

**The Double-Edged Sword:
ADHD in the Lived Experiences of Filipino Women Diagnosed in Adulthood**

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Abstract

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in women often goes undiagnosed until adulthood, particularly due to the different ways it can manifest compared to men. This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Filipino women with ADHD diagnosed in adulthood. Ethical standards of trustworthiness and rigor were followed. The data gathering was accomplished through unstructured one-on-one interviews with seven (7) participants, who were purposively chosen using purposive and snowball sampling. Narratives were transcribed and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. The study constructed four (4) major themes: (1) Accepting the Answers: Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis; (2) Diverse Impacts: Navigating Through Life with ADHD; (3) Holistic Perspective: Intersectionality of being a Woman and Culture in Adult ADHD in the Philippines; and (4) Defying Limitations: Strategies for Thriving with adult ADHD. Participants described challenges related to societal expectations, internalized stigma, and access to care, while also demonstrating resilience and developing unique coping mechanisms. This research highlights the need for culturally sensitive support systems, improved access to diagnosis and treatment, and increased awareness of ADHD in the Filipino context. By amplifying the voices of these women, this study aims to inform the development of culturally relevant interventions and contribute to a more inclusive society that values neurodiversity.

Keywords: attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, adult ADHD in women, qualitative study, neurodevelopmental disorder, Philippines

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Introduction

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting both children and adults (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). While research traditionally focused on childhood and adolescence, recent studies highlight its persistence into adulthood, with a global prevalence estimated at 2.58% for persistent adult ADHD and 6.76% for symptomatic adult ADHD (Babinski et al., 2020; Ginapp et al., 2022; Lewczuk et al., 2024; Li et al., 2019; London & Landes, 2019; Song et al., 2021). Despite this, adult ADHD is often undiagnosed or misdiagnosed due to overlapping symptoms and a historical focus on childhood diagnosis (Kathju, 2021; Lewczuk et al., 2024; Song et al., 2021).

Women with ADHD experience unique challenges, including varied symptom presentation, diminished self-esteem, and difficulties in social, academic, and psychological functioning (Aoki et al., 2020; Attoe & Climie, 2023; Ginapp et al., 2022; Morley & Tyrrell, 2023). Gender norms and societal expectations further complicate their experiences (Young et al., 2020). Inattentive symptoms, more common in females, often lead to underdiagnosis and delayed identification (da Silva et al., 2020; Vildalen et al., 2016).

Research on ADHD in the Philippines is limited, particularly regarding the lived experiences of adult women (Lasco et al., 2020; Lauengco, 2023). While estimates suggest a 3% to 5% prevalence, culturally sensitive research is lacking. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of Filipino women diagnosed with adult ADHD. This research seeks to understand their lived experiences, how they describe them, the essence of these experiences, and derive recommendations from their perspectives. By amplifying their voices, this study hopes to provide insights for improving support and interventions tailored to their needs, contributing to a more inclusive and culturally relevant understanding of ADHD this topic.

Literature Review

Adult ADHD in Women

ADHD presents differently in women than in men, often marked by inattentiveness rather than hyperactivity. This difference leads to underdiagnosis and late diagnosis in women, as their symptoms are less disruptive and more likely to be masked by coping strategies and societal expectations (Aoki et al., 2020; da Silva et al., 2020). Women with ADHD frequently report lower self-esteem and experience greater challenges in social, academic, and psychological functioning. They are also more vulnerable to anxiety, mood disorders, and strained relationships (Ginapp et al., 2022; Morley & Tyrrell, 2023).

Unlike men, many women receive a diagnosis only after seeking help for related mental health concerns or during a child's ADHD assessment. Self-diagnosis is common, often resulting from a lack of early recognition and the need to advocate for their symptoms to be taken seriously by healthcare professionals (Stenner et al., 2019). Cultural and gender norms intensify these challenges, as women are often held to higher behavioral expectations, exacerbating feelings of failure and inadequacy (Young et al., 2020). Furthermore, women with ADHD face increased risks, including impulsive behavior and vulnerability to coercion.

