

Acute and Transient Psychoses

Brief and acute psychotic disorders with a short duration and a generally good prognosis have long intrigued psychiatrists. Although they are included in internationally accepted diagnostic systems, understanding of these disorders remains minimal. This book is the first comprehensive overview of the clinical features, biology, course and long-term outcome of brief and acute psychoses. The authors review the world literature on the topic and they also present data from their own longitudinal study – the most complete investigation of this group of disorders so far conducted. The book concludes with considerations of the nosological status of brief and acute psychoses and their impact on our understanding of the continuum of psychotic and affective disorders.

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Andreas Marneros and Frank Pillmann

Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle-Wittenberg, Germany



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No one with experience will deny that the cases are upsettingly frequent in which, despite the most careful clinical observation, it seems impossible to arrive at a definite judgement [with regard to the differentiation of manic-depressive illness and dementia praecox].

Emil Kraepelin 1920

The nomenclature of these acute disorders is as uncertain as their nosological status [. . .]. Systematic clinical information that would provide definitive guidance on the classification of acute psychotic disorders is not yet available, and the limited data and clinical tradition that must therefore be used instead do not give rise to concepts that can be clearly defined and separated from each other.

World Health Organization 1992

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Preface

The road to the modern definitions of Brief and Acute Psychoses has been very long. Efforts to define and understand such brief, acute and good prognosis psychoses are very old-fashioned. Certainly, the definitions of ICD-10 for ‘Acute and Transient Psychotic Disorders’ and that of DSM-IV for ‘Brief Psychotic Disorder’ are not unchangeable and are also not final diagnoses. It could be assumed that even the present diagnostic algorithms will be changed. The main reason for the expected changes is that only very little and unsystematic research on this topic exists. We know really very little about the clinical aspects, the precipitants or the longitudinal prognosis. We hardly know anything about their aetiology, biology and genetics. But the relevance of such brief, acute, transient, good prognosis or ‘atypical’ psychoses for researchers and for clinicians is clear. No serious biological, genetic, pharmacological, prognostic and clinical research is possible if we do not have exact definitions or if we do not have exactly defined homogeneous groups of patients. Voluminous, diffuse and elastic groups of mental disorders called schizophrenia or affective disorders are a main handicap for effective research. But we also need exact clinical diagnoses and psychopathological understanding of the so-called ‘atypical psychoses’ because of clinical, therapeutic and prognostic aspects affecting long-term plans of patients and their relatives. Future research must seek aetiological, biological or genetic similarities and differences between the ‘atypical’ and ‘typical’ psychoses. This book might be a contribution to such efforts.

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