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## **MA Program “Special Education”**

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### **Abstract**

The phenomenon currently known as ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) has a history spanning. Historically, the understanding and classification of ADHD have been closely tied to the medical model, which focuses on pathologizing behavior. This model attributes ADHD symptoms to neurobiological dysfunctions or genetic anomalies, proposing medical diagnosis and pharmacological intervention as primary forms of treatment. However, recent perspectives from social psychology, critical psychopathology, and neurodiversity approaches challenge the pathological view of ADHD. These perspectives suggest that ADHD is not necessarily a deviation from the "normal" mind but an expression of a different form of cognitive and behavioral functioning. Moreover, they emphasize the importance of the social environment in shaping symptoms and advocate for inclusion, educational differentiation, empowerment of individuals, and reduction of stigma. Labeling Theory is a significant approach in sociology and psychology, focusing on how social groups and institutions assign labels to individuals or behaviors and how these labels affect social inclusion or marginalization. Labeling individuals with ADHD or learning difficulties is closely associated with stigma, as assigning a diagnosis can lead to negative social perceptions and prejudices. When a label becomes integrated into an individual's identity, there is an increased risk of being treated with lowered expectations, social isolation, or experiencing discrimination from their broader environment, such as school, work, or family. This stigma is reinforced when the label is accompanied by stereotypical perceptions, leading not only to limited

opportunities but also to the internalization of stigma, i.e., feelings of shame or inferiority. This study examines the experiences of eight adults with ADHD, specifically how the assignment of the institutional label is interpreted in their adult lives. The research questions primarily concern experiences of institutional labeling in the domains of school, social, and professional life, as well as its influence on self-image. Based on the nature and purpose of the research, a qualitative method was deemed most appropriate, utilizing semi-structured interviews. For sample selection, the snowball sampling method was used, involving eight individuals diagnosed with ADHD who had already reached adulthood at the time of the study. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis via coding. The findings of this study indicate that the ADHD label is perceived as a "grey phenomenon," as its perception is influenced by social, cultural, and individual factors. Neutral attitudes pertain to individuals for whom the label simply "exists" without binding them. For others, the label serves a comforting function, as it justifies their neurodiversity. This enhances the sense of understanding and familiarity among individuals with ADHD. However, the label can also reinforce stigma, leading to social isolation or discrimination. Internalized stigma and feelings of inferiority are common consequences. The social dimension of the diagnosis is significant, as some feel stigmatized and are hesitant about disclosing their ADHD label, while others gain a sense of belonging to a community with similar experiences. In the educational sector, teachers often hold negative perceptions of the abilities of students with ADHD, which can lower their expectations and negatively affect student performance. Similarly, in the professional sector, the ADHD label can lead to discrimination and limited career advancement opportunities, as employers may question the ability of individuals with ADHD to meet job demands. Participants in the study expressed fear that disclosing their diagnosis would lead to questioning their abilities and limited opportunities in the professional domain.

**Keywords:** ADHD, Adults with ADHD, Labeling, Stigma, Neurodiversity, Diagnosis