

# FACTS ABOUT FOSTER CARE CHILDREN ABUSED WITH PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS



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Whether under the care of Child Protective Services, Departments of Family and Child Services, or Youth Welfare Offices, foster children—often removed from family homes because of abuse—are furthered abused when they are prescribed psychotropic (mind-altering) drugs. Some US states report that more than 60% of foster children are prescribed mood-altering drugs (at a rate 300% above the national average).

Already troubled over their circumstances, these children are drugged for emotional and behavioral issues, sometimes with tragic outcome.

Take, for example, 7-year-old Gabriel Meyers, who didn't want soup for lunch one Thursday in April 2009. He was sent to his room after he threw away his soup, kicking his toys around and threatening to kill himself. Around 1 p.m., police responded to a frantic call and found Gabriel had hanged himself. He'd been prescribed a cocktail of psychiatric drugs, including an antidepressant that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned could lead to children committing suicide.<sup>1</sup>

Psychiatrists prescribed 93% of the psychotropic medication dispensed to foster youths, according to a 2008 study.<sup>2</sup>

- In Australia, one in four foster children was taking psychotropic drugs, and in residential homes, where children live in small groups supervised by social workers, the rate of drug use is 50%. Foster children are being medicated with psychotropic drugs at 10 times the rate of other children.<sup>3</sup>
- In Ontario, Canada, psychotropic drugs are prescribed to nearly half of the state wards accounting for drug prescriptions at a rate three times that of children in the general population.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2007, in Texas \$37.9 million was spent on psychiatric drugs for foster children.<sup>5</sup> Pharmaceutical companies have played a major role in encouraging their increased use on foster care clients. They participate in aggressive marketing, and conduct misleading research about efficacy and safety.<sup>6</sup>
- The United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances 1971 requires governments to protect children, including those in foster care from excessive and unwarranted exposure to psychotropic drugs. Psychotropic drugs can be prescribed only for medical purposes, yet foster care youth are routinely prescribed drugs for behavioral control.

<sup>1</sup>"Psychotropic Drug Abuse in Foster Care Costs Government Billions," Politics Daily, 17 June 2010.

<sup>2</sup>Julie Zito, "Psychotropic Medication Patterns Among Youth in Foster Care," *Pediatrics*, Vol. 121, No. 1, Jan. 2008, pp. e157-e163.

<sup>3</sup>Caroline Overington, "Foster kids medicated for 'mental health,'" *The Australian*, 4 Nov. 2008.

<sup>4</sup>"Nearly half of children in [Canadian] Crown care are medicated," *Globe and Mail*, 9 June 2007.

<sup>5</sup>Evelyn Pringle, "Psychiatric Drugging of Children Intolerable-Betrayal of Innocence," *Lawyers and Settlements.com*, 8 Mar. 2009.

<sup>6</sup>Op. cit. Politics Daily.

## Speaking Out

- "This is child abuse on a grand scale." — Richard Wexler, head of the Virginia-based National Coalition for Child Protection Reform.
- "We call it the chemical straitjacket." — Denise Crisp, President of the New South Wales, Australia, Foster Care Association.
- "Children in state foster care systems and juvenile prisons are particularly at risk of overmedication with psychotropic drugs...and under conditions that constitute egregious [extremely bad] departures from sound medical practice." — Angela Olivia Burton from CUNY School of Law.
- "All kids in foster care have some story of trauma, like abuse or neglect, so we need to ask the question, 'How are we dealing with trauma?'" Further, "The fact is that medication does not treat a disorder, it treats the symptoms of the manifestation...." — Charles Manos, School psychologist.
- "We're taking away their future...By blunting their emotion, we take away children's ability to relate to people, to trust, love, to care for others or to put themselves in another person's shoes to see how it feels." — Neuropsychologist who examined Texas records of children under state care.
- "Child advocates should illuminate that no alternatives were first tried and/or that the treating physician has given the prescription(s) without knowing if less invasive interventions were attempted." Guardians must "ensure that psychotropic drugs are not administered improperly to children in foster care as a means of chemical restraint." — Bob Jacobs from the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities, Inc.
- In 2010, Florida's Department of Children and Families prohibited foster care children being enrolled in clinical trials for psychotropic drugs. Foster care parents and guardians in any state or country should object to any child under their care being part of a clinical drug experiment.

Angela Olivia Burton, "They Use it Like Candy' - How the Prescription of Psychotropic Drugs to State-Involved Children Violates International Law," Social Science Research Network, 3 Apr. 2010.

Carol Marbin Miller, "Mind-altering drugs given to some babies in DCF's care," Miami Herald, 17 Sept. 2002.

Caroline Overington, "ONE in four children who have been removed from the care of their parents and placed in foster homes are being heavily medicated to control their emotions and behaviour," The Australian, 3 Nov. 2008.

Angela Olivia Burton, "They Use it Like Candy' - How the Prescription of Psychotropic Drugs to State-Involved Children Violates International Law," Social Science Research Network, 3 Apr. 2010.

Eileen FitzGerald, ""Growing numbers of children on medication," NewsTimes, 7 June, 2010.

Vera Sherav, "America's Over-Medicated Children," AARP, June, 2005

Bob Jacobs, psychologist, Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities, Inc, "Legal Strategies to Challenge Chemical Restraint of Children in Foster Care A Resource for Child Advocates in Florida."

"Florida to FDA: No Foster Care Kids in Psychotropic Trials," Pharnalot, 19 July 2010.