

Ritalin use higher in children of divorce"

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<http://www.divorce-online.co.uk/news/newsroom.asp?Section=Online+News&story=2966>

Ritalin use is almost twice as high among children whose parents divorce compared with those who continue to live with two biological parents, a Canadian study suggests.

Ritalin, or methylphenidate, is commonly prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, in children.

Use of the drug has increased rapidly over the past few decades in Canada, the U.S., the Netherlands, Israel and Australia, raising questions about whether it is overprescribed or prescribed inappropriately in children.

The study in Tuesday's issue of the Canadian Medical Association Journal attempted to tease apart whether family structure makes a difference in the higher prescription rate, but the findings do not explain why the prescription rates are higher, said the study's author, Lisa Strohschein.

"I've got the what, but not the why," said Strohschein, a sociologist at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.
Stress of divorce?

Previous studies suggest children who live with a single parent or a parent and step-parent were more likely to be prescribed Ritalin.

But a child could be living in a single-parent household because of several reasons — divorce, loss of parent to death or because they were born to a single parent. The earlier research was not clear about whether divorce itself makes a difference in Ritalin prescription rates.

When Strohschein looked at prescription rates between 1994 and 2000 among 4,151 children whose parents hadn't divorced and 633 children whose parents had, she found Ritalin use was significantly higher among children whose parents divorced.

In two-parent families, 3.3 per cent of children were prescribed the drug, which rose to 6.1 per cent among the children whose parents had divorced.

"It is possible that the stress of divorce subsequently elevated child behavioural problems to a point that necessitated methylphenidate use," Strohschein concluded. "However, one cannot rule out alternative explanations."

For example, since ADHD is thought to have a genetic component, there may be a greater likelihood of passing on the disorder among parents with a

history of mental health problems who divorce, Strohschein proposed.

Or, the anxiety, sadness and other emotions that children feel after divorce may lead to more contact with the health-care system. Visits to the doctor after a divorce occur as parents and doctors are on the lookout for problematic behaviour, and a child's symptoms may be mislabelled as ADHD.

The Statistics Canada survey results on which the study was based did not include questions to test whether Ritalin is prescribed inappropriately to children of divorce.

Be cautious in prescribing

Nonetheless, the findings should serve as a reminder to doctors to be cautious in prescribing drugs for ADHD to children after a divorce, said Dr. Abel Ickowicz, the psychiatrist-in-chief at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

"Because ... if we are going too quick to prescribe medication, like Ritalin, like methylphenidate, we may not only be masking the normal process of adaptation to divorce, but we may be contributing to the degree of distress the children of divorce are experiencing."

All of the explanations Strohschein proposed likely have some validity, said Dr. Anton Miller, a developmental pediatrician and child health researcher at the University of British Columbia's Centre for Community Child Health Research.

Miller added his own suggestion, saying the stress of dealing with ADHD behaviour in a child may contribute to divorce.

Ritalin's reign

Globe and Mail Update

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070609.wdrugssidebar09/BNSStory/National>

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Ritalin, the brand name for methylphenidate hydrochloride, has been the drug of choice to treat children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) for nearly 40 years.

Developed by the pharmaceutical company Ciba in 1954, it was initially prescribed to adults as a treatment for depression, chronic fatigue and narcolepsy.

Beginning in the 1960s, the central-nervous-system stimulant began to be prescribed to hyperactive children for its calming effect. In particular, it increased the time children could stay focused on an activity.

During the 1980s, prescriptions in the United States for children really began to climb. Canada wasn't far behind, with the psychotropic drug's popularity soaring in the 1990s. Prescriptions were up 500 per cent from the previous decade.

Pediatricians began to take notice of the worrying trend and recommended in 2000 that Ritalin be

prescribed only in very limited circumstances, and, even then, only for as long as necessary.

Worldwide, about 75 per cent of Ritalin prescriptions are for children, with four times as many boys on it as girls.

The Public Health Agency of Canada in 2004 reported that many adolescents were taking Ritalin as a recreational drug to stay awake, to increase attentiveness, to suppress appetite and to get high.

Research out of Atlantic Canada found that about 8.5 per cent of children in Grades 7 to 12 had taken Ritalin for non-medicinal purposes, compared with 5.3 per cent who were prescribed it.

Doctor's orders

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070609.drugs-layer09/BNStory/National>

Globe and Mail Update

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Stan Kutcher, a child psychologist and Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax, estimates that between 2 and 6 per cent of children ages five to seven suffer from mental-health disorders requiring treatment; for early adolescents under 14, the number rises to 7 to 11 per cent; by the late teens, research indicates roughly 18 per cent have diagnosable mental-health issues. The documents obtained by The Globe and Mail included Crown wards reviews at the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Toronto Catholic Children's Aid Society, Durham Children's Aid Society, Family and Children's Services of Niagara, and Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society. The children in permanent care with those agencies accounted for a little more than 18 per cent of the province's roughly 9,400 Crown wards. Psychotropic drugs most commonly prescribed to children:

ANALEPTICS

Examples are Ritalin, Adderall XR, Biphentin and Concerta.

- Used to treat inattention, distractibility, agitation, impulsiveness and hyperactivity.
- Approved by Health Canada for use with children.
- Doctors in Canada recommended their use to treat children 17 and under an estimated 1,125,000 times in 2006.

ATYPICAL ANTIPSYCHOTICS Examples are Risperdal, Zyprexa, Seroquel and Clozaril.

- Used to treat schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and mania.
- Not approved by Health Canada for use with children.
- Doctors in Canada recommended their use to treat children 17 and under an estimated 363,000 times in 2006.

SEROTONIN REUPTAKE INHIBITORS Examples are Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft, Celexa, Luvox and Anafranil.

- Used to treat depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder and eating disorders.
- Not approved by Health Canada for use with children.
- Doctors in Canada recommended their use to treat children 17 and under an estimated 360,000 times in 2006.

Sources: IMS Health Canada, Health Canada