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The Growing Concern About Mental Health Services and Medications: A Comparison of Children on the Inside and the Outside of the Foster Care System.

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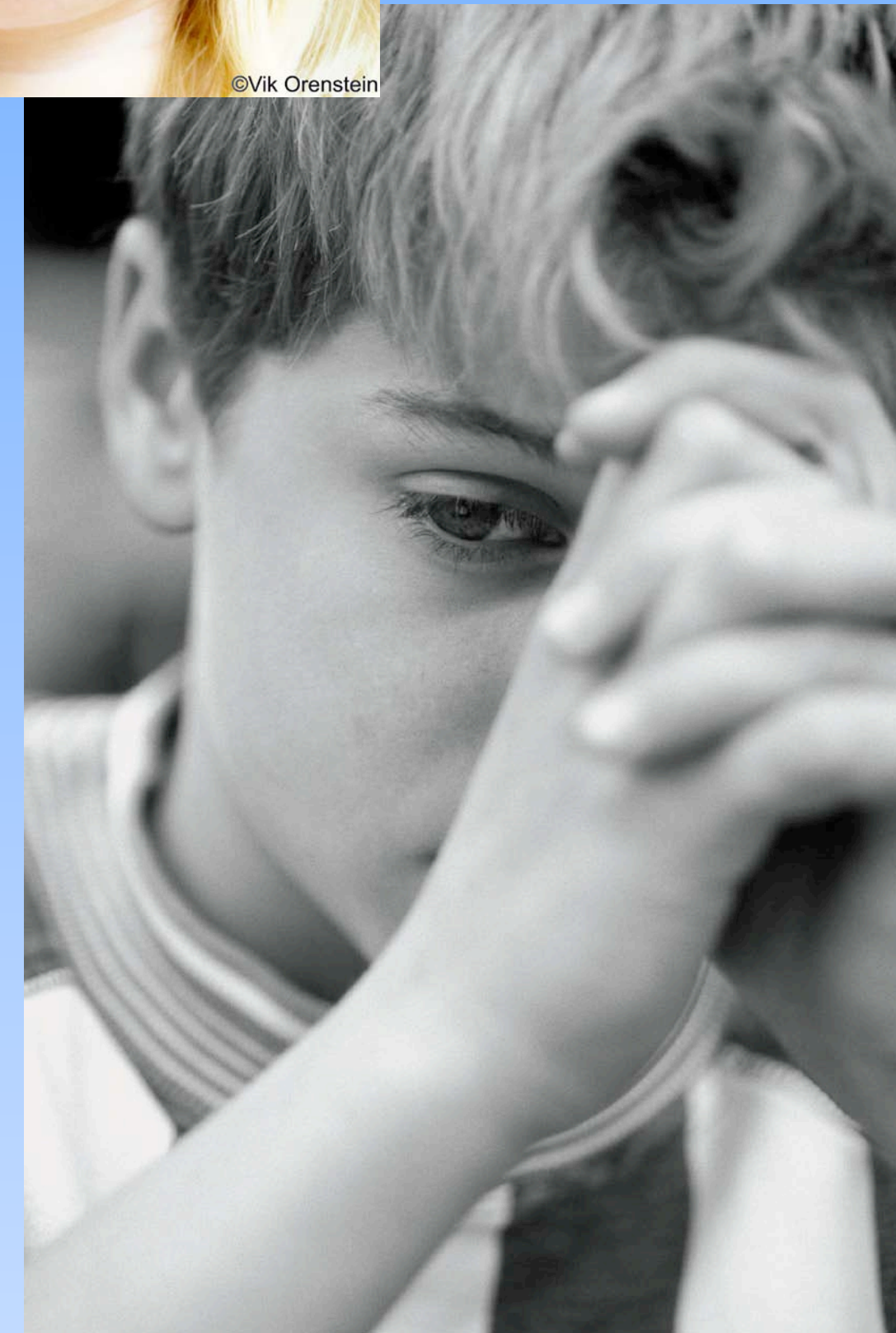
The Growing Concern about Medications: A Comparison of Children within and outside of the Foster Care System

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Concern

• Possible overuse of psychotropic medications in children in foster care has been raised as a significant problem, although the use of such medications in this population may actually be too low given the prevalence of mental health problems.⁴



Mental Health Issues

- Most youth in foster care have traumatic family histories and life experiences that result in an increased risk for mental health disorders.²
- The prevalence of mental health disorders with children in foster care are estimated as high as 80%.⁵
- These children are also 16 times more likely to have psychiatric diagnoses and 8 times more likely to be taking psychotropic medications.⁵
- Common psychiatric diagnoses:
 - Conduct and attention disorders, aggressive and self-destructive behaviors, depression, delinquency, autism, bipolar disorders, and impaired social relationships.⁵
- Concomitant psychotropic medication use is highly prevalent, with 41.3% of the youth receiving **≥3 psychotropic drugs**.⁷

Sociodemographics

- Children in rural foster care have higher rates of behavioral disturbance.¹
- Children in rural areas may enter foster care due to unmet treatment needs that their parents cannot satisfy.¹
- Medicated youth are more likely to be white or Hispanic, male, and 10-14 years of age.⁷
- Race/ethnic psychotropic medication disparities are greater for African American than for Hispanic youth.⁷
- Boys receive more different classes of psychotropic medication than girls.⁷

Nursing Implications

- Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) continue to see children as they come into foster care; they continue to identify specific health or developmental problems within this group and make follow-up recommendations as indicated.
- APNs, such as nurse practitioners or psychiatric nurses, are ideal clinicians for rural community-based care where less treatment options are available, making treatment as the explicit goal for children in the foster care system.¹
- Nurses are instrumental in encouraging ongoing evaluations and promoting overall wellness in foster care children.



Summary

- Adolescents involved with foster care have numerous risk factors that precede their entry into foster care; foster care is a marker of adversity, rather than a cause of psychopathology.³
- These findings are not necessarily indicative of excessive use of psychotropic medication or inappropriate care, given the higher proportions of children with mental health diagnoses compared to those reported among school-aged children in community samples.⁶
- A need to increase coordination of services and ensure follow up care is vital to meet the mental health needs of all children in foster care.

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