Receiving a diagnosis in adulthood can be life-changing, offering women a framework to understand their experiences and rebuild self-identity. It provides a sense of validation and

the potential for a more hopeful future (Brzezińska et al., 2021). The diagnosis thus becomes not only a medical label but a means of personal transformation and improved well-being.

Adult ADHD in the Philippines

In the Philippines, research and data on ADHD, particularly among adults, remain scarce. Underreporting, misdiagnosis, and limited diagnostic infrastructure contribute to this gap (Lauengco, 2023). While ADHD is estimated to affect 3% to 5% of the population (The Mindanao Journal, 2022), the focus of local studies has largely been on children and adolescents (Lasco et al., 2020). Despite the global rise in adult ADHD research, the lived experiences of Filipino women with ADHD are notably underrepresented in academic literature.

Nevertheless, awareness initiatives have emerged. “National ADHD Week” is observed annually, and in 2022, the first National Conference on Adult ADHD was held through the collaboration of the ADHD Society of the Philippines, NCDA, and other stakeholders (The Mindanao Journal, 2022). These efforts highlight a growing recognition of ADHD in adults and the value of support groups and advocacy communities in bridging knowledge gaps.

Cultural context significantly influences ADHD presentation and diagnosis. Lewczuk et al. (2024) emphasize that symptom expression and severity may vary across cultures, necessitating localized research. Most existing studies are Western-centric, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive exploration within Filipino society. Informal sources like media, vlogs, and community narratives provide insight into adult ADHD in the absence of formal research.

This study seeks to address the gap by exploring the lived experiences of Filipino women diagnosed with adult ADHD, aiming to provide a culturally grounded understanding and to amplify their voices in the broader ADHD discourse.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1
The Double-Edged Sword: Schema of Lived Experiences of Filipino Women Diagnosed in Adulthood



This study presents a conceptual framework symbolized by the *kalis*, a double-edged sword in Filipino culture, representing the lived experiences of women with adult ADHD in the Philippines. The *kalis* captures the duality of their journey—marked by struggle and strength, stigma and self-advocacy, invisibility, and empowerment.

The first theme, “Accepting the Answers: Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis,” reflects the difficult yet affirming path toward self-understanding. Subthemes include unrecognized childhood traits, deepening struggles into adulthood, the pursuit of diagnosis, and the bittersweet “aha!” moment of recognition.

Secondly, “Diverse Impacts: Navigating Through Life with ADHD,” explores the ongoing challenges these women face—executive dysfunction, emotional dysregulation, social difficulties, and healthcare barriers—all intensified by societal expectations and internalized stigma.

The third theme, “Holistic Perspective: Intersectionality of Being a Woman and Adult ADHD in the Philippines,” highlights how gender norms, cultural pressures, and socioeconomic constraints shape their experiences. These findings underscore the need for culturally and gender-sensitive approaches to ADHD care.

Finally, “Defying Limitations: Strategies for Thriving with ADHD,” showcases resilience. These women actively develop coping strategies, find strength in community, and embrace their neurodivergence. They challenge stigma, redefine ADHD on their own terms, and advocate for wider acceptance.

The *kalis* metaphor encapsulates their dual role—knowing when to protect and when to fight. These women are not just surviving with ADHD—they are mastering it, envisioning a society that embraces neurodiversity with care, dignity, and justice.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of adult Filipino women diagnosed with ADHD. As Creswell and Creswell (2022) note, qualitative research emphasizes understanding how individuals make meaning of human experiences. Phenomenology, rooted in psychology and philosophy, focuses on capturing the shared essence of a particular phenomenon through participants’ accounts (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

A reflexive phenomenological approach was employed, treating participants as co-researchers (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Purposive and snowball sampling recruited women aged 19 and above with a formal ADHD diagnosis and the ability to articulate their experiences. Recruitment occurred via online ADHD communities. Seven co-researchers participated in 40-minute unstructured Zoom interviews, beginning with an open-ended question about their ADHD experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2022) reflexive thematic analysis.

