



## The ADHD "Epidemic"

- ❖ In 2000, The American Academy of Pediatrics stated that ADHD is an epidemic.
- ❖ Stimulant medication sales increased 500% from 1991-99 (U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, 2000).
- ❖ The production of stimulant medications Adderall® and Dexedrine® increased by 4,516%, while the production of Ritalin® also increased by 375% from 1993 -2003 (U.S.D.E.A., 2003).
- ❖ Why the monumental increase in medications for ADHD? Has ADHD become a sudden epidemic? Or, as others posit (e.g., Leslie, 2004), is there a massive increase in over-diagnosis of the disorder?
- ❖ Wasserman et al. (1999) found that fewer than 40% of clinicians (N = 400) used the DSM-IV criteria to diagnose ADHD and fewer than 37% used behavior-rating scales to assess patients.
- ❖ Diller (2002), in reviewing the literature, found that "in the real world of primary care and community medicine the use of Ritalin is inconsistently linked to ADHD diagnosis" (p. S11).
- ❖ Perhaps we are medicating children for reasons other than actual biological ADHD (Diller, 2002).

## Trauma, Neglect, and ADHD

- ❖ In considering this possible over-diagnosis of ADHD, Weinstein, Staffebach & Biaggio (2000) observed that trauma symptomatology resembles ADHD symptomatology.
- ❖ These symptoms include: impulsivity, attention problems, restlessness or irritability (Blank, 1994), anger, hyper-vigilance, and exaggerated startle response or jumpiness (Weinstein et al., 2000).
- ❖ Maltreated children are often diagnosed with both ADHD and PTSD (McLeer, Callaghan, Henry & Wallen, 1994; Famularo, Fenton, Kinscherff & Augustyn, 1996).
- ❖ Are traumatized children misidentified as having ADHD?
- ❖ This is an important question given high rates of abuse and neglect (e.g., in 2002, 896,000 children were the victims of abuse or neglect; Child Maltreatment, 2004).

## Teachers' Roles

- ❖ In a 2003 study (Snider, Busch & Arrowood, 2003), 47% of teachers reported involvement in their students' ADHD diagnoses, and 92% indicated that teachers make the most recommendations for ADHD assessment.
- ❖ Snider et al. (2003) also found that teachers lack factual knowledge regarding ADHD and stimulant medication, with more than half of teachers (N=200) correctly answering only 5 out of 13 ADHD-related questions.
- ❖ Teachers are mandatory reporters of suspected cases of child abuse yet 84% of cases in public schools are unreported (O'Toole, Webster, O'Toole & Lucal, 1999).

Given teachers' critical roles in the identification of both ADHD and maltreatment, the current research examines teachers' **perceptions of child maltreatment**.

When teachers identify maltreatment effects do they describe **actual** maltreatment outcomes or do they describe ADHD behaviors? i.e., according to teachers:

## Do maltreated kids look like they actually have ADHD?

## Method

### Participants

- ❖ N = 112 pre-k to 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers and student teachers (N = 85 female)
- ❖ Teachers from around the world completed the on-line survey: U.S. (83.9%), Canada (7.1%), Asia (3.2%), Australia/NZ (1.3%), and unidentified (4.5%)
- ❖ Mean age = 33, SD = 13.93 years (range = 18 to 61 years old)
- ❖ Ethnicity: mostly Caucasian (86.5%) and Asian/Pacific (4.5%)
- ❖ Mean years taught = 9.77, SD = 9.61 years (range = 1 to 35 years)
- ❖ Grade levels taught: 42.3% teach elementary school (grades 1 to 5), 22.4% teach high school (grades 9 to 12), 19.2% teach junior high school (grades 6 to 8), 9% teach pre-kindergarten to kindergarten, and 7.1% are unidentified

