

Early Mental and Social Well-Being as a Foundation for Later Health

Prof. Dr. Lilly Shanahan



**University of
Zurich** ^{UZH}



**JACOBS
CENTER**

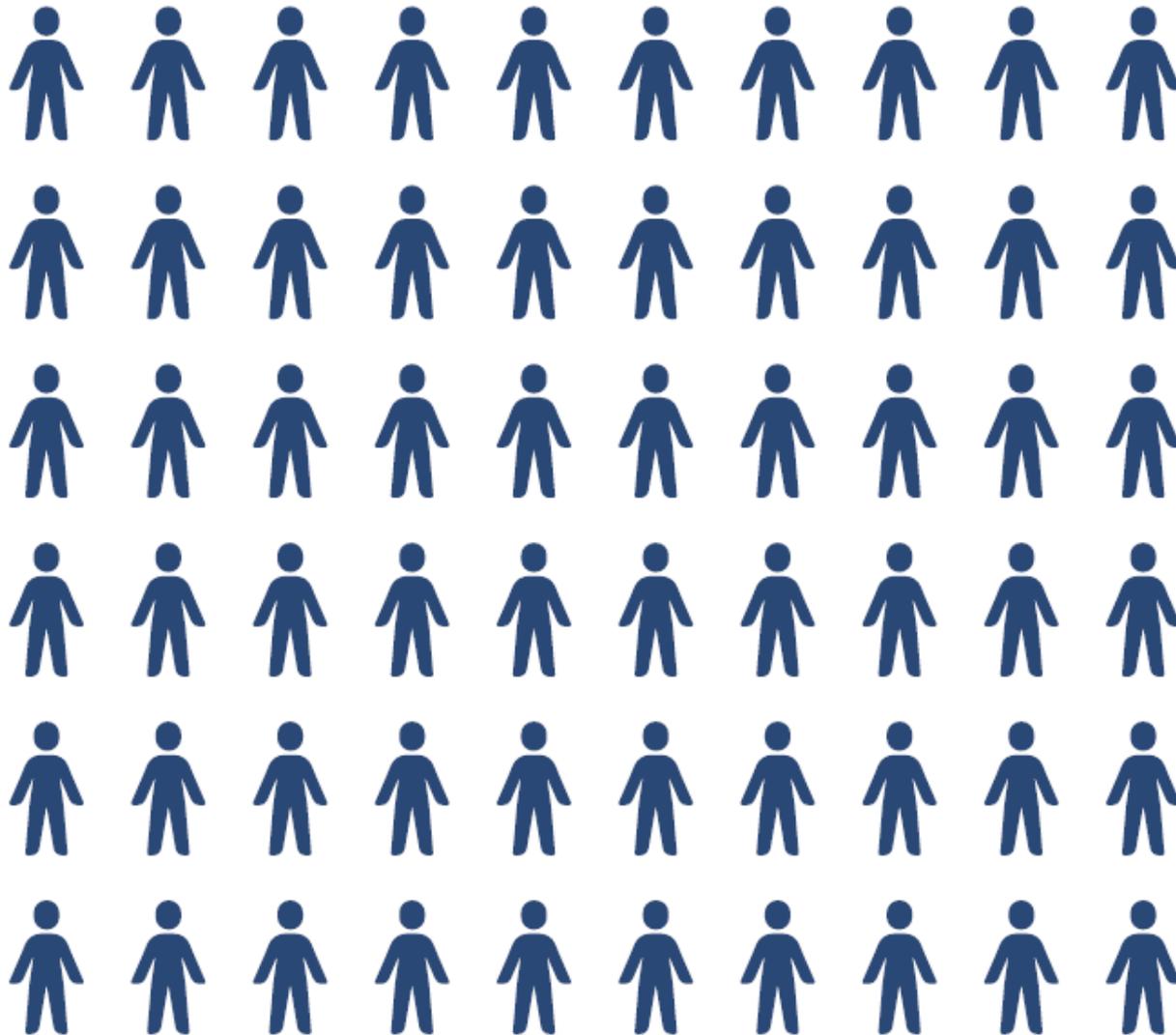
Key Question of this Conference

Can we take health in children and adolescents for granted?