Data analysis involved familiarization with the transcripts, systematic coding, theme development, and iterative review to ensure coherence and depth. Themes were descriptively named and supported by direct participant quotes.

Ethical approval was obtained from the institution's review board. Co-researchers gave informed consent, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. Identifying information was removed, and secure data storage and destruction protocols were followed.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: bracketing, member-checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and an audit trail for credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. All ethical procedures adhered to the Psychological Association of the Philippines (2022) guidelines, ensuring rigor and integrity in data collection and analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Themes

Following an in-depth analysis of the interview transcripts, four (4) major themes were constructed from the data. The themes were formulated from the co-researchers narratives, validated by the research adviser, and counter-validated by the co-researchers themselves.

Theme 1: Accepting the Answers: Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis

After a precise analysis and reflection of the narratives, *Accepting the Answers: Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis* was the first theme to be constructed. This theme highlights the co-researchers course of uncovering explanations and making sense of their past experiences when not diagnosed yet.

Undiagnosed Childhood and Unseen Differences. Co-researchers recounted childhood experiences marked by academic challenges, social difficulties, and a persistent sense of being different. These experiences often went unrecognized as potential signs of ADHD, leading to feelings of inadequacy and confusion that extended into adulthood.

Deshna shared:

...I remember I always had a hard time as a kid with focusing on things I didn't see, didn't seem interesting enough for me. I would never focus. I could never focus on that. [] Unless it's like my hyperfocus at the time. If it's my fixation, that's the only thing I can focus on for a long time. I was very hyperactive. It was a weird time, my childhood.

The Intensifying Struggles: Searching for Answers. Co-researchers transitioned into adulthood and professional life, their previously unrecognized or under-acknowledged ADHD symptoms intensified, creating significant challenges in their careers and daily lives.

Pirena questioned her struggles with tasks that seemed effortless for others:

I'm really pushing the extra effort to catch up and manage myself. So very masking, very tiring for the brain. I wanted to find out what was really going on. For most of my life, I've been struggling with depression, anxiety, mood dysregulation. But I knew because it wasn't just that—like why couldn't I just send an email quickly when that's all I needed to do? Why couldn't I wake up properly? Why did I have trouble with simple tasks?

Seeking Referral and the Path to Diagnosis. This subtheme focused on the co-researchers way of finding answers and validation for their lifelong differences and struggles. It explores their experiences navigating the healthcare system in the Philippines, seeking out qualified professionals, and undergoing the assessment process.

Lira elaborated:

First, I was diagnosed with depression. They gave me antidepressants. I said, ‘Okay, but it doesn’t feel quite right.’ So, we tried different medications and tests. Then, eventually, she said, ‘Okay, you probably have bipolar II.’ And then, over time, the anxiety started to increase until finally, we settled on the diagnosis of ADHD. It was because of the mood swings, attention deficiency, no hyperactivity but a lot of forgetfulness, a lot of fidgeting, and being unable to focus on one task. So, that’s how we ended up with this diagnosis. Now, I’m able to study and my mood swings are gone because apparently, it’s a side effect of ADHD, the mood regulation.

Post-Diagnosis: The “Aha!” Moment. Receiving the ADHD diagnosis during adulthood was a pivotal moment for the co-researchers. The “aha!” moment of diagnosis was not just about understanding the past; it was also about embracing the present and looking toward the future with a renewed sense of self-awareness and possibility. Mira shared how she reflected on her past experiences:

I’ve had so many realizations, especially about my childhood. It’s like, way back when I was very young, I would think to myself, ‘Oh, that’s why I’m like this.’ That’s what I usually say when I reflect on the past, especially my childhood and how it relates to who I am today. It all makes sense now. I have a clearer understanding of myself, and I’m no longer wondering why I acted a certain way. Why did I dislike that person? Why did I feel hurt so much? Questions like that. So, I’m more enlightened and my mind is more open to my quirks.

