



Researchers COMPARE mental illness transmission routes from parent to child

By Dr. Jessica Edwards

An estimated 25% of children in Germany live with a parent who is affected by mental illness. These children are at a high risk of psychological and developmental disorders, including severe mental illness (SMI).¹ Indeed, the trans-generational transmission of mental disorders (TTMD) seems to be a major risk factor for SMI development in children.² Children of parents with a mental illness (COPMI) are thus likely to comprise the next generation of patients with a mental illness and represent a target high-risk group for prevention programs.

In 2009, Hosman *et al.*, proposed a model to explain TTMD.³ By this model, TTMD comprises four major domains: the parent, family, child and social environment. These domains interact with their respective systems and are influenced by five transmission mechanisms: genetics, prenatal factors, parent-child interactions, family, and social factors. While much research has provided support for these individual domains and transmission mechanisms, research testing the TTMD model as a whole to explain SMI risk in affected children is lacking. Earlier this year, researchers in Germany announced the development of the randomized controlled multicenter study known as COMPARE — **C**hildren **O**f **M**entally **I**ll **P**arents **A**t **R**isk **E**valuation. The study aims to test the components of the TTMD model and establish the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of a high-quality randomized controlled trial (RCT) that aims to interrupt TTMD in COPMI.

As can be found in their *Clinical Study Protocol* published in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, Hanna Christiansen and colleagues will address five key sub-topics in the model-testing part of COMPARE. The first, known as COMPARE-family, will test the TTMD from parents to children. This sub-topic comprises the central RCT to COMPARE, testing the effects of high quality parental cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) versus parental CBT plus Positive Parenting Program (CBT+PPP) on children. COMPARE-emotion will use behavioural measures, peripheral physiological markers and neuro-imaging techniques to assess emotion processing and regulation in COPMI and the impact on TTMD. COMPARE-interaction will investigate parent–infant interactions, and how maternal co-morbid depression and anxiety in the peri-partum period affects infant development. COMPARE-work will assess the working conditions of mentally ill parents compared to healthy parents and the effects that working conditions have on the family. Finally, COMPARE-school will investigate the effects of parental mental illness on youth academic achievement, psychosocial adjustment and child well-being.

The researchers hope that COMPARE will establish specific transmission profiles for a range of parental disorders with or without co-morbidities and will identify the risk profiles for children at high versus low risk. Gaining this information is anticipated to improve the development of targeted TTMD interventions.



Referring to:

Christiansen, H., Reck, C., Zietlow, A-L., Otto, K., Steinmayr, R., Wirthwein, L., Weigelt, S., Stark, R., Ebert, D.D., Buntrock, C., Krisam, J., Klose, C., Kieser, M. & Schwenck, C. (2019), *Children of Mentally Ill Parents at Risk Evaluation (COMPARE): Design and Methods of a Randomized Controlled Multicenter Study – Part I*. *Front. Psychiatry* 10:128. doi:10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00128.

See also:

Stracke, M., Gilbert, K., Kieser, M., Klose, C., Krisam, J., Ebert, D.D., et al. (2019), *COMPARE Family (Children of Mentally Ill Parents at Risk Evaluation): a study protocol for a preventive intervention for children of mentally ill parents (triple P, evidence-based program that enhances parentings skills, in addition to gold-standard CBT with the mentally ill parent) in a multicenter RCT–part II*. *Front. Psychiatry*. 10:54. doi: 10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00054.

German Clinical Trials Register, *Clinical Trial Registration: DRKS-ID: DRKS00013516*. https://www.drks.de/drks_web/navigate.do?navigationId=trial.HTML&TRIAL_ID=DRKS00013516.

References:

¹ Wille, N., Bettge, S. & Ravens-Sieberer, U. (2008), *Risk and protective factors for children's and adolescents' mental health: results of the BELLA study*. *Eur Child Adolescent Psychiatry*. 17:133–47. doi: 10.1007/s00787-008-1015-y.

² van Santvoort, F., Hosman, C.M., Janssens, J.M., van Doesum, K.T., Reupert, A. & van Loon, L.M. (2015), *The impact of various parental mental disorders on children's diagnoses: a systematic review*. *Clin. Child Family Psychol. Rev*. 18:281–99. doi: 10.1007/s10567-015-0191-9.

³ Hosman, C.M.H., van Doesum, K.T.M. & van Santvoort, F. (2009), *Prevention of emotional problems and psychiatric risks in children of parents with a mental illness in the Netherlands: I. The scientific basis to a comprehensive approach*. *Aust e-J Advancement Ment Health*. 8:250–63. doi: 10.5172/jamh.8.3.250.