and discusses the potential impact on young people's perceptions of ADHD.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10311201/> - Although not directly related to ADHD, this article discusses the broader issue of digital evidence and misinformation, which can be applied to understanding how misinformation spreads on platforms like TikTok.
* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10311201/> - Similar to the previous entry, this link explores digital evidence but does not directly support the ADHD claims; however, it highlights the importance of verifying information in digital contexts.
* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519709/> - This resource provides information on ADHD from a reputable medical source, supporting the recommendation to consult such sources for accurate information about ADHD.