

Symposium 13: Young people's mental health: uniting the sciences to find answers

Sponsored by MQ: Transforming Mental Health

Theme: Psychiatry and mental health

Tuesday 11th April, 9:00 – 10:40

75% of mental illness begins before the age of 18 and the life-long impacts on individuals, families and communities are huge. Despite this, young people's mental health research is a major area of unmet research need and we lack even basic understandings of causes, how conditions develop, and the best treatments.

Changing the trajectory of illness during childhood has the potential to have substantial impact. In addition to the distress caused to the individual and their family, mental illness negatively affects educational achievement and employment prospects, and gives increased risks and poorer outcomes in association with co-morbid physical illness. The economic cost of mental illness between 2011 and 2030 has been estimated at losing over £11 trillion from the global economy (Bloom, 2011). There is clearly both a moral and economic imperative to treat, and ultimately prevent, mental illness.

Whilst our understanding of the brain improves there has been a slow down in recent years in innovation and novel approaches to treatment and prevention of mental illness. Furthermore, we lack the evidence of what works to be able to effectively prevent mental illness in young people. The reasons for this can be summarised into three key gaps; addressing these gaps requires joined-up research and a concerted intensive effort.

1. We need to understand how mental illness occurs
2. We need to be able to accurately diagnose those at high risk of becoming ill
3. We need to know what is the best intervention for them

We know that both biological and social factors create risk for mental illness; however, traditional research silos have hampered research. It is only by encouraging scientists to cross disciplines and collaborate that significant progress can be made. Hence in this symposium we bring together speakers who are working at the boundaries of traditional disciplines to stimulate discussions on how we can work towards preventing mental illness in children and young people.

Chair: Dr Sophie Dix (MQ: *Transforming mental health through research, London*)

Speaker 1: Helen Fisher (Kings College London)

'Biopsychosocial approaches to understanding the emergence of psychotic symptoms in childhood and adolescence'

Speaker 2: Jeremy Hall (Cardiff University)

'Genetic and environmental risks in mental illness - translational approaches'

Speaker 3: Andrea Danese (Kings College London)

'The hidden wounds of childhood trauma: psychoneuroimmunology of early stress and the impact on mental health'

Speaker 4: Jim van Os (Maastricht University)

'Approaches to linking genes and environment in neuropsychiatric outcomes'