Early Morning Functional Impairments in Stimulant-Treated Children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Versus Controls: Impact on the Family.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE:
Children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) frequently manifest early morning functional (EMF) impairments before school. We conducted a quantitative research survey to assess the impact of these EMF impairments on the family unit (caregiver, spouse/partner, and siblings).

STUDY DESIGN:
We developed an online survey questionnaire to collect data from 300 primary caregivers of children with ADHD and 50 primary caregivers of children who did not have ADHD.

RESULTS:
Although the ADHD children we surveyed were currently treated with stable doses of stimulants as their primary ADHD medication for at least 3 months, their parents reported high levels of EMF impairments in the child, which had a substantial negative effect on the emotional well-being of parents, on parents' functioning during the early morning routine, and on the level of conflict with siblings. The impact of EMF impairments on family functioning was mediated by the severity of the index child's impairments.

CONCLUSIONS:
EMF impairments exert a pervasive and significantly negative emotional and functional burden on not only the primary caregiver but also on the spouse/partner and siblings. This work suggests that adequate ADHD symptom control during the early morning period may be an unmet need for school-age children with ADHD being treated with stimulants. More work is needed to confirm this finding and determine the degree to which symptom control at other times of day is also an unmet need.