



Conduct Disorder



The upcoming fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) adds a descriptive features specifier to the diagnosis of conduct disorder for individuals who meet the full criteria for the disorder and who also present with limited prosocial emotions, such as limited empathy and guilt. The addition of the specifier will help specialize care and spur additional treatment and causal research.

Using the Specifier

Conduct disorder is characterized by behavior that violates either the rights of others or major societal norms. These symptoms must be present for at least three months with one symptom having been present in the past six months. To be diagnosed with conduct disorder, the symptoms must cause significant impairment in social, academic or occupational functioning. The disorder is typically diagnosed prior to adulthood.

In DSM-5, the criteria for conduct disorder are largely unchanged from DSM-IV, but the limited prosocial specifier is new to DSM-5. The specifier applies to those individuals with a more serious pattern of behavior characterized by a callous and unemotional interpersonal style across multiple settings and relationships. The specifier goes beyond the presence of negative behavior and reflects an individual's typical patterns in emotional and interpersonal functioning. People with conduct disorder who show this specifier display limited empathy and little concern for the feelings, wishes, and well-being of others.

Specializing Care and Spurring Research

Individuals with conduct disorder who meet criteria for the specifier have a relatively more severe form of the disorder and a different treatment response. Thus the specifier will allow clinicians to more accurately identify and diagnosis individuals who need more intensive and individualized treatment. The specifier attempts to avoid stigmatizing language and focuses on a limited display of prosocial emotions such as empathy and guilt.

The specifier will also encourage treatment research to refine what does and does not work for this group of individuals. In addition to treatment, the specifier will impact the research on persons with conduct disorder by designating groups of patients with more similar causal factors.

DSM is the manual used by clinicians and researchers to diagnose and classify mental disorders. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) will publish DSM-5 in 2013, culminating a 14-year revision process. For more information, go to www.DSM5.org.

APA is a national medical specialty society whose more than 36,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psychiatry.org and www.healthyminds.org. For more information, please contact Eve Herold at 703-907-8640 or press@psych.org.