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Programming effects of adversity on adolescent adaptive capacity

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2013

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Laceulle, O. M. (2013). *Programming effects of adversity on adolescent adaptive capacity*. University of Groningen.

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Short summary thesis

‘Programming effects of adversity on adolescent adaptive capacity’

Odilia M. Laceulle

This thesis aimed to test the effects of stressful life events (adversity) on changes in adolescent adaptive capacity, that is, the ability of an individual to deal with his or her environment. Adaptive capacity was measured both in terms of temperament and in terms of physiological responses to a laboratory stress task. The main findings point out that adolescents who are exposed to stressful events show changes in temperament and stressreactivity that deviate from changes in temperament and stressreactivity shown by adolescents not exposed to stressful events. For example, exposure to stress was related to increases in frustration instead of decreases shown by other adolescents. Moreover, the non-normative changes in temperament were related to an increased risk for the development of mental health problems. Taken together, these findings contradict the traditional assumption that adaptive capacity (in particular temperament) is stable over time and most important, emphasize the importance of studying changes in temperament and stressreactivity in the context of (stressful) life events.

Korte samenvatting proefschrift

‘Effecten van stressvolle gebeurtenissen op veranderingen in adaptieve capaciteit’

Odilia M. Laceulle

Het doel van dit proefschrift was om te onderzoeken hoe het meemaken van stressvolle gebeurtenissen voorspellend kan zijn voor veranderingen in adaptieve capaciteit tijdens de adolescentie. Adaptieve capaciteit zegt iets zeggen over iemands vermogen zich aan te passen aan een (veranderende) omgeving en kan op verschillende manieren onderzocht worden. In dit proefschrift hebben we gekeken naar temperament en naar lichamelijke stressreacties op een stressvolle laboratoriumtaak. De resultaten laten zien dat adolescenten die stressvolle gebeurtenissen hebben meegemaakt andere veranderingen laten zien in temperament en stressreactiviteit, dan adolescenten die geen of weinig stressvolle gebeurtenissen hebben meegemaakt. Bijvoorbeeld, adolescenten die stress meemaken rapporteren meer frustratie op 16, dan op 11-jarige leeftijd, terwijl jongeren die geen stress meemaken juist minder snel gefrustreerd zijn naarmate ze ouder worden. Uit het onderzoek kwam ook naar voren dat adolescenten die deze non-normatieve veranderingen in temperament laten zien, een grotere kans hebben om psychische aandoeningen te ontwikkelen. Samen genomen toont dit proefschrift aan dat adaptieve capaciteit (en in het bijzonder temperament) minder stabiel is dan vaak wordt gedacht en dat het belangrijk is om veranderingen in temperament en stressreactiviteit te onderzoeken in de context van stressvolle gebeurtenissen.