

## Editorial

As from the first issue of 2002 *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* will be published by Blackwell Publishers in Oxford. This move will enable the *Journal* to extend access to the range of services to readers and authors using electronic publishing and the Internet. The *Journal* will undergo a redesign of the page layout. The other journal produced by the Association of Child Psychology and Psychiatry is also switching to Blackwell and will change its title from *Child Psychology and Psychiatry Review* to *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*.

This issue starts with an annotation by Schulte-Körne on the genetics of reading and spelling disorders. He follows up on an annotation in the *Journal* on the same subject over 10 years ago by Bruce Pennington. There is no doubt that reading and spelling disorders show high heritability, although shared environmental influences (such as parents' role as remedial tutors) are also of importance. A number of independent molecular genetic studies have replicated the identification of regions on chromosomes 6 and 15 as promising candidate gene regions. In this way the search for gene localisation of reading and spelling disorder has been more successful than that of molecular genetic studies of other child psychiatric conditions. It is interesting to speculate which advances will be described in an annotation on this subject 10 years from now. Will it indeed be possible to locate dyslexia genes? And will this prove to be beneficial by providing very early intervention at a time when language areas are at a more plastic stage of development?

The practitioner review in this issue is on the psychological management of childhood anxiety disorders. The authors emphasise the superiority of brief psychological treatments for anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. Rather than linking specific standardised treatments to particular diagnoses, the authors stress the importance of basing treatment of anxiety disorders in children upon a careful, theoretically driven assessment and conceptualisation of the individual child and family. In their review the authors provide guidelines for the assessment of the child leading to a treatment formulation. One element they discuss is the assessment of risk and protective factors, illustrated by their own interesting research showing that parents of anxious children are more likely to reciprocate avoidant solutions and are less likely to encourage prosocial solutions than parents of nonanxious children.

A nice illustration of risk and protective factors involved in the emergence of anxiety disorders in children is the article by Ollendick et al. Negative life events set the stage for the development and onset of a variety of fears and anxieties in children and adolescents. However, not all children exposed to stressful events develop fear or related anxieties. In this paper Ollendick et al. showed that level of maternal education moderates this relation such that the effect is observed in children whose mothers possess low levels of education; mothers of children who possess high levels of education are able to buffer them

from such negative outcome. Moreover, the authors showed that negative attributional styles and use of avoidant coping strategies are predictive of fear in children whose mothers possess high levels of education but not in those children whose mothers report low levels of education. Presence of negative life events appear to overshadow attributional style and avoidant coping in children whose mothers possess low levels of education.

This issue also contains a paper on the 4-year prediction of specific language impairment (SLI). Approximately 7% of children experience SLI, with language difficulties now thought to be long term in nature. In the UK, prediction of good and poor outcome can usefully be made to coincide with changes of school placement occurring around 7 years (infant-junior) and 11 years (junior-secondary). Botting et al. found that measures of narrative retelling skills and expressive syntax at 7 years were the strongest predictors of overall prognosis at 11 years. This has implications for policy making and clinical practice. Importantly, long-term provision at secondary school age appears necessary for some children with SLI at primary school age. Further, performance on standardised tests of narrative and expressive syntax can give clinicians and educationalists an accurate indication of which children are most at risk of poor linguistic outcome by the time they reach secondary school.

A number of recent studies have highlighted associations between maternal smoking in pregnancy and risk for antisocial behaviour in offspring. An interesting question is whether or not the risk for early-onset conduct problems is associated with pregnancy smoking per se, possibly reflecting influences of prenatal smoking on foetal brain development. Maughan et al. explored this possibility in data from the 1970 British birth cohort. They too found clear links between parental smoking and risk for early-onset conduct problems. They also found, however, that outcomes depend importantly on whether mothers continued to smoke after the child was born: indeed the key risk seemed associated with *persistent* smoking rather than with smoking in pregnancy per se. This suggests that more proximal risks may centre on other correlated features of persistent smoking, rather than on smoking in pregnancy.

Just how common is Tourette Syndrome (TS) in young people? In their paper Hornsey et al. estimate the prevalence of TS in mainstream schoolchildren aged 13–14 years, and living in West Essex, UK. They found 7 out of 1012 children fulfilled diagnostic criteria for TS. This gives a minimum prevalence of 0.76% and a corrected estimate of 1.85%.

