

TV Watching, Parental Support Predict Bullying

BY HEIDI SPLETE
Senior Writer

Children who receive cognitive stimulation and emotional support from their parents when they are 4 years old are less likely to become bullies, but early television watching promotes bullying, reported Frederick J. Zimmerman, Ph.D., and his colleagues at the University of Washington, Seattle.

The results lend support to theories that bullying tendencies arise from cognitive as well as emotional problems. In a multivariate logistic regression analysis, the investigators reviewed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 Children and Young Adults on 1,266 children aged 6-11 years (Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med. 2005;159:384-8).

A single standard-deviation increase in each of the emotional support and cognitive stimulation scores at age 4 years was associated with a 33% decrease in the odds of becoming a bully in elementary school (odds ratio 0.67).

The investigators reported that a standard-deviation "increase in the number of hours of television watched at age 4 years was associated with an approximate 25% increase in the probability of being described as a bully by the child's mother at ages 6 through 11 years." The odds ratio for each hour of television watched per day was 1.06.

About 49% of the children were female, and about 80% were white. Only one significant difference appeared after controlling for parental education and income, and the age, sex, and race of the child: Being of African American ethnicity was associated with decreased bullying.

The study was limited by its use of maternal reports and the absence of a standard definition for the term bully, Dr. Zimmerman and his associates commented.

"Maximizing cognitive stimulation and limiting television watching in the early years of development might reduce children's subsequent risk of becoming bullies," the investigators noted. ■

Some Developmentally Disabled See Benefits From Aripiprazole

BY HEIDI SPLETE
Senior Writer

HOUSTON — The atypical antipsychotic aripiprazole reduced symptoms such as aggression, hyperactivity, and impulsivity in 56% of 32 children with developmental disabilities, according to Maria R. Valicenti-McDermott, M.D., and Howard Demb, M.D.

Previous studies have shown that aripiprazole (Abilify) has fewer side effects, compared with most other typical and atypical antipsychotics. In their retrospective study, the investigators assessed clinical efficacy and side effects of the drug when it was used to treat emotional and behavioral problems in children with developmental disorders, they wrote in a poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Adolescent Psychiatry.

The study included the first 32 children, aged 5-19 years, treated with aripiprazole at an urban clinic for children with developmental disorders, wrote Dr. Valicenti-McDermott and Dr. Demb of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York.

All but 1 child had multiple diagnoses: 18 had mental retardation, 16 had autistic disorder, and 12 had attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Other diagnoses included mood disorder, multiple complex developmental disorder, disruptive behavior disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, pervasive developmental disorders,

reactive attachment disorder, sleep disorders, and bipolar disorder.

The initial mean daily dosage of aripiprazole was 7.1 mg (0.17 mg/kg per day). The children reported for monthly visits and had used aripiprazole for at least 6 months at the time of the study. The mean maintenance dosage was 10.55 mg (0.27 mg/kg per day).

Overall, the medication was effective in improving symptoms or maintaining improvement in 10 of the 18 children with mental retardation (56%). Improvement in symptoms occurred in 9 of the 12 children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (75%), 5 of the 6 children with disruptive behavior disorder (83%), and 7 of the 19 children with pervasive developmental disorders (37%). Among children with pervasive developmental disorders, drug effectiveness was higher in those with mental retardation (38%) than in those without mental retardation (33%).

The presence of an autism spectrum disorder, however, predicted a worse outcome. In theory, higher dosages might be more effective in children with autism, Dr. Demb said in an interview.

Although more than half the children showed improvement in their side effect profiles, weight gain occurred in all the children during the course of the study, and three discontinued the medication because of weight gain. The mean body mass index increased from 22.5 to 24.1 kg/m² during the follow-up period. ■

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Young Girls May Be Just as Aggressive as Young Boys

BY DOUG BRUNK
San Diego Bureau

SAN DIEGO — While the bulk of current literature suggests that young girls exhibit less verbal and physical aggressive behavior than young boys, results from a new analysis funded by the National Institute of Mental Health suggest that may not be the case at all.

"Young girls—particularly those 5-6 years old—are more physically and verbally aggressive than we're giving them credit for," Mariann Suarez, Ph.D., said in an interview during a poster session at the annual meeting of the Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. "We typically think of boys as more physically and verbally aggressive and girls as more relationally aggressive, when in fact both [genders are all three types]. Little kids are very aggressive at a very young age."

The finding is important because pediatricians may be misidentifying aggressive symptoms in girls due to biased gender norms, said Dr. Suarez of the department of pediatrics at the Metro-Health campus of Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland.

As part of a larger NIMH study, Dr.

Suarez and her associate, James J. Snyder, Ph.D., set out to investigate the gender differences in the development of verbal, physical, and relational aggression in a sample of 161 kindergarten and first-grade students at a public elementary school in Wichita, Kan. Dr. Suarez conducted the work while she was a graduate student at Wichita State University.

For nearly 2 years, the investigators used the Behavioral Playground Observation Coding System and a 12-item peer nomination measure to assess the youngsters' pattern of behavior. Assessment periods for the coding system were six 5-minute periods during the first and second halves of kindergarten and four 5-minute periods during the first half of first grade.

Study participants completed the peer nomination measure during the fall and spring of kindergarten. The investigators found that girls displayed increasing rates of verbal/physical aggression, while boys displayed relational aggression at a rate that surpassed girls. "That surprised me," Dr. Suarez said. In kindergarten, more acts of verbal and physical aggression were observed among boys, compared with girls, but there were no gender differences among the first-graders. ■