AD(H)D and boys
a largely manufactured problem?

Wendy Fidler explores the latest research into Attention Deficit Disorder and asks whether modern, western culture be causing this escalating crisis for our boys?

Sami Timimi, consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist, analysed cross-cultural beliefs about children's behaviour and suggested that modern western culture has many features that should concern us. In Naughty Boys: Anti-social Behaviour, ADHD and the Role of Culture Timimi argues that the current epidemic of ADHD is a symptom of something going wrong in our culture, rather than reflecting a massive increase in children with a neurological deficit.

In 2008, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) published guidelines for the diagnosis and management of ADHD.

Key recommendations from the UK guidelines (to be reviewed in 2011) include:

- Specialist ADHD teams to develop age-appropriate training programmes for the diagnosis and management of ADHD for professionals who have contact with people with ADHD.
- Healthcare professionals should offer parents or carers of pre-school children with ADHD a referral to a parent-training/education programme as the first-line treatment.
- Teachers who have received training about ADHD and its management should provide behavioural interventions in the classroom.
- Parents/carers of children and young people with ADHD plus moderate levels of impairment should be offered group parent-training/education, either on its own or together with a group treatment programme (cognitive behavioural therapy [CBT] and/or social skills training).
- School-age children and young people with severe ADHD should be offered drug treatment as the first-line intervention. Parents should be offered group-based parent-training/education. Drug treatment for children and young people with ADHD should form part of a comprehensive treatment plan that includes psychological, behavioural and educational advice and interventions.

The NICE guidelines avoid several key issues, including:

- why a diagnosis of ADHD is given mainly to boys
- an understanding of ADHD 'behaviours' cross-culturally.

Different cultures have different beliefs about normal or deviant behaviour, and what are appropriate child-rearing techniques. The NICE emphasis on parenting classes as a first-line intervention effectively imposes views of childhood and child-rearing on communities that have differing and well-functioning alternative views. Conversely, it is modern western, culture where childhood behaviours have become most problematic.

Why are more boys diagnosed with Attention Deficit than girls?

More than a million children have been diagnosed with attention deficit in the US. Until recently the disorder was thought to be four to nine times...
The ‘Restorative Environment’

book

The ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) diagnosed in girls.

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boy’s problem, but experts increasingly agree that the disorder is widely under-

diagnosed in girls.

Paediatrician William Sears, author of The ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) Book, explains that whilst boys are more likely to ‘act out’ in school, becoming either the class clown or a discipline problem, girls are more likely to be withdrawn and ‘spacey’.

Girls tend to be inattentive rather than hyperactive and therefore less disruptive in school and at home. As a result, many girls with ADD go undiagnosed or are mistakenly believed to suffer from anxiety or depression.

Hyperactive boys tend to be referred for evaluation between ages five and seven, whereas most girls are aged eleven or more when they are referred.


Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, Atlantic Books, London


Agence française de sécurité sanitaire des aliments (Afssa), the French food safety organisation, issued a report on the safety of Bisphenol A (‘BPA’) on February 5 2010 mirroring an advisory note issued by the US Food and Drug Administration in January 2010. There are significant concerns around BPA levels in food and drinks industry;

Canada banned BPA in October 2008. Afssa are particularly concerned about the impact of BPA on pregnant and feeding mothers and the subsequent presence of ADHD type problems particularly in young girls.

Agence française de sécurité sanitaire des aliments (Afssa) http://www.afssa.fr/


US Food and Drug Administration:

http://www.fda.gov

Communication:

To comment on or discuss this article please contact the author: wendyfidler@eight29.com

What causes ADHD?

As yet, there is no known definitive cause for ADHD

Certain receptors in the brain, which should normally respond to the neurotransmitter dopamine, appear not to work effectively; this could be because dopamine is not being produced in sufficient levels.

Ritalin is the best known drug used to treat ADHD; it works by making more dopamine available and curbs symptoms such as hyperactivity and behavioural problems.

Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) of the brains of boys with ADHD shows they have a smaller prefrontal cortex – the brain’s ‘command centre’ and smaller caudate nucleus and globus pallidus – which translate the commands into actions.

ADHD may be genetic: one third of all fathers with ADHD have children with the disorder. Identical twins have at least 75% chance of sharing the same trait.