

CHILD DEPRESSION IN THE LAST QUARTER OF CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of child depression (CD) literature in recent decades is here analyzed, applying a quantitative approach to data gathered from PsychInfo and PsychLit databasis. A bibliometric study was applied to detect main research authors and groups, core journals, and most significant themes searched in the context.

It has been stressed the change taking place in this literature, since the moment the CD concept began to receive general support from specialists. The turning point may be placed in the middle '70 s, and some theoretical explanation for the change is offered here. The rise of cognitive paradigm strongly helped the acknowledge of the new syndrom, after being rejected under behaviorist and psychodynamic reasons.

Currently it receives large attention in literature, and specialization has grown in the last decade.

Introduction.

The landscape of mental perturbations has changed in the past decades. Many changes have taken place in it. One of the most remarkable has been the acceptance of the child depression syndrom by the scientific community, as the result of a long-lasting debate.

The wellknown philosopher Ortega-Gasset, claimed that, "man does not have nature but he has history". Such assertion may be referred to all human affairs, included pathologies, largely dependent upon historical factors.

Be it as it may, the truth is that the concept of child depression can only be fully understood when placed in a historical context. Let us trace here the main lines of its recent development.

HISTORY

In this historical approach, the first question to be answered, strange as it may now sound, is this: does child depression exist?

Here, as in some other cases, the real existence of this pathological entity was unaccepted for strict theoretical reasons. The scientific community maintained, on presumed solid grounds, that child depression did not exist.

Three different roots may be found in the rise of child depression concept: these are Psychiatry, Psychology and Ethology. Although each field has its own specificity, some connections between them may be traced, offering a coherent view of the whole story.

The psychiatric scene was largely dominated by the dynamic view of Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud (1914) as it is wellknown, conceived depression as a loss of self-esteem, since children have their ego not yet constituted, they cannot develop a depression pathology. The impossibility of the syndrome clearly resulted from that theory. This position was maintained for decades, and can also be found as far as 1966, in Rie's work.

Just after the World War II, American psychology was influenced by Behavioristic thesis. It has been generally acknowledged that B.F. Skinner (1938) was not interested in any inner psychological process. On such grounds, depression was not an acceptable concept to be referred to the studied behaviors.

This means that under the two largely accepted "paradigms" in the American scene, the children depression syndrome had no place to stand.

But despite theories, in the real world, depressive children existed, so clinicians fought against those orthodox positions, which denied its existence. As a result, things began to change in the 40's in several fields of applied psychology.

The most well known case is Spitz's one (1945). Based on behavioral observations of children in institutions, he sustained the existence of depression in very young children and called it analytic depression. The disorder was produced by the loss of the mother. First, the children protested the loss, then they responded with more protests and finally with depression. Bowlby (1951), from the same theoretical position, sustained the same thesis and stressed the need for strong attachment bonds between mother and children, to create the necessary conditions to decrease the possibility of depression, which is due to a loss of confidence in the possibility of recuperating the mother. Glasser (1966) from the same theoretical frame speaks of Masqued Depression, in an effort to explain the difficult CD diagnostic.

Years before, from a correlational framework, Akerman (1942) conducted factorial studies of lists of problems shown by school children: crying, bad moods and retraction; and called it depression. The same data appeared in other parallel research carried out later (Wiggins & Winder, 1961; Siegelman, 1966). This factor was consistently found in correlational studies conducted with regard to child behavior (Achenbach, 1978).

Coming from ethological research, in the early 60's, Harlow (1961) found in monkeys separated from their mothers the same behavioral pattern described by Spitz and Bowlby. Findings were replicated by Hinde & Spence-Booth (1971) and

others, and the experimental nature of those data coming from the field of comparative psychology had a strong impact on scientists. Given that monkeys were capable of developing depressive symptoms, why not to think about the possibility of a similar process in human children?

