



Data Trends

Summaries of research on mental health services for children and adolescents and their families

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Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., & Walters, E. E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, *62*, 593-602

Wang, P. S., Berglund, P., Olfson, M., Pincus, H. A., Wells, K. B., & Kessler, R. C. (2005). Failure and delay in initial treatment contact after first onset of mental disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, *62*, 603-613

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This *Data Trends* presents two articles about the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R). The NCS-R is the first national study of adults who were asked to reflect on childhood experiences with mental health issues. Half of all mental health problems begin by age 14, and the median age for some childhood illnesses begins at age 11.

Face-to-face interviews with respondents ($N = 9282$) were conducted between February 2001 and April, 2003. During Part I of the survey DSM-IV diagnoses were generated by the World Health Organization Composite International Diagnostic Interview. Part II asked about risk factors, consequences, additional disorders and other variables of interest. Respondents between the ages of 18-44 were asked about their age at the first onset of symptoms and their age when they first sought treatment for a disorder.

Half of all respondents who had mental health problems at some time in their life reported symptoms that began by the age of 14. The median age for the onset of social phobia was 13 years. The median age for the onset of impulse control disorders and anxiety problems was 11 years. Age of onset was associated with a very narrow age range for childhood disorders: impulse control problems tended to develop between the ages of 7-15; substance abuse disorders between the ages of 18-27 years, and mood disorders between the ages of 18-43. Overall, the median length of time between the onset of problems and treatment was about 10 years, indicating a significant lag between onset and treatment.

These important articles provide an updated view of childhood mental health problems and their age of onset. Half of all lifetime cases of mental health problems began by the age of 14. In order to reduce the prevalence of mental health disorders, interventions must begin during adolescence.