

Bipolar Disorder in children and adolescents recognized in the United Kingdom: a clinic-based study

A cross-sectional study of the clinical characteristics of young people with Bipolar Disorder in comparison with young people with Attention Deficit Hyperkinetic Disorder

Summary

Background: Diagnosis of paediatric bipolar disorder in the United States (US) have increased over the last two decades and lots of controversies about the validity of this illness, where high levels of comorbidity with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have also been reported. Little is known about how clinicians are making the diagnosis in young people from the United Kingdom (UK).

Methods: A cross-sectional study of 378 children and adolescents under the age of 18 who received a diagnosis of bipolar disorder or/and ADHD from a total sample of 3586 subjects in a large National Health Service (NHS) mental health trust between 1992 and 2007 was examined and compared by using item sheets.

Results: Children with bipolar disorder were rare in this sample (n=35; 1.0%), particularly under the age of 13 (n=9; 0.3%) and bipolar disorder did not commonly co-occur with ADHD. Children with bipolar disorder presented more often with elated mood (77.1%) and associated with mixed depressed mood (57.1%) and psychotic symptoms (45.7%) compared to children with ADHD. Irritability was commonly reported in both disorders while core ADHD symptoms were prevalent in both conditions but occurred in a greater proportion of children with ADHD.

Conclusion: Our findings suggest that psychiatrists in England use the traditional adult criteria of bipolar disorder rather than the broader criteria being adopted by some practitioners in the US.