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New Zealand Primary School Teachers' Knowledge and Perceptions of Attention-
Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common, unremitting, and controversial childhood disorders, which affects between 1% and 7% of New Zealand children. It leads to impairments in the individual's key life activities, including social relations, academic, family, and vocational functioning, self sufficiency, as well as adherence to social regulations, norms, and laws.

Teachers play a central role in the referral, diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring of students with ADHD. Research examining teachers' knowledge of ADHD however, has led to some uncertainty as to whether teachers have the level of knowledge about the disorder needed to support ADHD learners. The present study had two main objectives. It examined the knowledge and perceptions of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder held by primary school teachers in New Zealand and sought to determine whether teacher characteristics, such as demographic variables and experiences of students with ADHD, are associated with teachers' knowledge of ADHD. Eighty-four primary school teachers completed a postal survey containing demographic information and the Knowledge Of Attention Deficit Disorders Scale (KADDS). Results indicated that teachers answered an average of 35% of questions correctly on the KADDS. Teachers' scored significantly higher on the Symptoms/Diagnosis subscale compared to the Associated Features and Treatment subscales. All teachers in the present study reported that they believed ADHD impacts on the educational experiences of students diagnosed with the disorder. Most teachers had received no pre-service or in-service training about ADHD, and 90% of teachers wanted more training on ADHD. The majority of teacher characteristics examined were unrelated or only weakly related to teachers' knowledge of ADHD. However, the number of students with ADHD teachers' had

taught, participation in an individual behaviour plan (IBP), and participation in an individual education plan (IEP), were significantly and moderately related to higher KADDS total and Symptoms/Diagnosis scores. The results of this study suggest that New Zealand primary school teachers do not in fact have the level of knowledge about the disorder required to effectively participate in the referral, diagnosis, treatment, or monitoring of students with ADHD. Implications for educational psychology practice and directions for future research are discussed. Strengths and limitations of the study are also considered.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	xi
CHAPTER 1-INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Students with ADHD	2
Knowledge and Perceptions of ADHD	5
Teachers' Knowledge about ADHD	7
Statement of the Problem	11
Purpose of the Study	13
Significance of the Study	13
Definition of Terms	14
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	14
Teacher Knowledge	15
Perceptions and Misperceptions	15
Primary School Teachers	15
Full Primary, Contributing, and Intermediate Schools	15
Research Questions	16
CHAPTER 2-LITERATURE REVIEW	18
Diagnosis of ADHD	18
Current Definition	18
Subtypes	20
Differential Diagnosis	21
Prevalence	21
Comorbidity	23

Aetiology	25
Development, Course, and Prognosis of ADHD	26
Differences between Subtypes	27
Associated Characteristics and Outcomes	28
Families of Children with ADHD	29
Assessment	30
Treatment	31
Biological Approaches	32
Stimulant Therapy	33
Limitations of Stimulant Therapy	34
Anti-depressants	36
Psychological Approaches	36
Limitations of Psychological Approaches	39
Multimodal Approach	40
ADHD in Schools	40
The Roles of Teachers	44
Referral	44
Diagnosis	46
Treatment	46
Informing Parents	47
Teachers' Knowledge of ADHD	47
Symptoms/Diagnosis	50
Associated Features of ADHD	52
Treatment	54
Misperceptions and Gaps in Knowledge about Treatment	56
Teacher Characteristics that are Related to their Knowledge of ADHD	58
Demographic Variables	58
The Influence of Teaching Experience	59

Teacher Pre-Service and In-Service Training	60
Self-directed Study	62
Prior Exposure to and Experience of Students with ADHD ...	63
Teacher Self-efficacy	64
Summary	65
Rationale	66
CHAPTER 3-METHOD	67
Selection of Participants	67
Instrumentation	69
The Knowledge Of Attention Deficit Disorders Scale	70
Scale Development	70
Scoring Procedure	71
Reliability	71
Validity	72
Procedure	72
Ethical Considerations	73
Data Analysis	74
Data Screening	75
CHAPTER 4-RESULTS	77
Psychometric Properties of the KADDS	77
Scale and Subscale Distributions	77
Reliability	78
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample	79
Teachers' Experiences with ADHD	81
Teachers' Perceptions of ADHD	83
Teachers' Education and Training about ADHD	84
KADDS Assessment of ADHD Knowledge	86
Performance per KADDS Item	86