The diagnosis was not only a source of validation but also the start of developing coping mechanisms. Realizing that her struggles were not solely her fault but rooted in a diagnosable condition, Cassiopeia shared:

...So when I was diagnosed with ADHD, it was like a super huge relief Because, in a way, oh, it’s like I wasn’t the only problem. In other words, it rooted in something that I could, that I could find a way to improve. [] The help from my diagnosis was very significant because I became very sure of what coping mechanisms I needed and what problem-solving would work for me...

Theme 2: Diverse Impacts: Navigating Through Life With ADHD

This second theme explores the co-researchers facing challenges despite having and knowing their diagnosis.

Executive Function Challenges. Co-researchers expressed how hard it is still to manage their symptoms and get by even after their diagnosis. Amihan described her attention span as “*shorter than the attention span of a goldfish*” Cassiopeia expressed that:

It's like there are so many voices telling you what to do, and you don't know which one to listen to first. It's like you want to do so many things at once, but you're paralyzed because you don't know where to start.

Often co-researchers find it challenging to complete one task at a time, describing it as a state of "task paralysis". Even with a conscious awareness of their ADHD-related challenges, co-researchers still struggle for balance and management in their lives.

Emotional and Social Impact. Co-researcher described experiencing overwhelming emotions that were difficult to control leading to misunderstandings and conflict in their relationships. Danaya stated:

Because with ADHD, our emotions are often intensified. So it's hard to explain where you're coming from to other people. It's like you don't know why your emotions are so intense... why you reacted the way you did... it's just something that happens. It's like... you'd rather not explain it at all. Because most likely, other people won't understand. And then they might take it and use it against you.

It is also common among co-researchers to have a heightened sensitivity to perceived rejection, contributing to a significant issue of feeling hurt and anxious in social interactions leading to self-doubt and anxiety. Deshna expressed:

When it comes to relationships, like friendships or romantic relationships, I find it difficult to navigate them because I've heard people say, not in a nice way, but they've said, 'You're too much. You're overwhelming me.' So now, I've gotten to the point where I always ask or apologize every few minutes. I'm constantly saying, 'Sorry, am I being too much?'

Internal Barriers. Despite the clarity and validation that can accompany an ADHD diagnosis, participants continued to grapple with internal struggles that significantly impacted their well-being. Negative self-perceptions were evident in their narratives. Lira said:

...The hyperactivity, it's a very draining experience that it's a hindrance. I feel like if I didn't have ADHD, I would have achieved a lot more than I have now...

External Barriers. This subtheme explores the significant external barriers hindering access to adequate adult ADHD care and support. The recurring themes among co-researchers are their challenges in seeking limited access to specialized care and resources, financial constraints, and a complex healthcare system.

Mira pointed out the connotation that adult ADHD diagnosis is "*rich person's disease*". She shared that:

...You have to spend more so you can get diagnosed or you can get the care that you need. For someone who's been diagnosed, I guess the efforts of those who should be doing something; lack, and we don't get what we deserve in terms of accessibility of medicine or facility...

Theme 3: Holistic Perspective: Intersectionality of Being a Woman and Culture in Adult ADHD in the Philippines

Another theme comes from the understanding of ADHD in the context of Filipino culture, societal expectations, and economic realities.

Adult ADHD and Cultural Norms and Expectations. This subtheme explores the complexities of navigating a society that put heavy emphasis on Filipinos family values. Co-researchers shared their experiences on how Filipino families view mental health and how it affected their emotional and social perspectives. Mira shared what her family had to say when she opened up about her mental health:

Philippine families would easily say things like, ‘Oh, you just need to pray more,’ or ‘You’re just making it up.’

She further elaborated that:

...they won’t consider it as real if they don’t see the physical manifestations or as morbid as it would sound if you’ve taken your life. That’s the time that they would come out of that hallucination where they take off their most tinted glasses and say it was really a sickness...