1. How common is mental illness



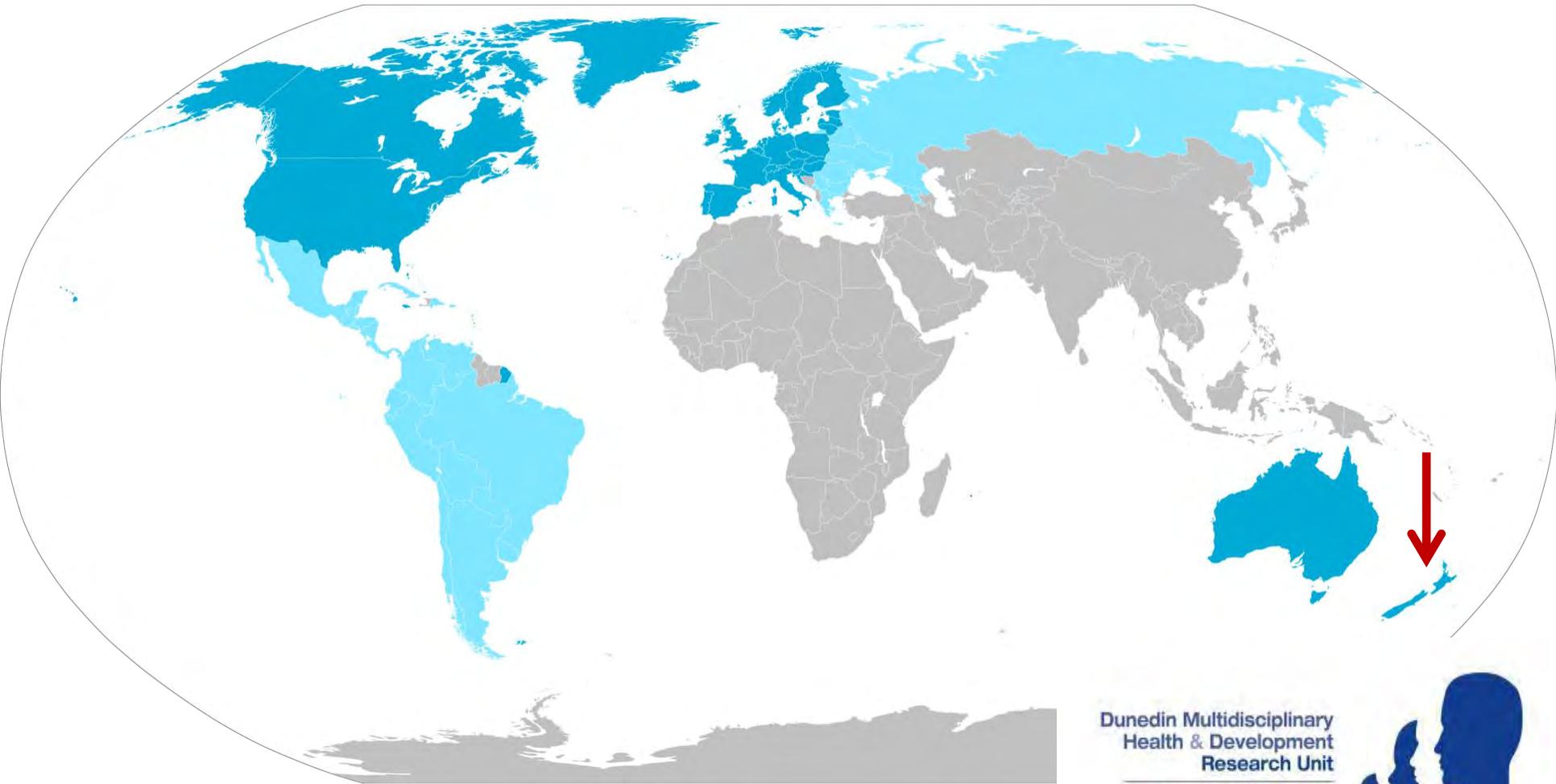
How common is mental illness?



How common is mental illness?

