

New Research Studies Long Term Treatment for Childhood Mental Disorder

By Melinda Smith
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For at least a decade, mental health experts assumed that Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) was a mental condition primarily seen in Western culture, especially in the United States. However, research by a team of Brazilian scientists found the mental disorder exists worldwide [and is most prevalent in Africa and South America]. A new study of American children with ADHD looks at which course of treatment is most effective in the long term. VOA's Melinda Smith has details.



ADHD child kicking wall

Children diagnosed with ADHD have trouble concentrating or sustaining attention. They are often hyperactive, restless and tend to act before thinking of the consequences.

Ashley Johnson was diagnosed at age seven. "Sometimes I wish I could stand still, like right now. I'm moving my feet and so it's just weird to just stand there and not to do anything -- I don't know."

Winnie Johnson says medication and therapy have helped her daughter.

"There's [There are] different needs that have to be met -- different academic needs, emotional needs."

During a two-year period, researchers followed 485 children, after they had already participated in a randomized treatment phase lasting 14 months.

Parents then chose treatment for their child from three options: medication or behavioral therapy alone, a combination of both, or referral to community mental health resources. What they found was that no matter which treatment was chosen, ADHD children did improve over time.



Ashley Johnson

One of the study's authors, Dr. Peter Jensen, says the results should give families hope. "Many of these children in this particular study got better, and got substantially better, and



Peter Jensen

improved a great deal over three years."

Without treatment, ADHD children are more prone to leaving school, having behavioral problems or substance abuse.

In the study of those who got consistent treatment, some kids improved right away. Others took longer. But the study's authors say the key to success for each family was simply finding what treatment works best for the child, and staying with it.

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