Background and aims:
Disruptive Behavior Disorders (DBD) are severe mental heterogeneous disorders involving deficits in regulating emotions and behavior. In a subgroup, etiological risk factors and callous-unemotional traits are childhood precursors of the affective dimension of psychopathy.

The present study aims to provide an overview of the literature regarding trajectories of callous-unemotional traits in children with DBD into adulthood.

Methods:
A nonsystematic review of the literature was performed using PubMed database applying the terms: “Disruptive behavior disorders”, “Callous-Unemotional traits”, “Antisocial behavior”, “Trajectories”, “Risk markers”, “Childhood” and “Adulthood”.

Discussion:
Callous-unemotional traits are subject to change across development and they do not represent an unmodifiable route to psychopathy.

Studies show that many DBD children have unstable levels of callous-unemotional traits. This is consistent with the fact that traits may improve with behavioral and pharmacological treatments.

Early prevention and intervention efforts have shown promising effects for youth with high levels of callous-unemotional traits.

Improvements in children’s self-regulation skills can occur through direct work with children or via parenting programs.

Preschool interventions and parent support for at-risk children were linked to fewer violent offenses during adolescence and into adulthood.

Low family’s socio-economic status is the most important predictor of high callous-unemotional traits.

Early-onset conduct problems and Hyperactivity comorbidity have been reported as mostly influential risk factors.

Boys later arrested for violent behavior were more likely to demonstrate high levels of oppositional behavior, poor emotion-regulation skills, low levels of family income and quality care in the home during early childhood.

Higher levels of callous-unemotional traits

Increased risk of maintaining disruptive behavior in adulthood

Higher risks for the community

Conclusion:
Early and timely identification of precursors is important and influence prognosis. Further studies are needed to determine target developmental periods for interventions to prevent the trajectory into adult psychopathy.

References:
2. G. Masi et al., Trajectories of callous–unemotional traits from childhood to adolescence in referred youth with a disruptive behavior disorder who received intensive multimodal therapy in childhood. Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment (2018) http://dx.doi.org/10.2147/NDT.S164032

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