

## **Psychosocial Issues in the Treatment of Asthma in a High-Risk Pediatric Population**

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**Purpose:** Asthma is the most common pediatric chronic illness. It disproportionately affects racial-ethnic minority children living in poverty – children who often also suffer the consequences of a variety of social and environmental stressors. In this context, asthma is often experienced as an additional stressor, which may exacerbate morbidity and interfere with adherence to treatment recommendations. **Method:** We compared the prevalence of asthma among children referred for behavioral and developmental problems before and after implementation of a comprehensive asthma management program. The asthma program helps children better manage their asthma through appropriate assessment and prescription using the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute guidelines, and health education. This was implemented in a very high-risk pediatric population: children and families residing in homeless shelters. **Results:** Prior to the comprehensive asthma intervention, 39% of children with behavioral health diagnoses also had asthma; this was reduced to 29%. Initially, 30% of children diagnosed with depression were also diagnosed with asthma; this was reduced to 18%. **Conclusions:** Improved management of childhood asthma may also improve psychosocial outcomes. This is consistent with literature relating depression and other emotional problems of childhood to “learned helplessness” or issues around self-efficacy. Implications for comprehensive asthma treatment are discussed.