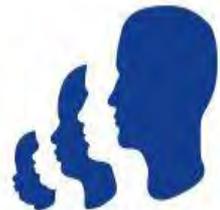


How common is mental illness? (Western world)



Dunedin Multidisciplinary
Health & Development
Research Unit

DMHDRU





Take-home message no. 1:

Mental disorder at some point in life is the norm and **NOT** the exception.

Key Question of this Conference

Can we take health in children and adolescents for granted?

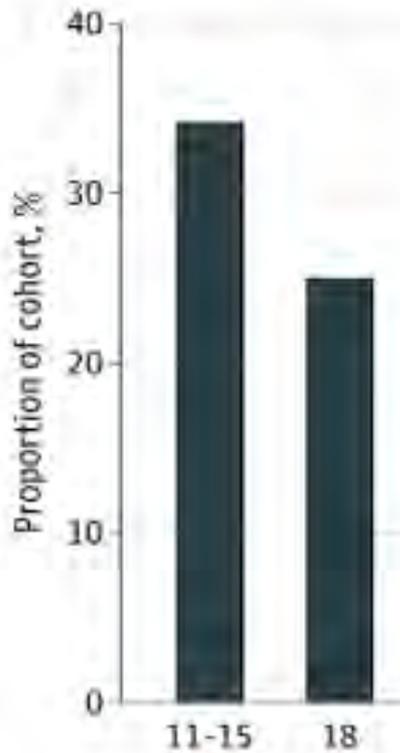
1. How common is mental illness?
2. At what age does mental illness typically have its onset?
3. What are exemplar pathways to mental illness?
4. How do children and adolescents with mental illness fare later in life?
5. How can we foster long-term health?

