

## Editorial

It is a great honour to assume the role of joint editor of the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, and inspiring to be part of an enthusiastic and supportive team. The Association for Child Psychology and Psychiatry has shown its open-mindedness and international orientation by electing, for the first time in its history, a joint editor who is not a native speaker of English. I appreciate the trust placed in me, and I hope I will come up to the expectation that, together with my fellow editors, this *Journal* will maintain, or even strengthen, its high standards and influential position in this rapidly changing field of research in child psychology and psychiatry. I follow in the footsteps of Dorothy Bishop, who I got to know when she was a joint editor and I was an author who had submitted an article to this *Journal*, anxiously awaiting the editor's decision. I remember I was struck by the skilful scrutiny and supportiveness of her editorial work and I wondered if I would be able to do equally well if I would be an editor, not knowing that years later I would be in a position to take up this challenge.

This issue is especially voluminous, since we wanted to reduce the number of articles in the pipeline awaiting publication. By temporarily increasing the number of pages, we wanted to ensure that the information the reader reaches is up to date and not obsolete by the time it is published.

Children of opiate and cocaine users are a notoriously difficult group to study, because the dropout rate in this group is high, and the reliability of information from mothers on prenatal drug use is dubious. Hogan's Annotation on the psychological development and welfare of children of opiate and cocaine users is an authoritative account of the state of the art of empirical knowledge concerning this issue. Hogan concludes that there is a lack of clear and consistent findings about the psychological consequences for children of parental drug use. She disentangles the various methodological problems of existing studies, and stresses the importance of the distinction between postnatal social exposure versus prenatal chemical exposure. In her recommendations for future research, she vividly pictures the mechanisms that are possibly involved in deviant social and moral development of children of drug-using parents.

There is an increasing number of children who are called survivors of childhood cancer, Christine Eiser devotes her Practitioner Review to the many problems childhood cancer survivors and their parents can be confronted with, such as infertility, learning problems, and problems in social and emotional functioning. Most problems are the result of treatment, but some, such as difficulties obtaining health and life insurance, are the result of ignorance or prejudice of members of the very same society which enables the kind of specialist treatment that rescued the child, and which should also take

its responsibility to support the child after leaving the hospital. It is sobering to read that the highly sophisticated care in specialist treatment settings, which is protective to the child and the family in the phase following the diagnosis, may prove to be an obstacle once late effects of a chronic nature arise and families become reluctant to bother the specialist staff. Much can still be done to support these children and their families across more extensive periods of time, not only during the therapy phase, but also later.

This issue contains four regular articles on autism. The two by Plaisted et al. deviate from the many studies on autism that focus on autistic individuals' disabilities, and show that autistic individuals do better on certain tasks than developmentally normal individuals. In one study, autistic children were faster in a visual search task than normal controls, possibly reflecting the clinical finding of unusually good abilities in detecting objects of interest in some autistic children. In the other study, autistic adults were better able than nonautistic control adults to discriminate between highly similar novel stimuli. However, the autistic individuals' poorer processing of the common features of stimuli possibly reflects the reduced generalisation of learning that is so common in autistic individuals. The other two articles on autism pertain to the abnormality in social orientation. The study by Swettenham et al. showed the much less spontaneous interest of the autistic child in looking at people versus looking at objects. The study by Ziatas et al. showed autistic children's inability to comprehend the belief terms think, know, and guess, which is interpreted as a sign of an impaired capacity to develop a theory of mind.

A birth cohort, such as the National Child Development Study, is an inexhaustible and rich source of data that can be exploited in an endless number of ways. Possibly the founders of this study were unaware of the many highly relevant questions that, 40 years later, can be tackled using sophisticated statistical techniques and intelligently designed methodologies. The study by Maughan et al. is one such, in which the academic progress of adopted children is compared with that in nonadopted comparisons of children born illegitimately but who were raised by their biological mothers. A number of other studies found a decreasing environmental influence and increasing genetic influence in individual differences in ability and attainment as young people move from childhood to adult life. However, the higher level of academic performance of adopted versus nonadopted children is retained as they become adults. The educational environment of the home and parental interest in the education of their child emerged as strong predictors of favourable outcome. These findings do not support a pessimistic view on environmental influences on the long-term attainment of children. Apparently, children adopted into educationally rich and supportive

environments were better off than their disadvantaged birth comparisons who were raised by their biological mothers.

In the week before writing this editorial, people in The Netherlands were shocked by the news that two 9-year-old boys, who had bullied a 3-year-old girl for many months, one day forcefully drove the child onto very thin ice. The ice broke, and the girl sank into the cold water. By the time the boys had asked for assistance the girl had drowned. Referring to an analogous case in England, where two boys killed a toddler, the issue of prevention of bullying and other forms of aggression among children was raised, as well as the issue of the treatability of highly aggressive children. It is therefore interesting that two studies in this issue pertain to aggressive behaviours in children, both with implications for treatment. Matthys et al. studied disinhibition in conduct disordered children. They claimed that their findings indicate the dominance

of behavioural activation over behavioural inhibition in conduct disordered children, with the implication for treatment that (mild) punishment procedures, such as time out and response cost, are necessary to restore the imbalance between behavioural activation and behavioural inhibition. The study by Cunningham et al. is highly relevant with respect to reducing bullying and playground aggression. Because most aggressive incidents are not detected by adult supervisors, the authors evaluated a student mediation programme in several schools. Student mediation is a school-wide programme in which teams of students are trained to detect, intervene in, and help peers resolve playground conflicts. In this study, student mediators successfully resolved the majority of the conflicts in which they intervened and clearly reduced direct observations of playground aggression.

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