### Materials

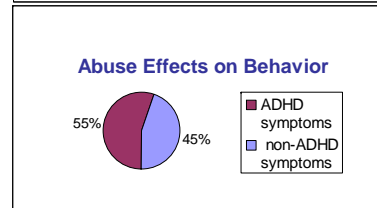
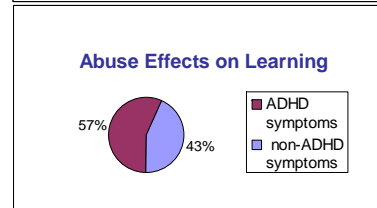
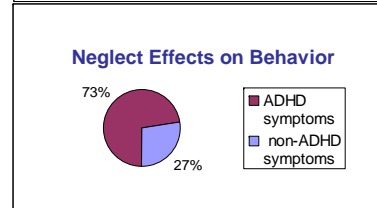
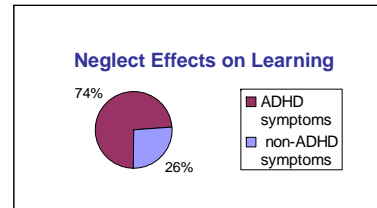
- ❖ The Student Behavior, Skills, and Learning Survey
- ❖ e.g. "How do you think that parental emotional neglect, whether it is of attention, time, or affection, impacts your students' learning?"
- ❖ e.g. "Many teachers have had children in their classrooms who are or have been physically or sexually abused by a caregiver. For children that you have known or suspected to have been physically or sexually abused, how do you think the abuse impacted their learning?"

### Procedure

- ❖ Data collection occurred as part of a larger internet teacher-only survey.
- ❖ Teachers were recruited on internet teacher message boards. A link to the online survey was provided in the invitation (N = 70).
- ❖ Teachers and student teachers were also recruited through the University of Oregon Human Subjects Pool (N = 42).

### Coding

- ❖ Inter-rater coding agreement was 89%.
- ❖ Items were coded as ADHD or non-ADHD symptoms. E.g., ADHD symptoms included "disruptive in the classroom" and non-ADHD symptoms included "dependent and overly emotional."
- ❖ Categories for the ADHD effects are based on Barkley (1990, 1997).



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## Results

- ❖ Pie charts (left) illustrate that according to teachers, neglect profoundly affects learning and behavior.
- ❖ **Neglect** outcomes manifest in far more ADHD-type impacts on behavior (e.g., "They have a hard time with rules and following them") and learning (e.g., "They perform below their ability") than non-ADHD impacts on behavior (e.g., "It causes some students to be clingy and dependent") and learning (e.g., "Often students are left to fend for themselves on the streets and lack parental support needed for success in school").

- ❖ **Abuse** was also described as strongly impacting learning and behavior.
- ❖ These behaviors were described as both ADHD-type behavior (e.g., "...hits and knocks down other students almost daily") and ADHD-type effects on learning (e.g., "These children have a difficult time focusing on classroom tasks") as well as non-ADHD behavioral effects (e.g., "...the student might be overly sexual or use sexual language/terms") and learning effects (e.g., "They are more standoffish, afraid to jump into a new lesson and are afraid of the teachers").

## Discussion

### Neglect is commonly described by teachers as looking like ADHD

- ❖ Suggesting that teachers can identify when neglected children are exhibiting ADHD symptoms.

### Physical and sexual abuse are described as having both ADHD-type and non-ADHD symptoms

- ❖ Therefore, teachers may also be helpful in identifying when abused children are exhibiting ADHD symptomatology as a result of their abuse.

- ❖ Teachers have key roles in identifying children with ADHD (Snider et al., 2003).
- ❖ Some teachers make direct treatment referrals for ADHD based on children's academic performance and classroom behaviors (Snider et al., 2003).
- ❖ The present study documents that when children are maltreated, teachers describe students' behavior and learning as exhibiting many of the symptoms seen in ADHD.
- ❖ Unfortunately much abuse and particularly neglect is undetected in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).
- ❖ With the rates of abuse and neglect so high, there is a likely probability that the ADHD-type behaviors observed in the classroom are sometimes the result of child abuse and neglect and not actual ADHD.
- ❖ This suggests that before children are given an ADHD diagnosis, their home environment should be as important a consideration as their classroom behavior or, as a society, risk compounding that maltreatment with further neglect and inappropriate discipline.

## Future Research

- ❖ This study suggests that we have a responsibility to investigate whether we are medicating abused and neglected children for misdiagnosed ADHD.

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