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Cumulative trauma, co-morbidity, diagnosis and treatment

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Objective: To discuss cumulative trauma and co-morbidity in the context of diagnosis and effective treatment, particularly in adolescents.

Method: Four adolescents who met more than one Axis 1 diagnosis along with Axis 11 diagnosis who received treatment inappropriately for 3 to 5 years, resulting in increased psychosocial morbidity. A case study of 1 adolescent, Jennifer is described.

Results: Adolescents, like adults can have co-morbid disorders on both Axis 1 and 11 which interfere with diagnosis and response to treatment. Appropriate diagnosis led to appropriate treatment of Jennifer, improvement and return to school.

Conclusions: Clinicians tend to underestimate the severity of adolescent mental health disturbance particularly when complexity of issues presents themselves. Instead a painstaking and thorough assessment of all facets of their presentation needs to be undertaken. This will result in better treatment results and lowered morbidity and better psychosocial functioning.

Biography

Joan Haliburn is a Consultant child, adolescent & family Psychiatrist. She is a Clinical Senior Lecturer at University of Sydney and Senior Supervisor of Complex Trauma Unit, Westmead Hospital and is also in private practice. She was the President of Australia and New Zealand Association of Psychotherapy between 2000 and 2003 and Director of its training division for 10 years. She has published numerous papers, presented workshops and papers in Australia and internationally. She has contributed chapters to several books. She is an International Fellow, American Psychiatry Association and is currently on the Board of Directors, International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation.

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