Effective development of executive controls is essential to adaptive functioning in the social, academic, and vocational realms. Child abuse may negatively influence the expected developmental progression of competence in certain executive functions, which in turn could have implications for the nature and persistence of certain forms of psychopathology associated with abuse and poor self-control. In a cross-sectional study, Mezzacappa et al. compared abused and nonabused boys on teacher

ratings, experimenter observations, and on performance tasks challenging the capacity to inhibit an act in progress and to passively avoid responses associated with adverse consequences. They found that abused boys showed diminished improvement with increasing age to the passive avoidance of responses. These results suggest that cognitive development may be adversely altered in abused children, which may influence the nature and persistence of certain forms of psychopathology associated with abuse and poor self-control.

Cruelty to animals is a behaviour that raises concern amongst both the general public and mental health clinicians. Within the child population such behaviour is often associated with wider conduct problems and poor prognosis. Although the low response rates for the normative and reliability studies stress its preliminary nature, the authors provide clinicians with a simple screening device that may help identify children who are engaging in cruelty to animals, thus enabling further assessment and intervention to be implemented.

Rovet and Hepworth compared children with different attention disorders (children with ADHD and children with congenital hypothyroidism) and controls on continuous performance tasks that differed in demands on inhibitory control and memory. The two patient groups both performed more poorly than controls, but differed, with results suggesting a problem holding information in memory for the children with congenital hypothyroidism, and results suggesting impulsivity in ADHD children.

Another contribution in this issue on "measurement" is the article by Manly et al. on the assessment of children's attention. Whereas adult neuropsychology has tended to emphasise psychometric quantification of attentional function within distinct domains, clinical approaches with children have tended to rely on reports of behaviour. Both approaches have their merits and limitations. For example, the predictive value of sometimes

highly abstract test performance for everyday situations in any individual case may be minimal. The best way to tell if a child can concentrate in the classroom may be to ask the child, and his or her friends or teacher. At the same time, if we wrongly assume that a deficient cognitive process is underpinning behavioural problems, we may overlook other crucial factors and develop poor interventions. In their article, Manly et al. describe a new battery (the TEA-Ch) that aims to give clinicians greater specificity in formally assessing children's and adolescents' attention.

Two studies pertained to autism: one by Ruffman et al. on social understanding, and one by Minshew and Goldstein on memory functions, in autistic individuals. The main finding of the paper by Ruffman et al. is that eye gaze is more likely to be correlated with severity of autistic symptoms and is a better correlate of the diagnosis of autism than is verbal performance. This has implications for clinical practice because interventions typically take the form of verbal education into theory of mind concepts. Even if such teaching were to facilitate verbal understanding, it is not clear that it would improve the fundamental lack of social insight in autism. It may be that the core, spontaneous, and perhaps implicit understanding will remain impoverished. The paper by Minshew and Goldstein describes the pattern of intact and impaired memory functions in autism in both the auditory and visual domains. The study demonstrated declining recall with increasingly complex material. The implication of this finding is that memory and learning can be enhanced by simplifying the information, such as simplifying sentence structure. Many of these strategies are in use in classrooms and are implicit in a number of treatment strategies, but this study provides insight into the cognitive basis of the success of these programs.

*Frank C. Verhulst*

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## Special Section on 'Genetics and Neurobiology of Internalising Disorders'

### Call for Papers

The Editors of *JCPP* have recently initiated a series of special issues on topics for which there is a particularly high level of research activity. Topics have been selected where findings are published in a wide range of journals and where there would be special benefit from publishing a collection of high-quality empirical papers in one issue of the *Journal*. The first topic selected was Social Cognition, edited by Jim Stevenson, and will appear in volume 43. The second topic is that of Genetics and Neurobiology of Internalising Disorders and will be edited by Frank Verhulst. The papers will be subjected to the normal refereeing process and, if accepted for publication, will appear together in one special issue of the *Journal*. The usual guidance on manuscript preparation should be followed. Manuscripts should be submitted by 31 May 2002 and should be marked 'For consideration for Special Section on Genetics and Neurobiology'.