2. At what age does mental illness typically have its onset

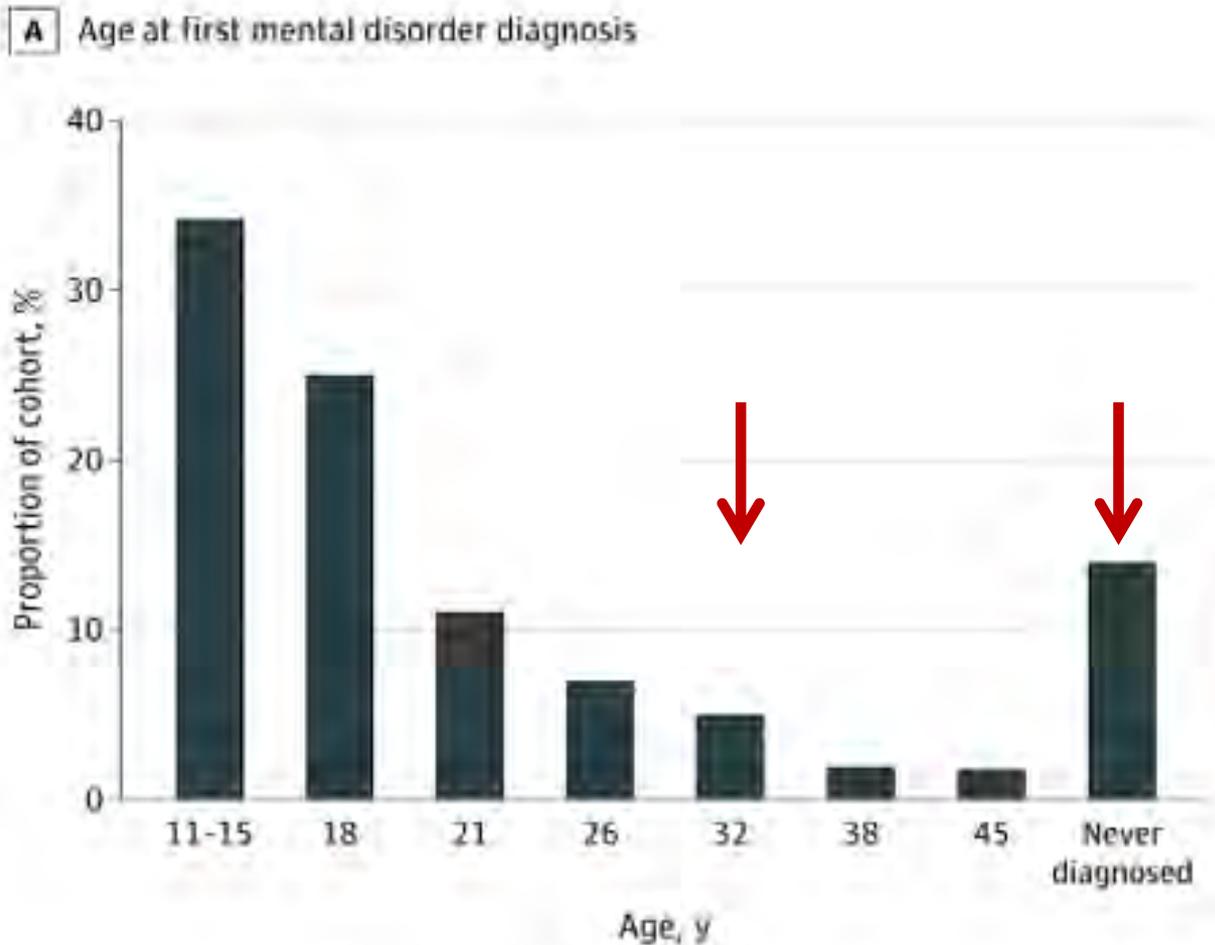


Age at First Diagnosis

A Age at first mental disorder diagnosis



Age at First Diagnosis



Age at First Diagnosis

Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 47:3/4 (2006), pp 313–337

doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2006.01618.x

Common emotional and behavioral disorders in preschool children: presentation, nosology, and epidemiology

Helen Link Egger and Adrian Angold

Center for Developmental Epidemiology, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Medical Center, USA

CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION

Mental Disorders in Early Childhood

Kai von Klitzing, Mirko Döhnert, Michael Kroll, Matthias Grube

SUMMARY

Background: About 17% of all children suffer from a mental disorder in early childhood, defined as the period up to the age of 6 years.

Epidemiological studies reveal a 16–18% prevalence of mental disorders among children aged 1 to 5 years, with somewhat more than half being severely affected (1–3). There is evidence that many disturbances occurring in the first year of life that are commonly

Example: Self-Injury

Also in Switzerland ...

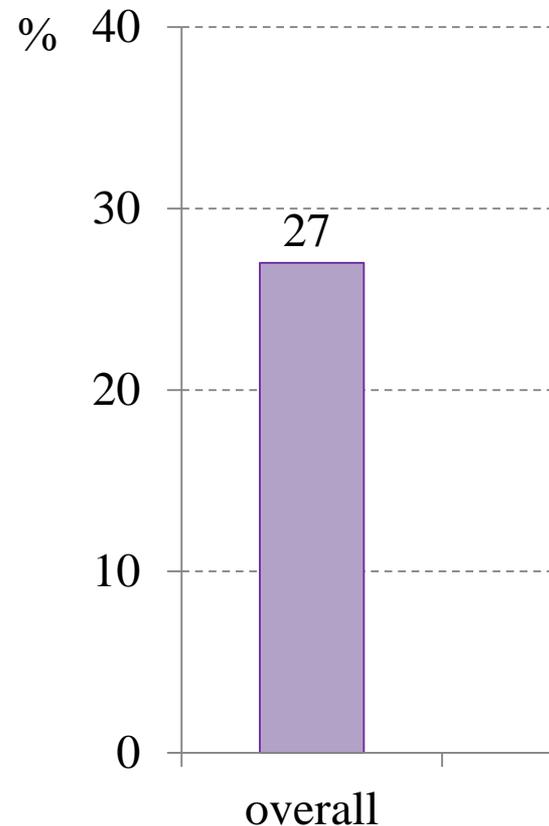


How often did you self-injure on purpose in the past month?

