

1442 Clinical Features of Depressed Children and Adolescents With Various Forms of Suicidality.

1451 Possible Link Between Childhood Separation Anxiety and Adulthood Personality Disorder in Patients With Anxiety Disorders in Japan.

Phenomenological Considerations of Childhood and Adolescent Psychopathology

In this issue of “Focus on Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health,” we present 2 studies that examine important and understudied aspects of the phenomenology of childhood and adolescent psychopathology: suicidality and separation anxiety.

Although suicide is one of the leading causes of mortality in youth, there have been relatively few studies of the phenomenology of and risk factors for suicidal ideation and attempts in youth. Liu and colleagues examine the phenomenology of suicidality in a large cohort of Hungarian youth with major depressive disorder and identify important clinical characteristics that are associated with high risk for various forms of suicidality, including feelings of worthlessness and co-occurring psychiatric disorders. This study identifies novel symptom targets for the development of intervention strategies to reduce suicidality in youth. Studies examining whether the same risk factors for suicidality are also present in non-depressed children with suicidal ideation are needed to determine whether the results of this study generalize to suicidal children and adolescents with other types of psychopathology.

Osono and colleagues retrospectively assess symptoms of separation anxiety in a group of Japanese adult psychiatric patients and controls in order to determine whether there are differences. The findings of this study also serve as preliminary evidence clarifying the developmental trajectory of childhood separation anxiety. Osono and colleagues identify elevated separation anxiety in childhood as a risk factor for adult anxiety disorders as well as cluster C personality disorders. Although this study relies on retrospective recall, it is a good example of an initial step toward identifying targets for longitudinal studies that prospectively examine developmental precursors of adult psychopathology. Ultimately, such studies may help to guide the design of high-risk studies as well as lead to the development of early interventions for adult anxiety and personality disorders.

The 2 studies in this issue of “Focus on Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health” also emphasize the importance of examining the phenomenology of psychopathology in cohorts from different cultures. Cross-cultural studies that evaluate similarities and differences in childhood psychopathology between various cultures may begin to identify genetic and culturally specific vulnerabilities to developing childhood psychopathology.

In summary, both of these studies illustrate the clinical utility of systematically evaluating phenomenological aspects of childhood and adolescent psychopathology. Such studies may be useful to identify risk factors for the development of psychopathology and may lead to more effective treatment options for youth with psychiatric disorders.

Melissa P. DelBello, M.D.

Section Editor, Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health