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Barriers to the Diagnosis and Treatment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Among African American and Hispanic Children

Fear of social stigma, lack of knowledge, and fear of over-diagnosis probably inhibit many African American and Hispanic parents from seeking diagnosis and treatment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) for their children. A recent survey by Harris Interactive compared the experiences, attitudes and levels of knowledge of African American and Hispanic parents with other American parents. The survey found significant differences between them. The results strongly suggest that parental fear of social stigma (“being labeled”), fear of over-diagnosis and a general lack of knowledge are more likely to inhibit the diagnosis and treatment of minority children with ADHD than of other children.

So What?

These results strongly suggest the need for educators and health care professionals to make additional efforts to reach out to minority parents, to make sure that the parents of children who may have ADHD know to whom they should turn if they suspect that their children may have ADHD and that they have sufficient access to both diagnosis and treatment. They also need to insure that the parents of children who do have ADHD are not inhibited from seeking treatment for them because of fears that they or their children will be stigmatized as a result.

Social Stigmatization

African American parents, and to a lesser extent Hispanics, are more likely than other parents to believe that a number of factors prevent children with ADHD from getting treatment. African American parents, in particular, are more likely to believe that their children’s race or ethnicity and fears of being “labeled” are important factors preventing the treatment of children with ADHD. Many more African American parents than Hispanic or non-Hispanic white and other parents believe that African American children are very likely to be misdiagnosed with ADHD when they do not have it. Hispanics also, to a much lesser degree, are more likely than non-Hispanic whites and others (but less likely than African Americans) to think that the misdiagnosis of Hispanic children is an inhibiting factor.

Hispanic parents are also somewhat more likely than African Americans, non-Hispanic whites and others to believe that language is a reason why some children cannot get treatment. Approximately half of all racial groups, but slightly more amongst Hispanics and African Americans, also see the cost of treatment as a major barrier.

TABLE 1

Factors Which Prevent Children From Getting Appropriate Treatment

“How much do you think each of the following prevents children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) from getting appropriate treatment?”

Base: All Respondents

Prevents Children From Getting Treatment “A Great Deal”				
	Total %	Race/Ethnicity		
		Hispanic %	African American %	Non-Hispanic White/Other %
Parents’ concern that their child will be “labeled”	53	51	57	52
Parents not having information on ADHD	53	57	58	51
Parents’ concern that treatment is based on their child’s racial or ethnic background	17	19	36	13
Language barriers (between parent/child and doctor/health care professional)	25	32	28	23
The cost of treatment	48	53	52	47

TABLE 2

Misdiagnosis Among Hispanic Children

“Compared to other children, how likely do you think *Hispanic* children are to be misdiagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?”

Base: All Respondents

	Total %	Race/Ethnicity		
		Hispanic %	African American %	Non-Hispanic White/Other %
More likely	19	23	39	14
Less likely	7	8	10	6
Equally likely	42	41	27	46
Not sure	32	27	24	35

TABLE 3

Misdiagnosis Among African American Children

“Compared to other children, how likely do you think *African American* children are to be misdiagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?”

Base: All Respondents

	Total %	Race/Ethnicity		
		Hispanic %	African American %	Non-Hispanic White/Other %
More likely	19	24	41	13
Less likely	7	7	12	6
Equally likely	43	39	27	46
Not sure	31	30	19	34

Lack of Knowledge

African American and Hispanic parents are less likely than non-Hispanic whites and others to know anyone who has been diagnosed with ADHD. African American and Hispanic parents are also less likely than this group to have ever received information about ADHD. And they are also significantly less likely to say that they would know where to go for help if they were told that their children might have ADHD.

TABLE 4

Know People Diagnosed With ADHD

“Do you know anyone who has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) by a doctor or other health care professional?”

Base: All Respondents

	Total %	Race/Ethnicity		
		Hispanic %	African American %	Non-Hispanic White/Other %
Yes	72	60	56	78
No	28	39	44	22

TABLE 5

Has Ever Received Information About ADHD

“Have you ever received information about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?”

Base: All Respondents

	Total %	Race/Ethnicity		
		Hispanic %	African American %	Non-Hispanic White/Other %
Yes	45	42	38	47
No	53	55	60	51

TABLE 6

Know Where To Go For Help With ADHD

“If you were told your child might have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), would you know where to go for help?”

Base: All Respondents

	Total %	Race/Ethnicity		
		Hispanic %	African American %	Non-Hispanic White/Other %
Yes, I would know where to go	75	69	64	79
No, I wouldn't know where to go	24	31	34	21

Methodology

These are a few of the findings from a much larger survey, *Cultural Attitudes and Perceptions about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder*, which was conducted for McNeil Consumer and Specialty Pharmaceuticals, manufacturers of Concerta®. The survey was conducted online and by telephone between May and July 2002 with three nationwide samples of parents with at least one child between the ages of 6 and 17. In total, interviews were completed with 1,034 Hispanics, 1,074 African Americans and 1,238 non-Hispanic whites and others. The results were based on 626 telephone interviews and 2,720 online interviews. A third, 33% of the Hispanic respondents were interviewed by telephone in Spanish. The surveys were designed and weighted to be nationally representative of all parents with children in these age groups in these three racial/ethnic categories. "Propensity score" weighting was applied to the online results to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus two percentage points (for the overall sample) and plus or minus three percentage points (for each of the African American, Hispanic and non-Hispanic white/other samples) of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. The online survey was not a probability sample.

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