

New study looks at medication use of kids with ASD, ADHD

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(Medical Xpress) -- Many children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can benefit from medication for related disorders such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

“Unfortunately, there is very poor understanding of overall medication use for kids with autism,” says Paul T. Shattuck, PhD, assistant professor at the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

As a step toward improving the situation, Shattuck and colleagues studied psychotropic medication use compared across individuals with an [ASD](#), [ADHD](#) and both an ASD with ADHD.

They found that children and young adults with both an ASD and ADHD had the highest rates of medicine use (58.2 percent) followed by youths with ADHD-only (49 percent) and youths with ASD-only (34.3 percent).

African-American children with ASDs-only and with ASD and ADHD were less likely to receive medication than white youths.

“Also striking are the high rates of antipsychotic, antidepressant/antianxiety and stimulant medication use in these youths,” Shattuck says.

“Observations from the present study reinforce the complexity of pharmacologic treatment of challenging behavior in kids with ASDs and ADHD. There needs to be a clearer guide for treating kids with both an

ASD and ADHD.”

Shattuck says that pharmacological treatment for ASD reflects a trial and error approach based on associated symptoms.

“Additional studies examining the treatment of core and associated ASD symptoms are needed to guide the treatment of these [kids](#),” he says.

The study, “Prevalence and Correlates of Psychotropic Medication Use in Adolescents with an [Autism Spectrum Disorder](#) with and without Caregiver-Reported Attention-Deficit/[Hyperactivity](#) Disorder,” is published in the current issue of the Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology. Thomas W. Frazier, PhD, of the Center for Autism at the Cleveland Clinic, was lead author of the study.

Researchers examined data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2), a group of more than 1,000 adolescents enrolled in special education. The NLTS2 includes groups of adolescents with ASDs, learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities and speech and language impairments.

More information: In addition to Frazier and Shattuck, study authors are: Sarah Carter Narendorf, SRI International; Benjamin Cooper, data analyst at the Brown School; and Edward L. Spitznagel, PhD, professor of mathematics in Arts & Sciences at WUSTL.

Provided by Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis

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