(ages 13, 15, 17, 20)

Example: Self-Injury

*How often did you self-injure on purpose in the past month?
(between ages 13 - 20)*



Example: Self-Injury

More common in LGBTQIA+ community

Mental Illness Common in Children with Chronic Physical Illness

Children aged 2 – 16 yrs

Diagnosis

Dermatological

Endocrine

Gastroenterological

Hematological

Neurological

Respiratory

Rheumatological

38% with ≥ 1
mental illness
in *past year*

Ferro, ... Shanahan et al. (2021).

Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.



Take-home message no. 2:

Mental illness typically begins in childhood or adolescence.

Implication

Persons who interact with children must be educated about mental illness.



Mental Health Awareness and Literacy

- Parents (and other family members, friends)
- Schools (incl. teachers)
- Child care (incl. afterschool)
- Pediatricians (and their teams)
- Other children
- ...

**MENTAL HEALTH
AWARENESS MONTH**



Mental Health Awareness and Literacy

... include knowing, for example, that ...

1. ... children often express first mental health symptoms as somatic symptoms (e.g., stomach aches, headaches etc.)
2. ... teenagers who are frequently edgy or irritable may in fact be suffering from depression or anxiety



Mental Health Awareness and Literacy

... includes recognizing that ...

3. ... pathways to poor mental health are manifold

- adverse childhood experiences
- intergenerational transmission
- biological changes (puberty)
- school and social stress
- ...



3. What are exemplar pathways to mental illness?

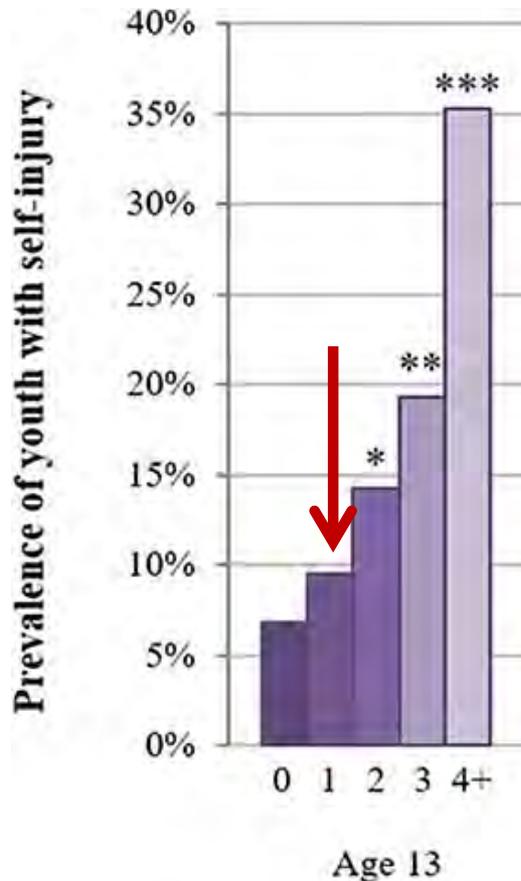


Social Stress Pathways: Schools

Association of failing an important test or having to repeat a grade with self-injury.



Overwhelming Stress

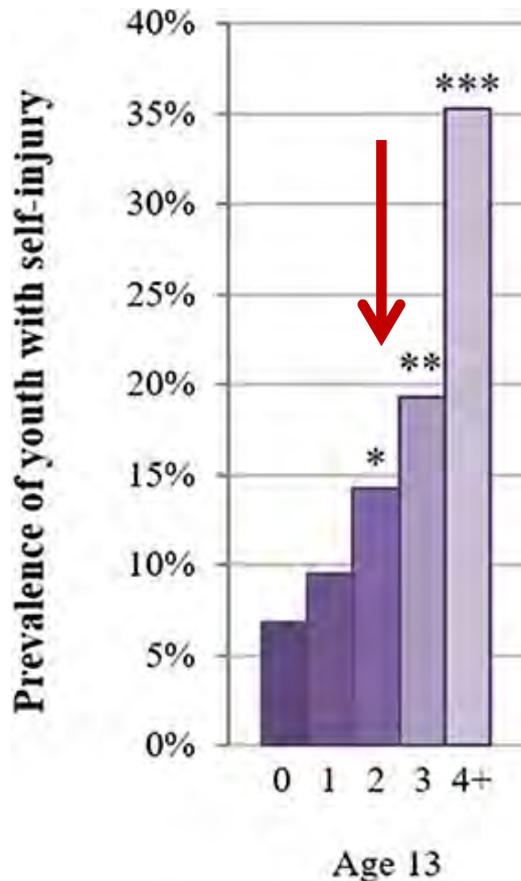


Number of life events

Example Stressors

- Repeat grade, fail exam
- Relationship breakup
- Parental divorce
- Parental job loss
- Death of a family member
- Violent harassment by a peer or sexual assault

