



May 5, 2003

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in School-aged Children: Association with Maternal Mental Health and Use of Health Care Resources

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Full article in *Pediatrics* May 2003;111(5 Supple Pt 2)1232-7

According to the American Psychiatric Association, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a disruptive behavior disorder characterized by on-going inattention and/or hyperactivity occurring in several settings and more frequently and severely than is typical for individuals in the same stage of development. Symptoms begin before 7 years of age and can cause serious difficulties in home, school and/or work life. ADHD can be managed through behavioral or medical interventions, or a combination of the two.

What are the findings of this study?

CDC researchers reported a fourfold increased association of ADHD in children whose mothers have a chronic and activity-limiting mental health condition (as reported in the 1998 National Health Interview Survey). Families with a child with ADHD use more healthcare resources for their child than unaffected families. Yet these families are significantly more likely to report that they cannot afford prescription medications and mental healthcare services for their child. By considering the mental health of the mother, healthcare providers might be able to reduce the individual, family, and social impact associated with childhood ADHD. Future explorations of this association will largely depend on improvements in the quality of nationally-representative data on the mental health of children and adults, access to mental healthcare services, and the use of these services.

Are there any additional findings?

Single mothers and less affluent mothers were significantly more likely than married and affluent mothers to report a chronic, activity-limiting mental health condition. Given the strong association noted in our study between maternal mental health and childhood ADHD, single-parent families of lower income may be the most affected population.

What do the findings suggest?

Maternal mental health is significantly associated with the presence of ADHD in school-aged children. This finding further supports a link between maternal mental health and behavior in children. The findings support a family-oriented system of access and use of healthcare.

What should healthcare providers consider?

Healthcare providers should consider two possibilities: 1) the potential for mothers with an activity-limiting mental health condition to have a child with ADHD or a related behavioral disorder and 2) the potential for mothers who have a child with ADHD to experience mental health problems. Addressing only the needs of the mother or the child individually may ignore significant risks for illness in the family and may compromise the benefits of treatment for either or both.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd

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