Child and adolescent psychiatry in the Netherlands

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Definition, historical development, and current situation

Definition

The field of child and adolescent psychiatry covers diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and rehabilitation of psychiatric disturbances in children and adolescents from birth up to the age of eighteen. Child and adolescent psychiatry is not a separate specialism but a super specialism. This means that the postgraduate training for child psychiatrists takes a total of 5 1/2 years; 3 1/2 years being devoted to general psychiatry and two years to child and adolescent psychiatry. Training is given only in recognized training centers. These centers are inspected every five years by a visitation committee that monitors the standards of training.

Historical development

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the society in the Netherlands, as in the rest of Europe, began to realize that children had their own needs and demands. This led to the introduction of the Child Laws, compulsory education, and the establishment of children’s hospitals. Psychiatry, too, began to take an interest in children. Mrs. N. C. Bakker, the wife of the future professor H. C. Rümke, opened a separate outpatient clinic for children in the Valerius Clinic in Amsterdam in 1919. Mrs. O. van Andel-Ripke did the same at the psychiatric-neurological university clinic in Utrecht in 1920. Influenced by the American Child Guidance Movement, the first child guidance center providing help for children with behavioral difficulties was established in Amsterdam in 1928 under the leadership of Mrs. N. C. Thibaut. This initiative was quickly followed in other large cities. The child guidance centers, which worked along multidisciplinary lines, later played a major role in the development of child and adolescent psychiatry. The pioneers of child psychiatry, Th. Hart de Ruiter, L. N. J. Kamp, and E. C. M. Freyling Schreuder, all worked part-time in such centers. In 1984, after a reorganization of the area of mental healthcare in the Netherlands, the child guidance centers were disbanded and their work was incorporated into the activities of the RIAGG (the Regional Institutions of Ambulatory Mental Health Care).

In the 1930s, outpatient clinics for children were created as part of the university psychiatric clinics (F. Grewel in Amsterdam 1931, E. D. E. A. Carp in Leiden 1936, and H. C. Rümke in Utrecht 1938). At the same time, the first university child psychiatry facilities were established (by Grewel in Amsterdam from 1936 to 1938,
by Carp in Leiden from 1937 to 1946, and by Rümke, in collaboration with Kamp, in Utrecht from 1940 up to the present day). The outbreak of the Second World War and the German occupation of the Netherlands all but put a stop to the further growth of child psychiatry in the Dutch universities. After the war, a number of teaching posts were recognized (L. N. J. Kamp in Utrecht and A. D. van Krevelen in Leiden 1950; Grewel in Amsterdam 1954). Soon after, the first full university lecturers in child and adolescent psychiatry were appointed (Hart de Ruiter in Groningen, 1951; van Krevelen in Leiden and Kamp in Utrecht, 1956). In 1956, in Groningen, Dr. Hart de Ruiter became the first professor of child psychiatry. The appointment of Kamp in Utrecht followed in 1964 and, at present, seven of the eight medical faculties in the Netherlands have a chair of child and adolescent psychiatry.

Child and adolescent psychiatrists also began to organize themselves within their professional organization, the Dutch Society of Psychiatry founded in 1877. In 1948, the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Section was set up with L. N. J. Kamp as its first chairman. The section organizes study groups, conferences, and congresses and, at present, with a membership of 250, it is the official platform of child and adolescent psychiatry in the Netherlands. In spite of several attempts, child and adolescent psychiatry has never been recognized as an independent medical specialism. However, since 1987, it is possible to become registered as a child and adolescent psychiatrist after completion of a two-year training.

The Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Section is a member of the International Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions (IACAPAP), of the European Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (ESCAP), and of the World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH). In 1960, the section organized the IACAPAP congress in Scheveningen, chaired by Professor D. A. van Krevelen and in 1995 it organized the 10th ESCAP congress in Utrecht, chaired by Professor H. van Engeland.

The publication of “The Dutch Textbook of Special Child Psychiatry” by D. A. van Krevelen in 1950 was an important milestone in the development of child psychiatry in the Netherlands. In 1972, “Hoofdlijnen van de Kinderpsychiatrie” (Main Themes of Child Psychiatry) by Th. Hart de Ruiter and L. N. J. Kamp was published, a book that had an enormous influence on the generation of child and adolescent psychiatrists of that time. In the 1980s, “The Manual of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry” by J. A. R. Sanders-Woudstra and H. de Witte gained great influence. Recently, “Child and Adolescent Psychiatry” by F. Verhey and F. C. Verhulst, and “Psychopharmacology in Children” by R. Minderaa and C. Ketelaars were published. All of these books figure prominently in the medical curricula as well as in the training of psychologists, remedial educationalists, and social workers. Because Dutch is spoken in few countries, it took a long time before child psychiatry in the Netherlands had its own journal. This was at last the case in the 1980s. In a fruitful cooperation with the fields of remedial education and developmental psychology, the journals “Tijdschrift voor orthopedagogiek en kinderpsychiatrie” (Journal for Remedial Education and Child Psychiatry) and “Kind en adolescent” (Child and Adolescent) were established. However, these days, the most important scientific work of the Dutch child psychiatrists is published in the major, English-language, international journals.