Adult ADHD Diagnosis as Privilege in the Philippines. This subtheme confronts critical issues that create barriers among individuals seeking mental healthcare attention. Co-researchers explain how different mental health is perceived in the Philippines compared to Western countries and how an individual should have privilege before receiving proper treatment.

Pirene talked about finding an unbiased specialist as she encountered another psychiatrist in the Philippines who would rather not diagnose her because she was able to adjust and merely cope with her situation. She expressed frustration, adding:

...The mindset is very old-fashioned. At the same time, many doctors believe that ADHD is just a childhood disorder that you outgrow, which isn’t true. They would rather avoid diagnosing you, because they feel like you might not really have it. They think you can just adjust to it, you know? They don’t want to label you. And if you’re not diagnosed, you can’t access the medication you need...

Adult ADHD in Women. This subtheme explores the intersection of gender and neurodiversity, particularly the challenges faced by Filipino women with ADHD. It was common among co-researchers to experience the stereotypical misconception that ADHD is only for hyperactive young boys; this causes them to have late diagnoses and further face challenges of societal expectations for women. Cassiopea elaborates:

...Especially when it comes to being a woman, people often assume, ‘Oh, you’re just being too emotional,’ or ‘Of course you struggle with that because you’re a woman.’ They don’t always believe you. Because women are taught to be timid and quiet, to be prim and proper. So, of course, women with ADHD, like myself, are going to act accordingly...

Envisioning Improved Support for Adult ADHD and Mental Health. This subtheme emphasizes co-researchers' suggestions and recommendations about expanding access to affordable and specialized care, ensuring that individuals can obtain proper diagnosis, medications, and therapy without financial burden. Deshna mentioned:

...I really wish that we had more awareness, that we had more accommodations for our students and also for adults. Like, I wish we had more accessible healthcare, like for medication. I am an advocate for spaces for wellness. Not just retreat centers and psych wards. A legitimate space where people can be safe.

Furthermore, Lira accounted that:

...I actually did a study on disability laws, I compared disability laws in the Philippines and the United States and they have this Americans with Disabilities Act the ADA and one of the things that they mandated is accommodations for students with ADHD and I feel like that's something we could replicate so for example over there if you have ADHD they give you extra time to work on your test like time and a half and some people might think it's unfair but as someone with ADHD especially the attention deficit type it's really hard for me to focus on exams because I get overwhelmed I need time to organize my thoughts and extra 30 minutes would really help me so maybe something like that. [] I just wish it was more accessible for everyone else...

Theme 4: Defying Limitations: Strategies for Thriving With ADHD

This theme revolves around the co-researchers personal journey toward embracing life with ADHD, focusing on the creation of personalized coping strategies and forming a community that offers support and understanding.

Developing Personalized Strategies. This subtheme explores the importance of identifying individualized solutions pertaining to co-researchers customize coping mechanisms, accommodations, and management tools to align with their unique needs. Mira shared that she rewards herself by having short breaks compared to before when she usually had no other way of handling her tasks or her time:

...after post-diagnosis and still in therapy, I have managed to adopt some ways. I set up alarms, and I trust my visual timer. So, like, when I see it's ticking [] I set myself 50 minutes to do this thing and then rest that way; it also helps me train my mind [] I do allow, like, 10 minutes break time. So, it would allow me to recharge...

Same with Amihan, who mentioned:

...I actually, I got to doing lists. Which is something I don't usually do. So, I have to list down everything I have to do to for the day. [] I do this little trick in my head that I do the easiest thing first. Also, Calendars are super helpful because I am not good with remembering dates, so I need like a constant reminder...

Pirena supported this by:

...So, super helpful for me if I maximize my Google Calendar a lot. Because I am very forgetful. So, it's either I write everything on a notebook or I use my calendar, like, even for menial tasks. Like, call this person, you're gonna meet this person. You have to go somewhere. You have to get ready to leave your house. Like, everything on Google Calendar. Because, I might forget and stuff like that...