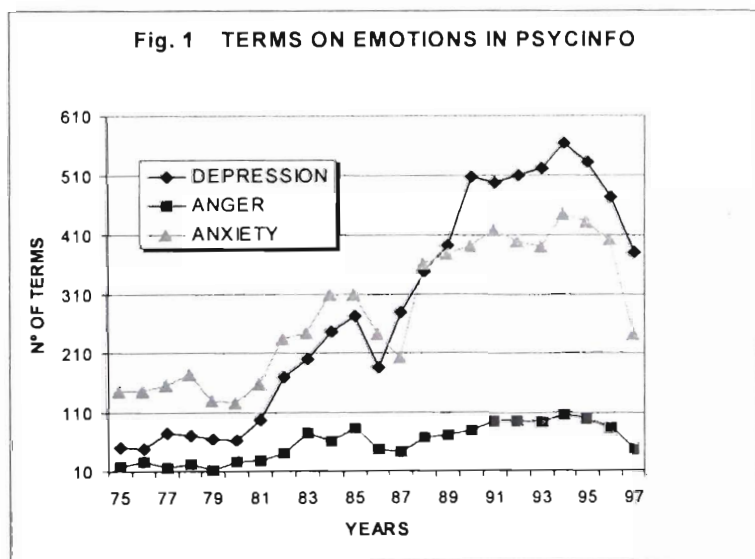
However, the final acceptance of a child depression concept took place under the influence of the cognitive paradigm, the new rising star well in the 60's. Cognitivism allowed for the study of internal processes - Seligman's (1975) studies on learned helplessness are a good example of it -, and in so doing, it made no objection to the reception of that one..

A historical landmark in the acceptance of the concept has been the 4th UEP Congress of Stockholm. Its proceedings were published by Annel in 1972. Three years later, in 1975, the National Institute of Mental Health formally accepted that nosological entity.

We are going to analyze the scientific literature appeared in the 1975-1997 period, to present in an objective way the evolution of this field.

THE EVOLUTION OF LITERATURE ON CD.

The uses of the term "depression" in the scientific literature gathered in the PsychInfo data basis, permit to infer the evolution of the studies on child depression. According to the following data (see fig. 1)

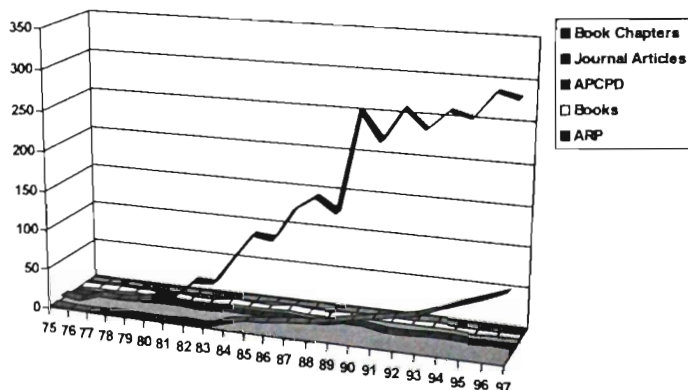


in the early 80's the word "depression" grew, having a pike on 1989. When compared its differential growth with the one of others children's emotions like

anger and anxiety, depression appears as being the most frequently studied one, specially in recent years .

Type of publication is also to be considered here (See fig. 2).

