

AlbertMohler.com

Young Americans — A Generation of Doped-Up Kids

Thursday, October 20, 2005

The use of psychotropic drugs, sleeping pills, and other pharmaceuticals among the very young continues to expand. Americans use 90% of all Ritalin prescribed throughout the world. Increasing numbers of children are taking powerful drugs. Are we concerned?

Writing in the October 19, 2005 edition of *The New York Times*, Gardiner Harris reports that the use of sleeping pills is soaring among children and teenagers: *The use of sleeping pills among children and very young adults rose 85 percent from 2000 to 2004, in yet another sign that parents and doctors are increasingly turning to prescription medications to solve childhood health and behavioral problems.*"

Doctors now believe that drugs prescribed to remedy attention-deficit problems may themselves be causing insomnia among the young. As Harris reports:

[A]bout 15 percent of people under age 20 who received sleeping pills were also being given drugs to treat attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, according to the study by Medco Health Solutions, a managed-care company that makes estimates about medication use in the whole population based on extrapolations from its own data. Drugs used to treat attention disorders can cause insomnia.

Few of the prescriptions given to children and young adults have the approval of the Food and Drug Administration because no sleep medication has been approved for use in children under 18. Still, doctors commonly use medications for patients and disorders for which the drugs have never received formal approval, particularly when those patients are children.

Dr. Robert Epstein, Medco's chief medical officer, said, "It leads you to wonder whether these children are being treated for insomnia caused by hyperactivity or whether the medication itself causes the insomnia."

The use of sleeping medicines among adults doubled from 2000 to 2004, Medco found.

In her important book, *Home-Along America*, Mary Eberstadt documents the impact of the medicalization of childhood behaviors and the dangers of using drugs to "treat" such problems. In an interview about the book, she said:

Yes, some children do have terrible mental problems, and some doctors and families find such drugs to be lifesavers. But even pro-medication experts believe that prescriptions have gone way too far. The question my book takes up is why.

Ritalin abuse, for example, is common and risky practice on every campus in the country and an acknowledged fact in teen popular culture; yet it garners almost no attention from doctors and parents. Why not? Several other problems with these drugs have also not gotten the public attention they deserve. Do readers know about the negative impact that of all those prescriptions are having on the U.S. military? (From the feedback I've gotten, almost no one outside military circles is aware of it.) Similarly, does anyone know the long-term consequence of labeling many millions of children and teenagers defective and telling them they need medication to fix themselves for life? These are all questions overdue for real discussion.

Is America ready for this discussion? Are American evangelicals ready to lead in this discussion?

Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.