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Trajectories of major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder in childhood and adolescence

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Studies confirm increased prevalence rates of depression in adolescents and that suicide remains the second leading cause of death for adolescents in the United States. Major Depressive Disorder and Bipolar Disorder represent complex psychiatric disorders that are characterized by symptoms with some age-related developmental differences and are often accompanied by deficits in cognitive, social and psychological functioning. Even though there has been a steadily increasing awareness of genetic, neurobiological, environmental and social influences that contribute to the unfolding of pediatric mood disorders, questions remain about the developmental trajectories and the most effective psychosocial interventions for Bipolar Disorder and Major Depression in children and adolescents.

Few examinations of the longitudinal outcome of the treatment of severe mood disorders with antidepressant, mood stabilizer or antipsychotic medications have included their combination with family therapy and long-term individual psychotherapy with children and adolescents. Investigations of treatment effectiveness with Bipolar Disorder and comorbidity, cognitive weaknesses, racial or cultural differences or the role of trauma and how these factors may influence the continuance of severe mood disorders from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. Questions also remain about the role of protective factors in preventing the persistence of severe mood disorders

and about which combinations of psychotherapeutic interventions may facilitate positive long-term outcomes in spite of structural and functional brain abnormalities that may be associated with Major Depressive Disorder or Bipolar Disorder in children and youth.

Since pediatric mood disorders should be understood in terms of interacting, multi-dimensional pathways, comprehensive, multimodal treatment should include supportive family treatment and individual psychotherapy as well as the use of psychotropic medication. Research studies on risk factors and variables associated with the onset and the continuation of Major Depressive Disorder and Bipolar Disorder in children and adolescents suggest the importance of coordinated, multimodal treatment.

Speaker Biography

James B McCarthy is a full-time faculty member and the Director of Training, Pace University Doctoral Program in School-Clinical Child Psychology in New York City and Clinical Professor of Psychology, Adelphi University, Garden City, NY. His research interests include severe psychopathology in children and adults, cognitive development and trauma as well as psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. He has published extensively in the professional literature and is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association. His most recent book, "Psychosis in Childhood and Adolescence" is published by Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

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