Fig.2 Evolution of Literature of Child Depression

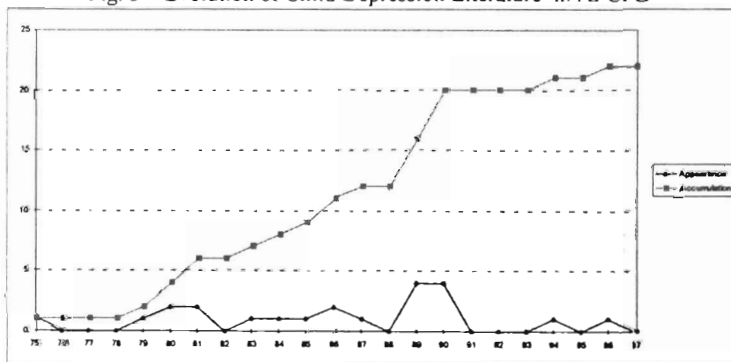


APCPD = Annual Progress in Child Psychology and Development

ARP = Annual Review of Psychology

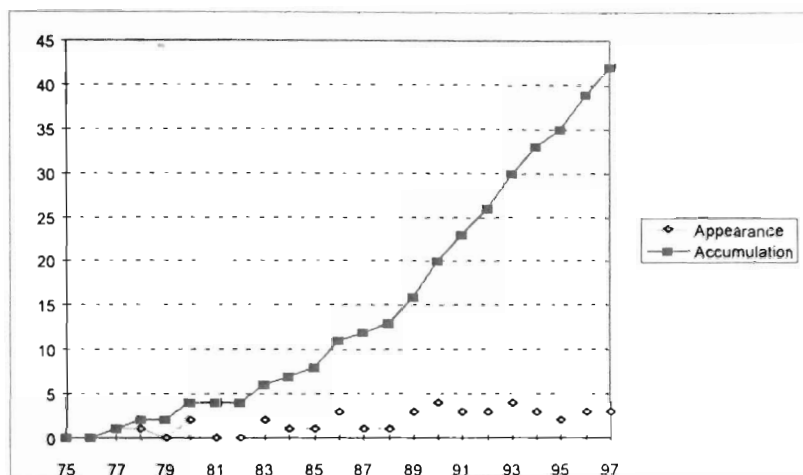
The great change in this field takes place in journal articles category, where in the '80 s a sharp slope has risen . In contrast, other sources like Annual Review of Psychology (2 articles) are less representative. By the contrary, Annual Progress of Child Psychiatry and Development (see fig. 3) and book production (see fig. 4) offer a continuous pace, with an average of 2/3 units yearly on the same period.

Fig. 3 Evolution of Child Depression Literature in APCPD



Annual progress in Child Psychiatry and Development

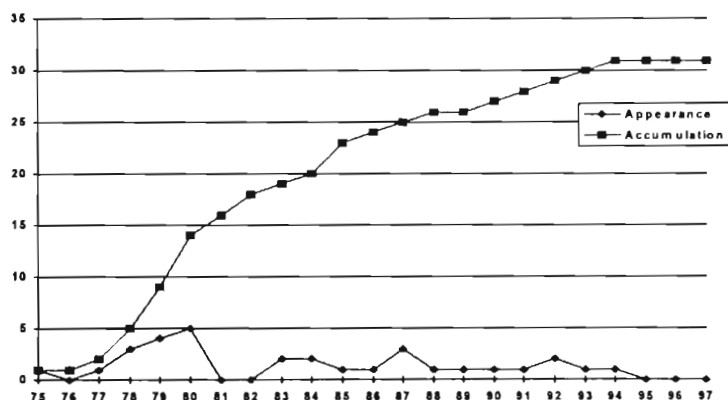
Fig. 4 Evolution of Child Depression Literature (Books)



The Proceedings of the NIMH meeting about CD, held in 1975 was the first book, and it appeared in 1977.

Research has been made possible through the construction of assessment tools allowing an empirical and quantitative approach to individual cases. The pick on tool production took place in 1980 (see fig. 5)

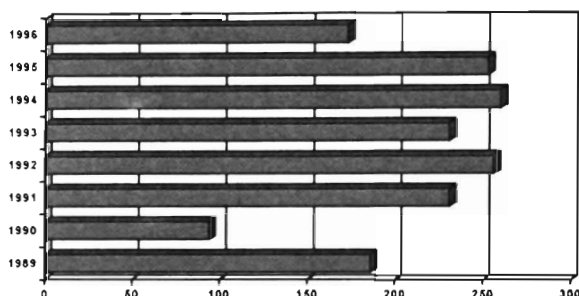
Fig. 5 Specific tools of child depression assessment



, long before the pickes for the rest of categories (1989 for the Annual Progress

in Child Psychiatry and Development, 1990 for books and 1996 for journal articles). It is evident that 1989 represents an inflection point on literature of CD. If we throw a closer look at the PsycLit data corresponding to the period 1989-1996, we find that there are an average of 200 articles yearly, with a pick on 1994 and a remarkable lowering in 1990 (see fig. 6) :

