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Psychiatry and the Viable Fetus: Clinical, Ethical and Legal Issues

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Introduction: Child abuse is a multifaceted issue requiring a multidisciplinary approach. Child abuse has dealt principally with the born child. The landmark Roe v Wade Supreme Court decision created the legal term viable fetus and by prohibiting third trimester abortions implied a state obligation to ensure healthy birth of the viable fetus. In a series of precedent cases, the viable fetuses of pregnant psychiatric women whose current and past behaviors suggested that the fetus would be endangered in utero or shortly after birth were made wards of the court. State laws mandate that a child born on an endangering substance be reported as child abuse. However, based on invasion of privacy, a recent Supreme Court ruling overturned a state statute that required positive pregnancy drug screens be reported to police with criminal charges beyond child abuse. But can and should there be privacy issues in caring for the viable fetus?

Method: Review of Lexis-Nexis and Medline with analysis of legal cases and clinical articles.

Results: The legal, ethical, and clinical issues involved in the rights of the viable fetus are summarized with a focus on protection of the well being of the viable fetus as presented in current legal standards. Specific clinical case material is presented as well as hypothetical discussions of substance abuse and chemotherapy.

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Violence in school as coping-reactions

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According to the scientific research data inclination to violence among preliminary pupils consists 15–37%. There were investigated 226 school maladjusted pupils in the age of 7..10 years, because of deprived conditions. They were divided into 3 groups.

The first group (96) was consisted by children from destructive families. Living in the situation of emotional isolation and physical abusing 73 (76,04%) of them often acted as active offenders, getting satisfaction from their power and filling of control on the other children.

The second group (72) was performed by social orphans where 42 (58, 3%) pupils demonstrate some particularities of violence behavior. Never provoke an incident they accompanied aggressive behavior of active offenders that gave them an opportunity to get rid of the fillings of strain and defect by identifying themselves with more strong leaders.

The third group (58) was children of Russian families that had to migrate to the countries of former Soviet Union. They demonstrated the filling isolation, rejection (“culture shock”) with the high level of anxious, sensitiveness and low self-estimation because of the stress social changes. Such pupils used to be passive victims and tended to respond any threaten by avoid, subjecting or subdepressive episodes. Striving to avoid the violence 37 (68,3%) of them agreed join such behavior on their schoolmates.

The investigation allow to suppose that the foundation of the aggressive behavior in preliminary pupils is the mechanism of protection and trying to find the way social and psychological adaptation. In these cases such mechanisms more corresponded so called coping mechanism, that defined good or bad adoption.

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School particularities of depression

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The revealing of depressive states in childhood is one of the most complex and actual problem of the child psychiatry. The aim of the current investigation was to make it accurate the clinic characteristic and reveal the psychopathological particularities of depressive disorders in preliminary pupils. The object of the conducted study was the clinical investigation's data on 43 patients of the both sex (12 girls and 31 boys), in the age of 7..11, that were studying in secondary schools, and managed as inpatients in Center of Mental Health for children and adolescents. There were used basic psychiatric methods: clinic-anamnestic, clinic-psychopathological and clinic-dynamical ones. Besides, the somatic and neurological statuses were estimated. The results of the study showed that independently from the nosological attributes of depressive state the clinical picture was characterized both the very affective disorders with behavioral deviations and somatovegetative manifestations. All the symptoms were disposed on the level of social-psychological adaptation of these children, and first of all, on their school adjustment. Every case was characterized either with poor school academic progress, in spite of increasing time and efforts to prepare the home tasks or school rejection. Somatovegetative disorders were disposed as complains on different uncomfortable senses and aches in body, head aches and etc. Besides it was obvious the decreasing of appetite and electiveness in eating or increasing of appetite and meal abuse. After all it was revealed the sleeping disorders. The interpretation of depressive states in preliminary pupils often cause difficulties due to changes, rudiments, mosaic of clinical picture. The prevalence of behavioral disorders and somatovegetative components cause the cases of hypodiagnoses of depressive disorders that leads to inadequate therapy. To solve this problem properly it is necessary to join the efforts of psychiatrists, psychotherapists, pediatricians, medical psychologists, teachers and families of children.

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Psychopathology and related predictors in infancy

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Objective: To investigate the prevalence and predictors of psychopathology in Children 18 Months of Age

Method: A birth cohort of 5560 children born in 2000, have been assessed by public health nurses four times in the first year of life, and the mental and physical health of the children are systematically recorded. In a nested case-control study 400 children are sampled at the age of 18 months for a standardised infant-psychiatric assessment of developmental psychopathology and diagnostic classification according to ICD 10 and Diagnostic Classification 0–3.

The prevalence of mental health problems at the age of 18 months are calculated and analysed in relation to problems in the first year of life, reported by the health nurses.

Results: The study runs from July 2001-July 2002. The preliminary results shows that about 20 % of the children examined so far meets the criteria for an infant psychiatric diagnosis. Results concerning predictors and prevalence of psychopathology in the children studied, will be presented at the congress.