What FAPT Should Know About Children's Mental Health

Lee Goldman, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist

Defining Mental Health

- How is mental health defined?
- What do you see to know if a child is mentally healthy?
- Mental health/illness is defined by functioning: behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social

Functioning that defines mental illnesses

- Emotional functioning
  - Depression
  - Mania
  - Anxiety
  - Anger
- Cognitive functioning
  - Fears/Phobias
  - Delusions/Hallucinations
  - Negative or Cognitive Distortions
  - Obsessions

Social and behavioral functioning that helps defines mental illness

- Social functioning
    - Defiance
    - Manipulation
    - Avoidance
    - Dependence
- Behavioral
    - Manifestations of the cognitive, social & emotional

The etiologies of mental illnesses?

- Genetic
- Biological in utero, nutritional, toxins
- Behavioral contingencies
- Cognitive Schemas
- Experiences (i.e. trauma)
- Social (e.g. peers/friends/gangs)
- Family system
- Systemic (i.e. cultural, environment)

Basis for Genetic Contribution

- Occurrrence in families
  - Higher frequency of multiple individuals with a shared illness.
- Concordance studies
  - Primarily seen in Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder
  - Identical twins (~40%) v fraternal twins (~12%).
  - Concordance of doctorates raises questions

Theories around biological bases

- In utero influences
  - Fetal Alcohol Syndrome;
  - Drug exposure
- Medication studies (neurological)
  - Demonstrate the reduction of symptoms;
  - Targeted to impact selected brain chemistry
- Physiological studies
  - Imbalances in neurotransmitters;
  - Brain scans (CAT, MRI, PET)

Behavioral and Cognitive factors

- Behavioral
  - Classical/operant conditioning;
  - Learned helplessness
- Cognition
  - Negative triad;
  - Irrational beliefs;
  - Cognitive distortions;
  - Automatic thoughts

Experiential and Social

- Negative Experiences
  - Attachment;
  - Abuse;
  - Neglect or Rejection;
  - Traumas
- Social
  - Peer pressure;
  - Humiliation/ridicule/bullying;
  - Gang/group belonging

Theories around family systems

- Family patterns thought to contribute to mental illness
  - Abuse;
  - Neglect or Rejection;
  - Triangulation;
  - Double binds;
  - Inverted power structure;
  - Overprotection;
  - Allowing splitting; etc

Systemic influences

- Discrimination
- Inequities
- Resiliency factors
- Educational supports
- Community resources (recreational, religious, etc)

What are some effective treatments?
(evidence-based)

- Multi-Systemic Therapy
- Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster care
- Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy
- Dialectical-Behavioral Therapy
- Functional-Family Therapy
- Wraparound

Mental health is the result of a multi-dimensional process of growth and development involving the interaction and interdependence of all aspects of an individual's life.

Implications for FAPT

- Assessment must be multi-dimensional
- Planning must consider what is amenable to intervention
- Services may need to impact the child/family on multiple levels
- Funding considerations should include the impacts on mandates (i.e. educational or custody)

Valuable resource:

Virginia Commission on Youth Collection of Evidence-based Practices

vcoy.virginia.gov/collection.asp

Systems of Care and Mental Health consultation - Contact information:

Lee Goldman, Ph.D.
(703) 624-0223
lgoldman@cox.net
1495 Chain Bridge Rd.
Suite 202
McLean, VA 22101