Finding Community and Support. Co-researchers emphasize the role of discovering a sense of understanding and validation from various supports such as peers, family, friends, therapists, and online communities. Mira shared that it is quite easy being around her friends who are also diagnosed with ADHD because they easily understand each other, and she does not need to explain herself all the time:

...I'm actually happy that within my circle of friends [] it's kind of comforting especially if you know this person. Like, oh, we're on the same tribe...

Similar to Deshna, who mentioned:

...I only met her a few weeks ago and she was so nice and understanding. And I was like, I don't have to try so hard. So, it was really good. It's true that you need more ND people in your life if you're ND...

Amihan further supported this:

...we all have this quality [] like most neurodivergent people usually gravitate towards other neurodivergent people...

Redefining ADHD. This subtheme pertains to co-researchers moving beyond labels and reflecting on what terms personally resonate with their day-to-day experiences. Mira explained:

...ADHD can be your superpower if you have fully embraced or managed your symptoms [] on the other hand, ADHD can be a kryptonite if you fail to somehow overcome or if you just do nothing you just let it become a weakness and you don't improve yourself with knowing that you have ADHD...

While Danaya shared that:

...ADHD for me is a double-edged sword. Because you can succeed because of it. Maybe the symptoms help, but it's more dangerous because sometimes the qualities of being ADHD or the symptoms, those are what pull you down. So, that's it. Others say it's a superpower, but for me it's more of a double-edged sword because what I experienced is different...

Embracing Neurodivergence. This subtheme tackles the process of accepting ADHD as part of one's identity. Co-researchers recognize and appreciate the strengths and challenges of the condition. Danaya shared that:

...I've become more understanding of myself. It's like I'm getting to know myself again after 25 years..."

While Deshna mentioned that:

...If you feel it, you feel it. That's it for me. If you feel it, you don't have to explain yourself. You don't have to question yourself. You can just ride the wave. You're feeling it. And also advocate for it. You talk to people about it...

Pirena expressed how she wants to open up opportunities for people like her and help them become more self-capable in the future. She further elaborates:

...that's why I make the efforts of building communities or joining talks or having open discussions about different neurotypes, neurodiversity. [] I found out that I shouldn't feel so bad about having a different neurotype because there are ways and tools and methods that can help you manage and adjust to this world that's not really tailored for us. [] It's either you go the route of masking and trying to be as neurotypical as you can, or you go against that and, you know, be proud of the type of person you are [] Like, I just have a different brain. Like, it doesn't mean I'm dumber than you...

Reflective Resonance

Theme 1: Accepting the Answers—Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis

This theme captures the co-researchers' journeys toward understanding and embracing their ADHD diagnoses in adulthood. Many recalled childhood difficulties—academic, behavioral, and social—that were dismissed or mislabeled, often interpreted as laziness or defiance rather than symptoms of ADHD (Lynn, 2019; Song et al., 2021). These early experiences led to self-doubt and low self-esteem (Stenner et al., 2019). In adulthood, intensified symptoms affected careers and relationships, pushing many to mask their struggles in order to meet expectations. Though masking offered short-term relief, it often led to burnout and emotional exhaustion (Attoe & Climie, 2023; Oscarsson et al., 2022).

The path to diagnosis involved self-reflection, research, and persistence, especially in navigating misdiagnoses and limited awareness among professionals (Aoki et al., 2020). Receiving a formal diagnosis brought a transformative “aha!” moment—providing validation, relief, and a new lens through which to view past struggles (Ginapp et al., 2022). This newfound clarity fostered self-compassion and the motivation to adopt tailored coping strategies, though many also expressed grief over missed opportunities and the late timing of their diagnosis (Aoki et al., 2020).

Theme 2: Diverse Impacts—Navigating Life With ADHD

A diagnosis was not the end, but the beginning of a complex journey of symptom management. Co-researchers struggled with executive dysfunction, emotional regulation, and social challenges—consistent with adult ADHD literature (Guo et al., 2021; Schiavone et al., 2019). Difficulties in time management, forgetfulness, and disorganization disrupted daily routines and home life (Silverstein et al., 2020).