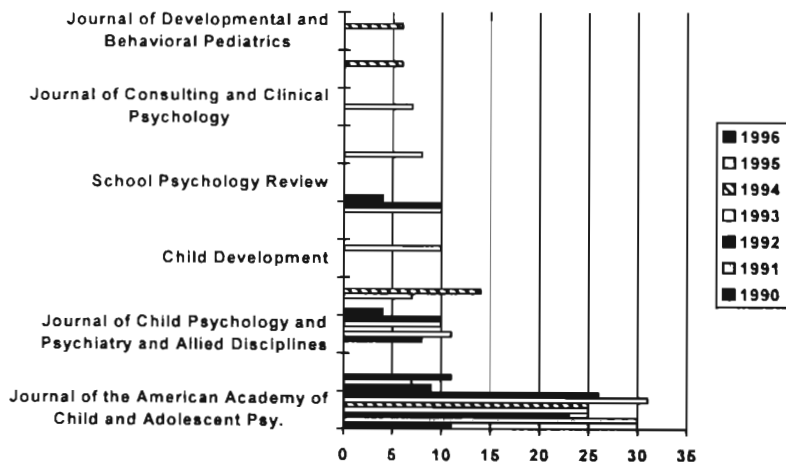
Fig. 6 Articles by Year¹



¹ Precedence of information contained in all graphics: PsycLIT Database (A.P.A.).

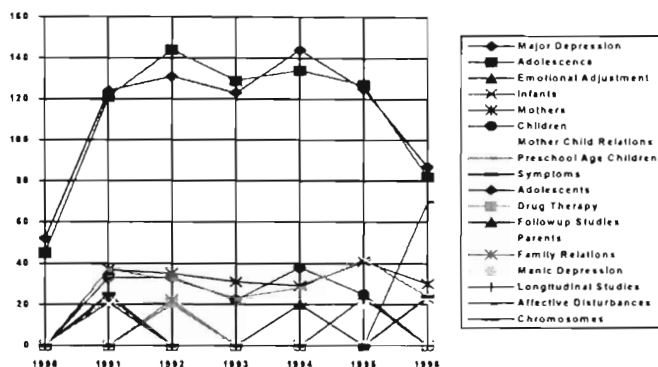
It is interesting to determine the most productive Journals offering articles on CD (see fig. 7). These are (for the period 1990-96) the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, at the top of the list, and *Development and Psychopathology*, the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* and the *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, -all of them are, as it may be seen, American journals specifically dedicated to child research and, at least two of them, placed on the psychiatric field.

Fig. 7 Most Productive Journals (1990-1996)



Complementary information may be gained from the analysis of the most frequently employed keywords to describe the articles content. (see fig. 8).

Fig. 8 Most Frequent Keywords (1990-1996)¹



¹ Only terms cited twenty times or more in a year.

At the top of the list, we find "major depression" and "adolescence"

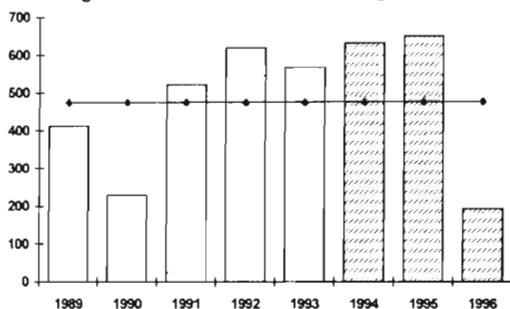
The other topics have less impact, and among them are included "Mothers", "Family relations", and, in the last year, the "Affective disturbances" term grew dramatically. It is clear from this that most of research has been carried out in adolescent major depression, taking into account family variables. As far as the growth of "affective disturbance", it is probably due to the new DSM-IV taxonomy, in which this term has been largely employed. A complementary information may be gained examining the appearance of new descriptors in the collected data. In our view, the "mother" concept has been continuously present in research, while "chromosomes", "affective disturbance" or "longitudinal studies" only recently have been taken into account. (see fig. 9).

Fig. 9 Appearance of Issues

1996	Chromosomes - Affective disturbance - Longitudinal studies
1995	Comorbidity - Behavior problems - Drug abuse
1994	Emotional adjustment - Stress
1993	Anxiety neurosis - Attention deficit disorders
1992	Family relationship
1991	Symptoms - Drug - Follow-up studies
1990	At risk population
1989	Mother

An extremely interesting information is related to authors producing research on the field. The average number of authors per year is about 475 (see fig. 10).

