Adultification of Young Black Females on Their Health and Well-being: A Qualitative Study

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE
Adultification is the process by which children, particularly Black girls, are perceived and treated as more mature or adult-like than their peers, often resulting in the denial of their childhood experiences and the imposition of adult expectations. This study seeks to explore the impact of adultification on Black girls' identity formation and the overall well-being of Black girls, which includes navigating racism and sexism in the context of institutional interactions and personal relationships.

METHODS
Conducted as a qualitative inquiry, the study engaged Black girls and young Black women aged 13 to 24 years and their caregivers. Recruitment occurred primarily at a large US urban, hospital-based, adolescent specialty practice and through a community-based organization (CBO). The research design was co-led by young Black females from the CBO and used an arts-based project integrated with a semistructured interview for youth and caregivers. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS
A total of 26 Black females and 25 female caregivers were enrolled in the study. Themes identified among youth participants included a desire to maintain childhood, experiences of hypersexualization, and the need for culturally sensitive mental health support. Caregivers expressed concerns regarding early sexual debut, the rapid maturation of Black girls, the criminalization of Black girls in school, and the need for improved parenting support and mental health resources.

CONCLUSIONS
The study's multifaceted approach provided novel narratives from both youth and their caregivers on the impact of adultification on the well-being of young Black females. Findings underscored the necessity for interventions and policies to address racism and sexism that Black girls and young Black females face in clinical and community settings.

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