

IN THIS ISSUE

This issue contains two invited reviews, sets of papers examining various aspects of depression, anxiety disorders, and trauma/stress exposure and individual articles examining suicide, development of psychosis, and measurement of spirituality.

Depression

In the first of the two invited reviews, Gilbert (pp. 287–297) reviews a range of diverse evolutionary theories of depression, dividing them into two types: non-social and social. He divides social theories into those that emphasize ‘attachment loss’ and ‘defeat loss’. While we are not yet in a position to choose definitively amongst the range of theories, he concludes that depression can be best understood as emerging from the activation of defensive strategies that have evolved through natural selection.

Two articles in this issue examine different aspects of depression. In the first, Naismith *et al.* (pp. 313–323) show that implicit learning is substantially impaired in severely depressed patients compared to matched controls. They suggest that these results further support the role of frontostriatal dysfunction in depression. In the second article, Salkovskis and colleagues (pp. 325–333) report on a randomized controlled trial of self-help in patients receiving anti-depressant treatment for depression in general practice. While the self-help group reported greater improvement in knowledge about depression, they did not differ from controls on any measures of clinical outcome.

Neurobiology of adolescence

In this issue’s second invited review, Ernst *et al.* (pp. 299–312) present a developmental model for motivated behavior in adolescence. They suggest a triadic, neuroscience-based model that consists of a reward system, hypothesized to be instantiated in the nucleus accumbens, a harm-avoidant system localized in the amygdala and a supervisory system in the prefrontal cortex. They focus first on how this system can explain the adolescent propensity for risk-taking and then review the implications of their model for disorders of mood and anxiety.

Anxiety

Three articles in this issue examine various aspects of anxiety. Bolton *et al.* (pp. 335–344) examine sources of individual differences in early-onset anxiety disorders through maternal assessments for 6-year-old twins. They find rates of anxiety disorders in these children to be as high as, or higher than, those seen in older children. For the two disorders they examined (separation anxiety disorder and specific phobia) heritability estimates were quite high, in the range of 60–80%.

Given that trait anxiety is common and heritable, Lee and colleagues (pp. 345–351) ask the intriguing question of whether being anxious has any beneficial effects. They report that a high level of trait anxiety assessed in adolescence is indeed protective against fatal accidents in younger adult life (although this is also associated later in adulthood with higher rates of non-accident mortality). This paper also relates to the theme of determinants of stress exposure below.

Our third paper on anxiety, by Katon *et al.* (pp. 353–363) reports on a good-sized randomized controlled trial of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and pharmacotherapy *versus* standard treatment for panic disorder in a primary-care setting. They found that active treatment, which could be accomplished with only a modest increase in cost, led to substantial clinical improvement. The cost per quality adjusted life-years was well within the range seen with standard medical treatments such as the statins.

Trauma and stress exposure

Nabi *et al.* (pp. 365–373) examine personality predictors of traffic accidents leading to injury in a large population-based French cohort. Overall levels of aggression/hostility were not predictive of traffic accidents, although subscales measuring irritability and negativism were predictive. The authors conclude that ‘road rage’ and associated constructs are not a simple product of general levels of aggression/hostility.

Continuing in a line of research examining the role of genetic factors in ‘environmental’ variables, Federenko *et al.* (pp. 375–385) explore, using a range of self-report scales, the heritability of perceived stress. A multivariate model applied to all the scales suggested common genetic effects across the scales and modest to moderate heritabilities. In accord with other findings, genetic factors appear to influence the experience of and/or the perception of stress.

In an epidemiologic sample of young Australian adults, Parslow *et al.* (pp. 387–395) examine predictors of PTSD symptoms in individuals exposed to a severe bushfire. They found that rates of symptoms were predicted both by pre-trauma characteristics including sex, personality and psychiatric symptoms as well as the nature of the trauma itself with the latter having overall greater predictive power.

Other topics

This issue concludes with three papers examining a range of topics. Hawton *et al.* (pp. 397–405) follow-up a large English sample of individuals treated for deliberate self-harm over a 20-year period. They found a substantial increase in total mortality that resulted from modest increases in death due to a range of medical conditions and quite large increases in risk for death through suicide and accidents.

Spauwen and colleagues (pp. 407–415) followed up a sample of adolescents growing up in urban and non-urban environments. They attempted to predict interview-assessed psychotic symptoms at follow-up from self-report psychotic symptoms at earlier interviews and urbanicity. They found a significant interaction between these two predictors in that the impact of prior psychotic symptoms was only seen in those living in urban environments. The authors suggest that this result might reflect the action of gene–environment interaction.

In the final paper in this issue, King *et al.* (pp. 417–425) report their development of a self-report scale for spirituality, a construct under-researched in the mental health field. Beginning with 47 items, they end up with a 20-item scale with high test–retest and internal reliability. They suggest that this scale will be useful as a broad measure of spirituality applicable to individuals with and without traditional religious beliefs.