ADOLESCENTS DESCRIBE THE MEANING OF PHARMACOLOGICAL TREATMENT OF ADHD FOR THEIR AUTHENTICITY: DEVELOPMENT AND INTELLIGENT USE OF METHYLPHENIDATE

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Background and aims: Minors with attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) may receive pharmacological treatment against their will and find that it modifies their authentic selves. The use of medication has been widely criticized on this account. In this study, the effect of ADHD drugs on adolescents’ personal experience is examined in order to understand how psychological changes that adolescents experience under medication interrelate with their attitude toward being medicated. We investigate these changes among Israeli adolescents, the participants’ experience in controlling the change, and their assessment of what the change means for their lives.

Methods: Thirty-eight adolescents participated in semi-structured interviews. Using grounded theory, the authors analyzed the findings separately and called on an external referee to resolve disagreements about the results.

Results: The results show that methylphenidate affects participants’ demeanor, mood, and preferences. Most participants began to use it in childhood. Many spoke disapprovingly about how it modified their sense of authenticity as their independence grew in adolescence. Some even discontinued its use. Largely due to the development of their autonomy and their perception of using medication, many manipulate their use of methylphenidate to enhance selected traits and willingness to engage in various activities. When preparing for a matriculation exam, for example, they take the medication; when they wish to be creative or sociable, they avoid it and enjoy what they consider the advantages of ADHD, such as creativity and spontaneity.

Conclusions: As discretionary users, the participants shape their lives in a way that makes them more meaningful and diverse, better tailored to their social surroundings, and more useful in maintaining autonomy in the course of pharmacological treatment of ADHD. Thus, it seems that adolescents with ADHD should be allowed to influence their pharmacological treatment of the disorder in order to adjust it to their needs and personalities.