



**European Society for Child
and Adolescent Psychiatry**

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Address for Correspondence related to ESCAP Communications:

Prof. DR Milica Pejovic-Milovancevic
Institute of Mental Health, Faculty of Medicine,
University of Belgrade Milana Kasanina 3,
11000 Belgrade, Serbia
E-mail: milica.pejovic@imh.org.rs

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Learning with fun: the 2nd residential course on child and adolescent psychiatry in Catania, Sicily, endorsed by the ESCAP Research Academy

In the past decades, the major academic societies in the field of child and adolescent mental health have been promoting scientific courses focused on strengthening clinical and research skills of trainees and early career child and adolescent psychiatrists from all over Europe and beyond [1–3].

In 2019, we set up a residential course in Catania (Italy) addressed to early career colleagues in the field (trainees, PhD students or consultants within the first 3 years of substantive post). The residential course, endorsed by the Research Academy of the European Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (ESCAP), was organized in collaboration with “Progetto Aita” Onlus, a non-profit association which supports children with neurodevelopmental disabilities, promoting inclusive social and sport activities, as well as scientific events in the field of child and adolescent mental health. Crucially, the course also aimed to foster an international network of early career clinicians and researchers in the field, as well as to build and promote interpersonal interactions. An essential ingredient to this was represented by the moments of informal exchange, outside the framework of the formal lectures and sessions, within the suggestive and unique location of the course, just in front of the wonderful Sicilian sea.

After a forced break of 2 years due to the COVID-19-related emergency, the 2nd Residential Course endorsed by ESCAP on the “Assessment and Treatment of Psychiatric Disorders in children and adolescents” was finally held again in Catania, from September 28th to October 1st, 2022.

A total of 19 participants, including child and adolescent (neuro)psychiatrists and psychologists from 10 countries (Brazil, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Switzerland, United Kingdom) selected based on their interest and experience in the field of child and adolescent psychiatry, attended the course. The main aims of the course were to strengthen both clinical (diagnosis, treatment, and prevention) and research (research methods and presentation of scientific work) skills related to the most relevant mental health conditions in children and adolescents.

The planned frontal lectures and interactive sessions featured a variety of topics.

In the opening afternoon, Professor Benedetto Vitiello (University of Turin, Italy, and formerly at the National Institute of Mental Health—NIMH—Bethesda) over-viewed currently available literature on mood disorders in children and adolescents, highlighting both the key semi-ologic aspects and the underlying neurobiology, which might in the future inform precision psychiatry [4] approaches to the treatment of these conditions. The management of self-harm and suicidal ideation was then discussed by Professor Dennis Ougrin (Queen Mary, University of London), who presented an effective method to manage self-harm in adolescents, referred to as Therapeutic Assessment [5] which is one intervention that improves engagement with aftercare [6]. A comprehensive overview of the epidemiology, and etiology as well as the diagnosis and on the pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatment of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) was provided by Professor Samuele Cortese (University of Southampton and New York University, NYU). His presentation mainly relied on advanced evidence synthesis methods such as pairwise, network, and individual patient data meta-analyses, as well

as big data from epidemiological studies. Professor Kerstin von Plessen (University Hospital of Lausanne) delved into the topics of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and Tourette Syndrome, overviewing the available literature on the underlying neurobiological mechanisms of these conditions, thus reviewing developmental trajectories as well as the novel targeted therapeutic available strategies [7].

Professor Luigi Mazzone and Dr. Martina Siracusano (University of Rome Tor Vergata, Italy) provided an update on the state of the art of the research on autism, ranging from early detection of symptoms as well as, risk and protective environmental factors associated with ASD, to novel promising pharmacological core symptoms treatment.

Dr. Carmen Morcillo (Solent NHS Trust, UK) provided a comprehensive overview of the management of eating disorders, discussing, in particular, the recommendations from guidelines of the Royal College of Psychiatrists on the management of physical risk in adolescents with anorexia nervosa [8].

Finally, an interesting session on Psychotic Disorders was conducted by Professors Marco Armando and Paul Klauser (Lausanne University Hospital, Switzerland). Specifically, an interesting academic lecture on the definition, epidemiology, clinical pattern and diagnostic tools for the clinical high-risk state and first episode psychosis in children and adolescents was given by Professor Armando. Noteworthy, Professor Klauser deeply discussed the neurobiology of Schizophrenia as well as therapeutic interventions and the importance of translational research in the field.

During the afternoon sessions, attendees reported on clinical cases selected by the course faculty as well as ongoing research projects. These interactive sessions turned out to be highly stimulating opportunities for an exchange between participants belonging to different cultural and medical realities. A particular focus of discussion was on the concept and relevance of *formulation*, given concerns that this is somehow neglected, especially in younger generations of child and adolescent psychiatrists, who tend to focus solely on the descriptive diagnostic criteria [9].

With regard to the course feedback, almost 90% of the delegates rated the course as “very good”, stating that it had enhanced their knowledge of the key topics in child and adolescent mental health.

As a possible improvement of the course, participants suggested increasing the course duration, allowing it to include other important child and adolescent mental health conditions, such as Bipolar and Personality Disorders, Gender Dysphoria and Substance Abuse disorder.

Given this excellent feedback, we are already planning the next residential course (www.residentialcourse.com), endeavouring to implement as much as possible the feedback from the delegates. We are looking forward to another

stimulating and exciting course with our early career colleagues in 2023 in Catania, Sicily.

Corresponding Author:

Assia Riccioni
assiariccioni@gmail.com

Martina Siracusano
siracusanomartina@hotmail.com

Authors:

Assia Riccioni^{1,2} · Martina Siracusano^{1,3} · Chiara Davico⁴ · Paul Klauser^{6,7} · Carmen Morcillo⁸ · Dennis Ougrin⁹ · Benedetto Vitiello^{4,5} · Kerstin J. Plessen^{6,10} · Marco Armando^{6,7} · Samuele Cortese^{8,11,12} · Luigi Mazzone^{1,2}

¹Child Neurology and Psychiatry Unit, Fondazione PTV—Policlinico Tor Vergata, Tor Vergata University Hospital, Viale Oxford 81, 00133 Rome, Italy

²Department of Systems Medicine, University of Rome Tor Vergata, Via Montpellier 1, 00133 Rome, Italy

³Department of Biomedicine and Prevention, University of Rome Tor Vergata, Via Montpellier 1, 00133 Rome, Italy

⁴Department of Pediatrics, Regina Margherita Pediatric Hospital, 10126 Turin, Italy

⁵Department of Public Health and Pediatric Sciences, Section of Child and Adolescent Neuropsychiatry, University of Turin, P.Zza Polonia 94, 10126 Turin, Italy

⁶Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry, Lausanne University Hospital and the University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

⁷Center for Psychiatric Neuroscience, Department of Psychiatry, Lausanne University Hospital and the University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

⁸Solent NHS Trust, Southampton, UK

⁹Youth Resilience Unit, Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Mental Health Services Development, Queen Mary University of London, London, UK

¹⁰Child and Adolescent Mental Health Centre, Mental Health Services—Capital Region of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark

¹¹Centre for Innovation in Mental Health, School of Psychology, Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences and Clinical and Experimental Sciences (CNS and Psychiatry), Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 1BJ, UK

¹²Hassenfeld Children’s Hospital at NYU Langone, New York University Child Study Center, New York, NY, USA

¹³Division of Psychiatry and Applied Psychology, School of Medicine, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

Assia Riccioni and Martina Siracusano contributed equally to this work.

Marco Armando, Samuele Cortese and Luigi Mazzone contributed equally to this work.

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