Overwhelming Stress

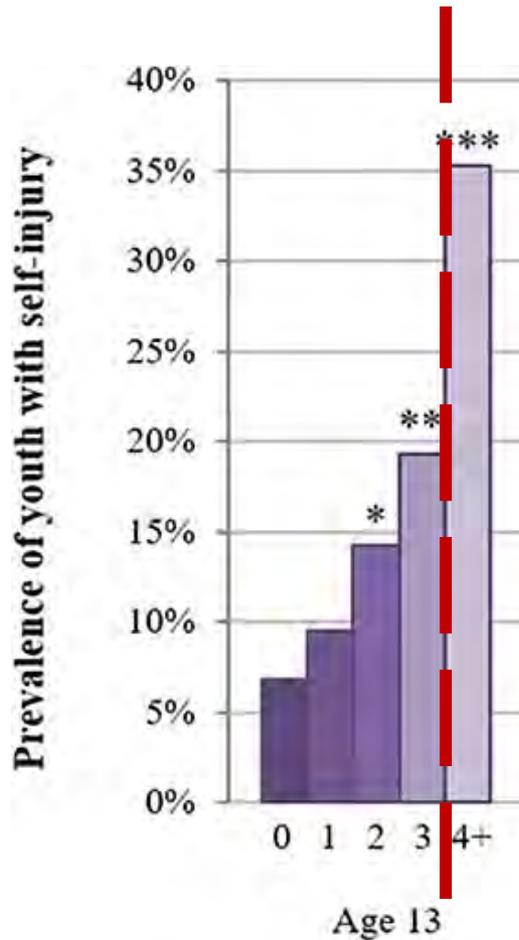


Number of life events

Example Stressors

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Overwhelming Stress

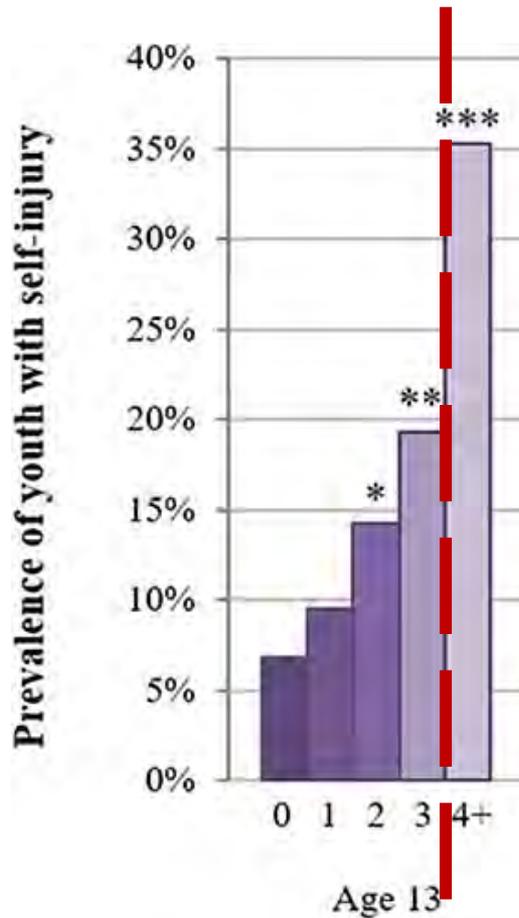


Number of life events

Example Stressors

- Repeat grade, fail exam
- Relationship breakup
- Parental divorce
- Parental job loss
- Death of a family member
- Violent harassment by a peer or sexual assault

Overwhelming Stress & the Pandemic



chronic physical illness,
discrimination,
COVID-19 pandemic

Number of life events

Steinhoff ... Shanahan. (2020). *Frontiers in Psychiatry*.



