



Pediatric Bipolar Disorder: A Practical Guide for Clinicians

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Abstract

Pediatric bipolar disorder (PBD) is a controversial clinical entity and it still needs to be satisfactorily defined. Having a polymorphous presentation and associated with numerous symptoms of comorbid psychiatric illnesses often diagnosed during childhood and adolescence, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, its symptoms do not completely parallel those of bipolar disorder in adults. The clinician must be able to reach a diagnosis of PBD in the presence of fluctuating and atypical symptoms, especially in children, who tend to experience mixed episodes and very rapid cycles. Historically a key symptom for diagnosing PBD is episodic irritability. Proper diagnosis is critical due to the gravity of its prognosis. Clinicians may find supporting evidence for a diagnosis through careful study of the medical and developmental history of the young patient in addition to psychometric data. Treatment prioritizes psychotherapeutic intervention and assigns important roles to family involvement and a healthy lifestyle.

Keywords Pediatric bipolar disorder · Labile affect · Psychomotor agitation · Disinhibition · Family

Introduction

It is estimated that ~ 60% of patients suffering from bipolar disorder (BD) in adulthood exhibited symptoms before the age of 19, and that 20% to 40% of bipolar adults showed early signs in childhood. The prevalence of pediatric bipolar disorder (PBD) is estimated to be 3.9%, with peak incidence during adolescence [1]. At as early as 6 years of age, BD may be clinically identified, and hypomanic clinical presentations have been described in 4-year-olds. Diagnosing this prepubertal form is a major challenge. Due to polymorphous, indistinct symptoms that differ quantitatively from those of adult BD, PBD is especially difficult to diagnose. Individuals with the disorder may also present with any of several comorbid psychiatric illnesses of childhood and adolescence. In spite of this reality, PBD has yet to be assigned unique diagnostic criteria: the DSM-5 makes no distinction vis-à-vis adult BD [2]. Although it is rare, the stakes for its correct diagnosis are high. PBD is a chronic disorder that severely alters cognitive and emotional functioning in youth, with substantial repercussions on academic and social life. In the face of pronounced, atypical symptoms observed in their

child patients, clinicians must be able to distinguish PBD from a range of differential diagnoses. An early treatment specific to the disorder may then be implemented, thereby substantially improving prognosis and lowering the risk of suicide. Family involvement is a key element of therapy that affects the trajectory of the disorder.

PBD: A Complex Diagnosis

PBD remains greatly underdiagnosed because of the complexity of its clinical presentation, with symptoms often identical to those of other childhood psychiatric disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Clinicians must aim to prevent the disorder, sparing patients its serious consequences, and avail themselves of the best therapeutic tools for its treatment when diagnosed. It is important to note that the clinical presentation of PBD in prepubertal children differs from that in adolescents, the latter being more similar to BD in adults. In adolescence, symptoms become very pronounced and the criteria for diagnosis more conspicuous. We will describe PBD in children and adolescents while focusing on clinical characteristics allowing early prepubertal diagnosis.

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Clinicians Practical Guide To Attentiondeficithyperactivity Disorder

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