

A Compelling Conference Addressing Underlying Themes in Child and Adolescent Psychopathology Research, Assessment and Treatment

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Short Communication

Child and Adolescent Psychopathology is becoming increasingly common and has been associated with a range of negative outcomes, including poor educational attainment and suicide [1]. Therefore, it is an area of substantial concern and uncertainty, which was demonstrated by the 200 delegates who attended and presented their findings at the 9th International Conference of Child and Adolescent Psychopathology (ICCAP). Professor Cecilia Essau hosted the stimulating and enjoyable three-day conference at the picturesque University of Roehampton. Delegates presented innovative findings from a range of psychological disciplines and 42 countries, including South Africa, Mexico and Taiwan. I will discuss a few particularly interesting and innovative studies, to give you a feel of the conference and the findings presented.

Interestingly, the influence of Callous-Unemotional (CU) traits, which I previously knew very little about, was quickly apparent as an important underlying theme. The keynote addresses and presentations demonstrated that CU traits, characterised by deficient affect, lack of guilt and callous use of others, are associated with a range of negative outcomes, such as conduct problems and empathy deficits [2-4]. These findings were particularly compelling as they caused me to consider the effects of CU traits on the study I presented at the conference exploring aggression and empathy in ASD.

Another important theme was the necessity of investigating factors underlying psychopathology, such as parenting, personality traits and peer relationships [5-7]. Robin Banerjee illustrated this by exploring peer relations and finding that childhood rejection is associated with later psychopathology. This has important implications as at-risk children can subsequently be identified and problem behaviour can be prevented. Furthermore, Dr Alma Vallejo presented a particularly controversial study investing Mexican adolescents self-reported suicide attempts. The study highlighted some novel gender differences in the influence of parenting practices on suicide attempts. However, the ethical considerations initiated much discussion, as some delegates questioned the ethics of addressing such a sensitive subject with adolescents. This illustrated cultural research inconsistencies and the influence of current affairs in different countries, as the follow-up care was lacking due to current issues in Mexico. This has important implications, as the international conference highlighted that the influence of cultural context and current affairs on research findings may need to be considered and addressed in the future. Finally, Prof Roger Ingham deviated from the main conference themes and instigated substantial interest and discussion by presenting his findings regarding young people and sexual health [8]. This refreshing keynote highlighted a range of risk factors that have been identified and used to reduce teenage pregnancy rates. Surprisingly, although the media

portrays the rates as on the increase, prevention programs have actually been associated with a 41% decrease in teenage pregnancies since 1998 [9], however, causality is unknown. Overall, attending this insightful, thought-provoking and compelling conference has been a valuable experience and has provoked me to consider the outstanding questions in my future research. I therefore hope to attend again next year and would definitely recommend it to anyone interested in Psychopathology or Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

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