Emotional dysregulation, including rejection sensitivity, deeply affected their relationships and self-worth. Internalized stigma and masking contributed to feelings of inadequacy

(Morley & Tyrrell, 2023). The burden of trying to appear “normal” in a neurotypical world left many feeling isolated and misunderstood.

Barriers in accessing diagnosis and care—especially high costs, misdiagnoses, and a lack of ADHD-specialized services—added further difficulty, particularly within the Philippine context (Adler et al., 2019; Weiss & Stein, 2022). These challenges emphasized the need for accessible, gender-informed support systems that address the multifaceted impact of ADHD on women’s lives (Morgan, 2024).

Theme 3: Holistic Perspective—Intersectionality of Being a Woman and Filipino With ADHD

This theme explores how Filipino cultural norms and gender roles uniquely shape ADHD experiences. Cultural values like *hiya* (shame), respect for authority, and a strong work ethic often discourage mental health discussions, framing ADHD symptoms as moral or spiritual failings (Slobodin & Crunelle, 2019). Co-researchers shared how family responses rooted in stigma delayed their diagnosis and support.

Economic limitations, lack of insurance, and misconceptions—such as the belief that ADHD only affects children—further restricted access to care (Schoeman & Voges, 2022). Gender expectations added another layer: ADHD symptoms in women were often misinterpreted as hormonal or emotional issues (Hinshaw et al., 2022). Many co-researchers masked their symptoms to meet societal expectations of being composed and nurturing, contributing to misdiagnosis and emotional distress (Vildalen et al., 2016).

These insights underscore the need for culturally and gender-sensitive mental health care, especially for marginalized groups in non-Western contexts (Bergey et al., 2022; Chronis-Tuscano, 2022).

Theme 4: Defying Limitations—Strategies for Thriving With ADHD

Despite systemic and personal challenges, co-researchers developed personalized strategies for managing ADHD. Tools like planners, alarms, and visual aids helped with organization, while practices such as mindfulness, task prioritization, and self-compassion supported emotional regulation and reduced shame (Beaton et al., 2022; Lewczuk et al., 2024).

Community and relational support played a key role. Online groups, therapy, and understanding partners helped reduce isolation and enhance resilience (Canu & Carlson, 2007; DuPaul et al., 2020). These women reframed ADHD as both a challenge and a strength—what some described as both “kryptonite” and “superpower” (Sedgwick et al., 2019).

Ultimately, co-researchers shifted from stigma to self-acceptance, actively redefining ADHD through self-advocacy and the celebration of neurodiversity (Mueller et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The study contributed to the deep understanding of the lived experiences of adult women with ADHD diagnosed in adulthood in the Philippines. Their experiences tell a powerful story of discovery, resilience, and empowerment. Accepting their condition post-diagnosis

allows for a new understanding and reframing of past experiences, often colored by years of unnoticed or misinterpreted symptoms. Living with ADHD involves a struggle with executive function, emotional and social challenges, as well as internal and external barriers. Yet, it also highlights the adaptive capacities and strength of these women.

Cultural factors significantly shape the experiences of Filipino women with ADHD, with societal norms and stigma creating additional layers of complexity in accessing care and finding acceptance. This highlights the need for culturally informed mental health services and broader societal education.

Women with ADHD utilize innovative strategies to thrive amid neurodiverse challenges. Creating supportive communities and redefining ADHD as both a unique strength and a vulnerability demonstrate the dynamic process of embracing neurodiversity. Through their tenacity and advocacy, these women are changing the conversation from limitation to celebration, shaping a future where neurodiversity is not just accepted but valued for the richness it brings to the human experience.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author used OpenAI's ChatGPT to assist in paraphrasing sections of this manuscript and aligning them with publication guidelines. All outputs were reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy and originality.

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