Black Mothers More Likely to Give Boys Higher ADHD Rating

A mom's race may drive differences in ratings reported for symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in kids.

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Black children, especially boys, often receive higher scores on common attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) measures than their white counterparts. Now, new findings published in the Journal of Attention Disorders reveal that Black mothers rate boys higher for the inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity that define this brain disorder, which affects functioning and development, regardless of the child's race, reports Lehigh University.

For the study, Black and white mothers were recruited and randomly assigned to watch a brief video of either an African-American or Caucasian boy displaying behaviors associated with ADHD. This resulted in four groups: African-American mothers viewing an African-American boy; African-American mothers viewing a Caucasian boy; Caucasian mothers viewing an African-American boy; and Caucasian mothers viewing a Caucasian boy.

Next, researchers asked the women to complete an assessment of the frequency of symptoms associated with ADHD behaviors as they observed them in the video. (All the children followed a script so their behaviors were identical.)

Findings demonstrated significant differences in ADHD symptom ratings based on the mother's race, not child race or interaction between maternal and child race. (This surprised scientists because previous studies showed that African-American boys received higher scores for common measurements of ADHD.)

"The primary takeaway is that common psychological assessment measures like parent behavior questionnaires are influenced by race; these assessments are not happening in a cultural vacuum," said George DuPaul, PhD, a professor of school psychology at Lehigh University and the study's coauthor.

DuPaul hopes these findings will "alert professionals conducting evaluations that race (particularly parental race) makes a difference in how children's behavior is viewed."

Researchers stressed that, given consistent evidence of health disparities across racial groups with

respect to ADHD, it’s important to understand and address variables related to racial differences and to develop assessment measures that provide equivalent data, which could help lead to accurate diagnostic decisions across racial and ethnic subgroups.

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