

Study Finds nearly One Million U.S. Children may be Misdiagnosed with ADHD

By: Mike Bundrant, Natural News

A research study conducted by a Michigan State University economist has found that nearly one million children in the United States may have been misdiagnosed with ADHD.

These diagnoses were often triggered by the child being the youngest (and therefore most immature) student in their kindergarten class.

According to the study published in the *Journal of Health Economics*, these students are more likely to be prescribed medication to modify their behavior than their older classmates. According to lead researcher Todd Elder, this can waste between \$320 million and \$500 million per year on unnecessary medication. Between \$80-\$90 million of that is paid by Medicaid.

This is not to mention that fact that these children are being unnecessarily subject to psychiatric treatment (for which psychiatry has a rich history) and the medication itself.

Who is doing the diagnosing?

According to Elder, ADHD is often diagnosed after a teacher reports symptoms such as poor behavior, problems sitting still and inattention. This is usually considered relative to their classmates, which becomes a problem when a child begins Kindergarten at the age of five, while their classmates are six years old.

With as many as 4.5 million children under 18 diagnosed with ADHD, it is important for both teachers and medical professionals to take a student's relative age into account before handing down a diagnosis.

In his research, Elder sampled nearly 12,000 children who had been diagnosed with ADHD, and compared the rates of medication usage between the oldest and youngest children across a grade. The study used data provided by the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort, funded by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Elder found that younger kindergarteners were 60 percent more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD, and were more than twice as likely to be prescribed medication.

After careful evaluation, the study estimates that around 20 percent of the 4.5 million students currently diagnosed with ADHD (900,000) may have been misdiagnosed with the disorder. This was determined by examining the student's birth dates and kindergarten cutoff dates to

determine the youngest and oldest students in a grade.

For example, in a state where the kindergarten cutoff was December 1, students who were born on December 1 (and therefore the youngest in their grade) had far higher rates of ADHD diagnosis than those born on December 2 (and were therefore the oldest in their grade).

Though they were born a single day apart, they were assessed differently because of their comparative age and maturity level versus their classmates.

Although teachers cannot diagnose ADHD themselves, mental health and medical professionals rely heavily on their observations of the child during the school day (in combination with a parent's observations) to make a diagnosis of ADHD.

Unfortunately, this study has demonstrated that the observation of these "symptoms" may only be a result of intellectual or emotional immaturity among younger students rather than an indication of a problem.

Of course, if you take into account other factors, such as the debate, then the misdiagnosis rate may soar even higher.

This is assuming that you believe that ADHD is officially diagnosable in the first place. After all, where are the objective diagnostic tests? It's a fair question.

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Sources:

<http://msutoday.msu.edu>

<http://www.sciencedaily.com>