

OPINION

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Psychiatric Drugs for Kids Abused

Students tagged 'dysfunctional' get caught in trap

BY FRED SHAW JR.
Thousands of African American children in special education and foster care are being labeled as "dysfunctional" and prescribed mind-altering drugs.

African Americans comprise only 16 percent of the total U.S. student population, yet comprise nearly one-third of the total students in special education programs and 40 percent of the children in foster care.

According to one New York study, minority boys are 11 times more likely to be placed on mind-altering prescription drugs. Parents are also being forced to put their child on such drugs as a requisite for their education.

The problem is so pervasive that

at the 94th Annual NAACP National Convention in Miami Beach in July, NAACP delegates and national board members joined President and CEO Kweisi Mfume and Chairman Julian Bond in unanimously passing a resolution in support of the Child Medication Safety Act of 2003 (S. 1390). The act prevents school personnel from forcing parents to put their children on psychiatric

The drugs they are put on to 'treat' the so-called disorder are a chemical lynching.

— Fred Shaw Jr.

drugs to receive educational services.

The resolution, introduced by the NAACP Compton Branch, condemns the inappropriate psychiatric drugging of children and the misuses of special education to

stigmatize African-American children as "disabled."

Through these programs, our children are being told they have various mental disorders and learning disabilities such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) despite no objective, measurable scientific test being able to prove these.

Most people are unaware that no blood test, brain scan, X-ray, or urinalysis exists to verify these 'disorders.' Even worse, children are being given mind-altering / behavior-modifying drugs to treat a non-existent disorder without their parents being told of the serious and sometimes fatal side effects of the drugs.

I've become increasingly alarmed about our normal African-American males being labeled with mental disorders. The drugs they are put on to 'treat' the so-called disorder are a chemical lynching. They are more potent than cocaine and



Fred Shaw Jr.

are scheduled by the Drug Enforcement Administration in the same abuse category as opium, amphetamine and cocaine. I wanted the NAACP to do something to actively combat this on a national level.

For more information regarding what you can do to help get the Child Medication Safety Act made into law, contact Mikki Jenkins or Fred Shaw Jr. at the NAACP Compton Branch by calling 310-637-8540.

Fred Shaw Jr. is the president of the Compton, Calif. NAACP.

In the Dark About Underage Drinking?

Holidays are perfect time to discuss issue with kids

BY JUDY CUSHING

The holiday season, with its emphasis on families, presents parents with the perfect opportunity to discuss an issue that involves the health and well being of all our children - underage drinking.

I'm afraid many, many parents and grandparents are in the dark about underage drinking and the destruction it can cause our children, our families and our communities.

Our children are starting to drink at a very early age, many when they are in the sixth or seventh grade. And they're not drinking socially; they're drinking to get drunk.

Drinking, in fact, is associated with the three major causes of teen death: accidents, suicide and homicide.

Some parents view alcohol use around the holidays as some sort of "rite of passage" for their children, without thinking about how much is at risk when alcohol is mixed with young minds and bodies. But new studies by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reveal that alcohol consumption by adolescents results in brain damage - possibly permanent - and impairs intellectual development.

Recent research has also found that youth are getting the wrong message about alcohol. Alcohol companies are out-shouting par-



Judy Cushing

Parents also need to put pressure on our policy makers - to force the beer industry to refrain from targeting our children with their multi-billion dollar ad campaigns...

ents. Our kids see more TV commercials for beer - the number-one illicit drug in this country for teens - than for chips, sneakers, jeans or juice. They are seeing those commercials on TV shows popular with children and teens.

And during the holidays there are bowl and playoff football games

featuring a smorgasbord of clever, sexy beer ads that attract a huge audience of young, impressionable guys.

Given these mind-numbing facts, what can parents do?

For starters, take advantage of the holidays to talk to your children about the dangers of underage drinking, and about how some of the ads they see romanticize products that are not only illegal but also harmful.

Parents also need to put pressure on our policy makers - to force the beer industry to refrain from targeting our children with their multi-billion dollar ad campaigns, and to strengthen existing laws for minors in possession and for adults who furnish alcohol to our kids. Not all kids, of course, drink. As parents, and as communities and a country, we need to recognize and celebrate our kids who abstain from alcohol, and emulate and fund those programs that keep them abstinent.

Judy Cushing is president and CEO of Oregon Partnership, a statewide non-profit organization that provides prevention education and treatment referral for alcohol and drug issues. For free and confidential information about substance abuse issues, call Oregon Partnership's HelpLine at 800-923-HELP or visit www.orphnership.org.

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