

ADHD Drugs Being Overused To Treat Hyperactivity



According to the results of a new survey, an alarming number of preschool children are being prescribed drugs to treat hyperactivity. This practice is against medical guidelines which recommend that these drugs should not be used in children under the age of six.

The survey was conducted with 136 educational psychologists from 70 local authorities across the UK. The goal of the survey was to gather their views on the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of ADHD.

Over a fifth of educational psychologists revealed that they know of preschool children who are being given medication such as Ritalin despite the fact that the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (Nice) recommends that psychological interventions should be tried first. The Nice guidelines clearly state, "Parent-training/ education programmes are the first-line treatment for parents or carers of preschool children. Drug treatment is not recommended for preschool children with ADHD."

Ritalin (methylphenidate) is a central nervous stimulant that is commonly used to treat attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The survey demonstrates that medication was seen as the main solution in the treatment of ADHD and was considered to be the predominant form of treatment despite Nice guidelines. The findings also show that there was an "intolerance of difference" toward children who do not conform to the norm.

The survey report highlights the need to examine policies regarding the effective prevention and intervention in preschool children going through behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. According to Vivian Hill, director of professional educational psychology training at the IoE, who conducted the research with Horatio Turner of UCL, the number of young children being put on medication is alarming and a primary reason why this is so is because the children's mental health service is extremely underfunded. For healthcare providers to work with a child or young person and their family is quite costly, but if this practice was promoted, it would be safer and likely to have better results.

One of the participants of the survey also highlighted that in our society, it is viewed that there must be something wrong with a person who does not fit in a particular environment. Another pointed out that it has somehow become convenient and comforting to say that the problem is within the child thus absolving everyone else of blame.

The psychologists communicated during the survey that they were frustrated by factors that limited their ability to effectively treat children with ADHD. They felt that by the time they become involved, the only perceivable solution is medicine.

The survey report thus concludes that it is important for educational psychologists to become involved in developing a broader understanding of ADHD among families. The report also recommends the implementation of a multi-agency approach for its assessment and treatment.

A Department of Health spokesman said: "Prescribing decisions are for doctors to make, but there are clear independent guidelines for the treatment of ADHD, which only recommend the use of drugs in severe cases and as part of a comprehensive treatment plan.

Source: Guardian

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