Parents of children with ADHD report more parenting stress than parents of comparison children (McCleary, 2002). While parents of adolescents with ADHD rate their relationships with their adolescent as being more conflictual than do parents of comparison adolescents (Robin, 1990), it is unclear how much stress parents of adolescents with ADHD experience. Adolescents with ADHD, however, are more likely than other adolescents to exhibit behaviours that are likely to elicit parenting stress including oppositional and risk taking behaviours (Barley, 2004). While these adolescent behaviours may be associated with increased parenting stress, this may not always be the case. Some parents may regard certain adolescent behaviours, such as difficulty sustaining attention and disorganization, as stressful while other parents may not.

Thus, when examining the factors that contribute to parenting stress, it is necessary to examine parental attributions. Attributions are the explanations of why a behaviour or event has occurred (Weiner, 1985). Studies (e.g., Heatherington, McDonald, Toljek, & Funk, 2007) showed that increased mother-adolescent conflict is associated with global (behaviours that have a negative impact across multiple contexts) attributions about the other’s behaviour.

This study will investigate the association between parenting stress and parental attributions for parent-adolescent conflict in youth with and without ADHD. It is expected that parents of adolescents with ADHD will make more negative (global) attributions about the causes of conflict with their youth, and that these parental attributions about conflict will predict higher levels of parenting stress.

Do number of conflicts and global attributions predict parenting stress in the adolescent-parent relationship domain?

Mothers: ADHD status was not a significant predictor ($R^2 = .36$, $F(1, 26) = 3.95$, $p = .06$) of adolescent-parent relationship stress. When number of conflicts ($\beta = .29$, $p = .250$) and global attributions ($\beta = .14$, $p = .440$) were added into the model, mother was a significant predictor of maternal stress in the adolescent domain ($R^2$ change $= .096$, $F(2, 24) = 2.33$, $p = .121$).

Fathers: ADHD status was not a significant predictor ($R^2 = .12$, $F(2, 19) = 1.27$, $p = .314$) of adolescent-parent relationship stress. When number of conflicts ($\beta = .09$, $p = .783$) and global attributions ($\beta = .30$, $p = .273$) were added into the model, neither was a significant predictor of maternal stress in the adolescent domain ($R^2$ change $= .120$, $F(2, 19) = .122$, $p = .314$).

Parents of youth with ADHD do not differ from parents of comparison adolescents in their attributions for conflict. However, parents of youth with ADHD experience increased number of conflicts with their adolescents and have more parenting stress than parents of adolescents without ADHD. This may, to some degree, be due to the increased caretaking demands that these adolescents impose on their parents. Difficulties such as noncompliance, oppositionality, and difficulty with following through on parental instructions (Barley, 1970) may instigate parent-adolescent conflict. Furthermore, parents of these youth must often resolve and become involved with school, peer, and sibling difficulties which further increase the demands of parenting (Barley et al., 1991).

• Mothers of adolescents with ADHD experience more stress in the adolescent-parent relationship domain (ADPR) whereas fathers do not. On the one hand, previous research has shown that fathers of children with ADHD are more avoidant and less involved in childhood than mothers (Liffted et al., 2008). This may mean that mothers have more interactions with their child, which increases the likelihood that discussions might turn into conflicts. On the other hand, perhaps, mothers’ appraisal of their parent-adolescent relationship is different from fathers’ because there is something intrinsically different between mothers and fathers. It is possible that mothers view themselves as the primary caregiver which may give rise to a desire for more closeness, improved communication and increased affection, in comparison to fathers. Hence, in light of a similar parent-youth relationship, mothers may experience more stress related to the quality of this relationship than fathers.

When dealing with high levels of stress, parents of youth with ADHD tend to use maladaptive parenting strategies (McKee et al., 2018). Furthermore, parents with externalizing disorders hold more rigid beliefs about parental unsuname (Boehling & Robin, 1986), that their parents engage in more power-authoritative discipline (Gordos et al., 2007), and have more negative perceptions of the parent-child relationship (Gordos et al., 2003). These difficulties in relating to one another begin in childhood and continue into adolescence. Thus, stress in the ADPR may reflect parental desire for closeness after years of strained parent-adolescent interactions and for this reason, stress in the ADPR may not be predicted by current levels of conflict, global attributions and ADHD status as is the culmination of years of dysfunctional interactions.