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SCREENING FOR RISK OF LATER MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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Purpose: This is one of the first studies to report that the Achenbach internalising scales were much more effective at identifying those with current comorbid depression and anxiety, rather than individual mood disorder.

Introduction: The Achenbach behaviour checklists (YSR, YASR) are widely used, low cost screening tools used to assess problem behaviour. Several studies report good association between the checklists and psychiatric diagnoses; although with varying degrees of agreement. Most are cross-sectional studies involving adolescents referred to mental health services; few are in large community-based studies. This study examined the usefulness of the Achenbach internalising scales in the primary screening (both predictive and concurrent) for depression and anxiety.

Methods: The sample was 2400 young adults from an Australian population-based prospective birth cohort study. The association between the empirical anxiety and depression scales were individually assessed against DSM-IV depression and anxiety diagnoses. Odds ratios and diagnostic efficiency tests report the findings.

Results: Adolescents with internalising symptoms were twice (OR 2.3, 95%CI 1.7 to 3.1) as likely to be diagnosed with later DSM-IV depression. YASR internalising scale predicted DSM-IV mood disorders (depression OR = 6.9, 95% CI 5.0–9.5; anxiety OR = 5.1, 95% CI 3.8–6.7) in the previous 12 months. The internalising scales were much more effective at identifying those with comorbid depression and anxiety.

Conclusions: Adolescence and early adulthood are key risk periods for the onset of anxiety and depression. This study found that young people with internalising behaviour problems were more likely to have comorbid depression and anxiety DSM-IV disorder.

Literature Reference:

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