Teachers' Knowledge of the Associated Features, Symptoms/Diagnosis, and Treatment of ADHD	93
Differences in Amount of Teachers' Knowledge about the Associated Features, Symptoms/Diagnosis, and Treatment of ADHD	94
Common Knowledge about ADHD	94
Commonly Held Misperceptions about ADHD	97
Gaps in Teachers' Knowledge about ADHD	99
Differences in Teachers' Knowledge of ADHD based on their Demographic Group	103
Differences in Teachers' Knowledge of ADHD based on their Experiences and Perceptions of ADHD	105
Variation in Teachers' Knowledge of ADHD According to the Educational Setting they Felt was most Appropriate for Students with ADHD	109
Summary	111
CHAPTER 5-DISCUSSION	113
Characteristics of the Sample	113
Teachers' Knowledge and Misperceptions of ADHD	116
Symptoms/Diagnosis of ADHD	118
Symptoms	118
Diagnosis	119
Associated Features of ADHD	120
Situational Variations of ADHD Symptoms	121
Epidemiology and Aetiology of ADHD	122
Treatment of ADHD	124
Knowledge of Treatment of ADHD	124
Gaps in Knowledge of Treatment of ADHD	126
Misperceptions about Treatment of ADHD	127
Teacher Characteristics that are Related to their Knowledge of ADHD	128
Teaching Experience	129

Teacher Training and Professional Development	130
Prior Exposure to and Experience of Students with ADHD ...	131
Self-directed Study	133
Self-efficacy	134
Implications	135
Practical Recommendations	141
Strengths	144
Limitations	147
Future Directions for Research	148
REFERENCES	151
APPENDICES	
A. First Section of the Questionnaire	185
B. Modified Version of the Knowledge Of Attention Deficit Disorders Scale	188
C. KADDS Recode Statements and Composition of Subscales.....	191
D. Ethical Approval for the Study	192
E. Initial Letter to Principal	193
F. Principal's Consent Form	194
G. Participant Information Sheet	195
H. Correct Responses to Items on the KADDS.....	199

LIST OF TABLES

	PAGE
Table 1. Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Normality for Teachers' Scores on KADDS Scales	78
Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha and Descriptive Statistics for the Knowledge Of Attention Deficit Disorders Scale (KADDS)	79
Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample	80
Table 4. Teachers' Education and Training about ADHD	85
Table 5. Mean Correct, <i>Don't Know</i> and Incorrect Responses per KADDS Item for Full and Subscales	86
Table 6. Frequency Distribution of Correct, <i>Don't Know</i> and Incorrect Responses for Items Assigned to the Associated Features Subscale	88
Table 7. Frequency Distribution of Correct, <i>Don't Know</i> and Incorrect Responses for Items Assigned to the Symptoms/Diagnosis Subscale	90
Table 8. Frequency Distribution of Correct, <i>Don't Know</i> and Incorrect Responses for Items Assigned to the Treatment Subscale	92
Table 9. Most Common Correct Responses on the KADDS	96
Table 10. Teacher Incorrect Scores (Errors) on the KADDS Subscales	98
Table 11. Differences Among Teachers' Incorrect Scores on the Three subscales of the KADDS	98
Table 12. Most Common Incorrect Responses on the KADDS	99
Table 13. Teachers' <i>Don't Know</i> Scores on the KADDS Subscales	101
Table 14. Most Common <i>Don't Know</i> Responses on the KADDS	102
Table 15. Correlations for Teachers Demographic Characteristics	103
Table 16. Gender Differences in Teachers' Knowledge of ADHD	104
Table 17. Differences in Teachers' Knowledge as a Result of the Type of School in which they Taught	104
Table 18. Relationships between Teachers' Knowledge of ADHD, as Measured by the KADDS Scales and their Experiences and Perceptions of ADHD	108
Table 19. Teachers' Knowledge of ADHD According to the Educational Setting they Felt was Most Appropriate for Students With ADHD	110

LIST OF FIGURES

	PAGE
Figure 1. Age of respondents	81
Figure 2. Participants' responses to the question "If you have had students with ADHD in your classroom, have you ever participated in developing an individual behaviour plan (IBP)?"	82
Figure 3. Participants' responses to the question "If you have had students with ADHD in your classroom, have you ever participated in developing an individual education plan (IEP)?"	83
Figure 4. Stacked bar graph showing percentages of correct, <i>don't know</i> and incorrect responses to the 15 Associated Features subscale questions	89
Figure 5. Stacked bar graph showing percentages of correct, <i>don't know</i> and incorrect responses to the nine Symptoms/Diagnosis subscale questions	91
Figure 6. Stacked bar graph showing percentages of correct, <i>don't know</i> and incorrect responses to the 12 Treatment subscale questions	93

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