

Editorial



Definition of child and adolescent psychiatry: A new insight into the importance of the discipline

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Reviewing definitions regarding child and adolescent psychiatry shows a more descriptive approach in this relation and it mainly refers to as one of the branches of psychiatry that diagnoses, treats, and prevents child and adolescent psychiatric disorders, and researches on biopsychosocial factors effective in the development and course of these disorders, as well as investigates therapeutic responses to a variety of interventions.¹ Historically, the Swiss psychiatrist Moritz Tramer (1882-1963) was probably the first to introduce child psychiatric parameters in terms of diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis into the discipline of medicine in 1933.²

However, a definition of this branch of psychiatry, which indicates its importance in regard to the mental health issues and with looking at the specific situation of this field among other psychiatric trends, has not been presented so far. In regard to the importance of childhood events from a psychiatric point of view, two different approaches can be considered: First, Sigmund Freud's views and the psychoanalytic perspective are historically significant, emphasizing the importance of childhood experiences and traumas, especially before age five, and their profound effects on shaping personality in the later years of life. For this reason, psychoanalytic therapies in adults try to resolve unconscious conflicts that have their roots in childhood. For this purpose, to access the unconscious of the person, i.e., there and then, various techniques such as free associations, dream interpretation, and analysis of defenses and tongue slips are used. In fact, in this method to access some of the realities of a person's life in the past and mainly related to the early years of life whose negative effects are reflected in the current life of the person, and to resolve conflicts related to them, indirect methods with a journey from the present to the past are used. In this way, indeed, in order to untie the conflicts at the present time, we reread the past that we have lost in a person's life and it has not been possible to change it in the past life.

The second approach to considering the importance of childhood events is the approach to child and adolescent psychiatry as a medical discipline; According to this approach, various negative consequences for childhood psychiatric disorders have been shown in numerous studies that will occur in the future of a person's life; For example, numerous negative consequences of child abuse include the following problems and disorders: deficits on numerous indices of adaptation across the lifecycle, sexual behavior problems, aggression, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder and sociopathy later in life, substance abuse and self-injurious behavior, borderline traits, depression and suicide, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative disorders, eating disorders and multiple somatic health problems.^{3,4} There are also specific causal trajectories for the course of some psychiatric disorders from childhood to adulthood, which indicate the importance of childhood disorders, such as the causal pathway associated with ADHD, in which a succession of ADHD in early childhood, problem behavior in late childhood, conduct disorder during adolescence, and substance use disorders during adulthood can be observed.⁵

Paying attention to the concepts of both of the above-mentioned approaches fully addresses the need for prevention strategies and early interventions in order to properly manage children's psychiatric disorders.

Now, how can a definition of child and adolescent psychiatry be provided that, in line with the two main approaches mentioned above, expresses the importance of this field of psychiatry and its true nature and identity, so that both influences of this field of psychiatry at the present time and attention to childhood and adolescence as a human past to be pointed out? In this regard, as a full professor of child and adolescent psychiatry with 32 years of experience in the field of psychiatry, I would

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like to share my own definition of child and adolescent psychiatry, as follows:

“Child and adolescent psychiatry is, indeed, the entry, presence, and intervention in the past but real and objective world of the future human beings.”

By this definition, the individual's past is no longer a world in the unconscious, and vague and out of reach, however a real, objective, and accessible world, but in a human being who has not yet understood his/her future, and still has not experienced the negative consequences of his/her current psychiatric problems belonging to the future. This definition addresses the preventive aspect of the issue so that with early childhood interventions we can prevent further disorders at an older age. Children and adolescents at the present time, which is the past of their future life, are in our hands to prevent the next negative consequences in the future of their lives in any way possible with appropriate interventions. We have this excellent opportunity to resolve their reality of problems at the present time before it is needed that approach to interpretation of their dreams or free associations during their adulthood lives to resolve their conflicts. It is hoped that this definition of child and adolescent psychiatry, beyond a mere descriptive definition of this branch of psychiatry, will show the importance of paying attention to this field, emphasizing child and adolescent psychiatric problems as one of the priorities of mental health in society. Nowadays, despite significant scientific

advances in the diagnosis and treatment of childhood and adolescence psychiatric disorders, providing the care needed by children and adolescents with these disorders is still an important challenge for health care systems.

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