Fig. 10 Authors Annual Average



For comparison, we divided the period 1989-1996 in two halves (see fig. 11 & 12). According to our results, while in the first one the most productive author was Neal D. Ryan (with 13 publications, most of them about psychobiological bases of child depression and appearing in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*).

Fig. 11 Most Productive Authors (1989-1992)

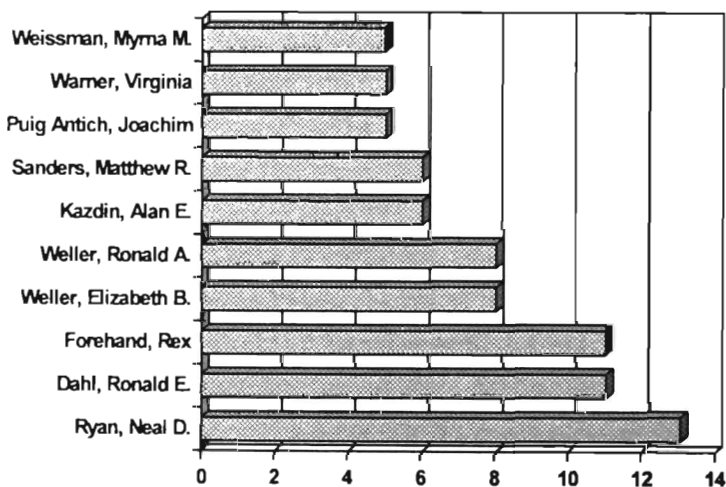
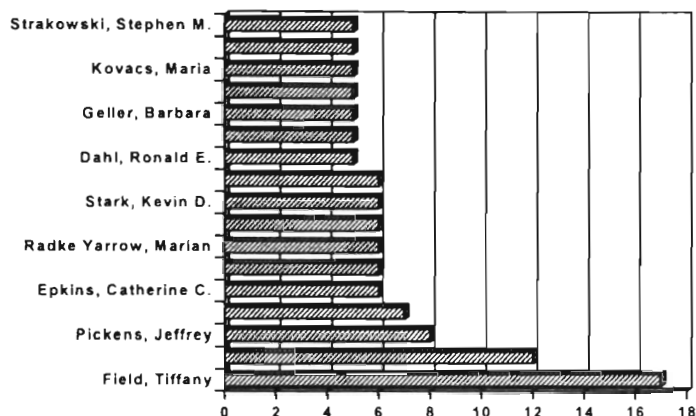


Fig. 12 Most Productive Authors (1993-1996)



In the second sub-period (1993-96) the most productive author is Tiffany Field (with 17 publications, mainly on depression and parents-children interactions). In both lists (that include people with at least 5 articles in a three years span) only three names are mentioned: Elisabeth B. Weller, Ronald E. Dahl, and the above mentioned Neal D. Ryan.

The world distribution of authors and groups of authors doing research in CD offers an interesting panorama. While the bulk of articles have been produced in US and Canada, there are also papers coming from nine other countries: Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand, Sweden, Poland, Russia, Spain and Italy, and Japan. We may say that the research on CD is spreading all over the world.

CONCLUSIONS.

To conclude, let us summarize the main results of our exam of current CD literature.

CD concept as a category for child psychopathology was accepted by scientific community in the middle of the 70's. In previous time, only some individual efforts may be found on this field. It is clear that, on that point, the negative influences coming from various theoretical frameworks may be detected.

Since the moment the CD syndrome was accepted, the literature on this topic, mainly in its form of journal articles, grew dramatically, specially from 1989 on. It is also possible to trace the communication network, in which a few wellknown periodicals are the leading channels through which a large volume of information flows.

Analysis of the topic has shown that people dealing with it normally belong

to the fields of child psychiatry and child psychopathology, usually relating it with other developmental questions. Specialization has become normal in the field, and it is possible to find a few groups of well dedicated authors working on these matters, while a large number of contributors only appear making sporadic contributions. On the whole, the scene seems to be dominated by groups working in American centers, although CD has awoked a worldwide interest.

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