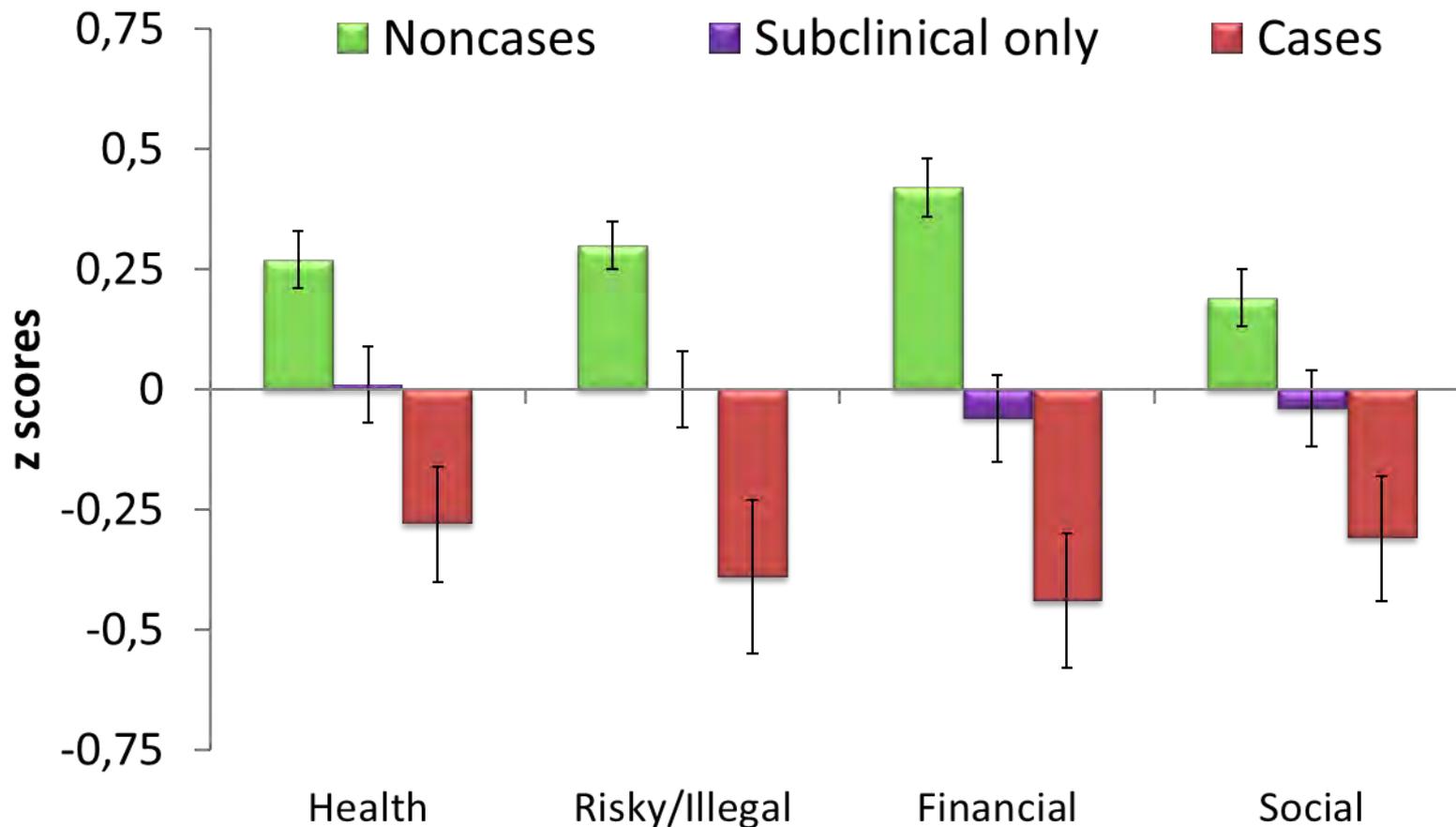
Take-home message no. 3:

Overwhelming social and school stress are common pathways to mental illness.

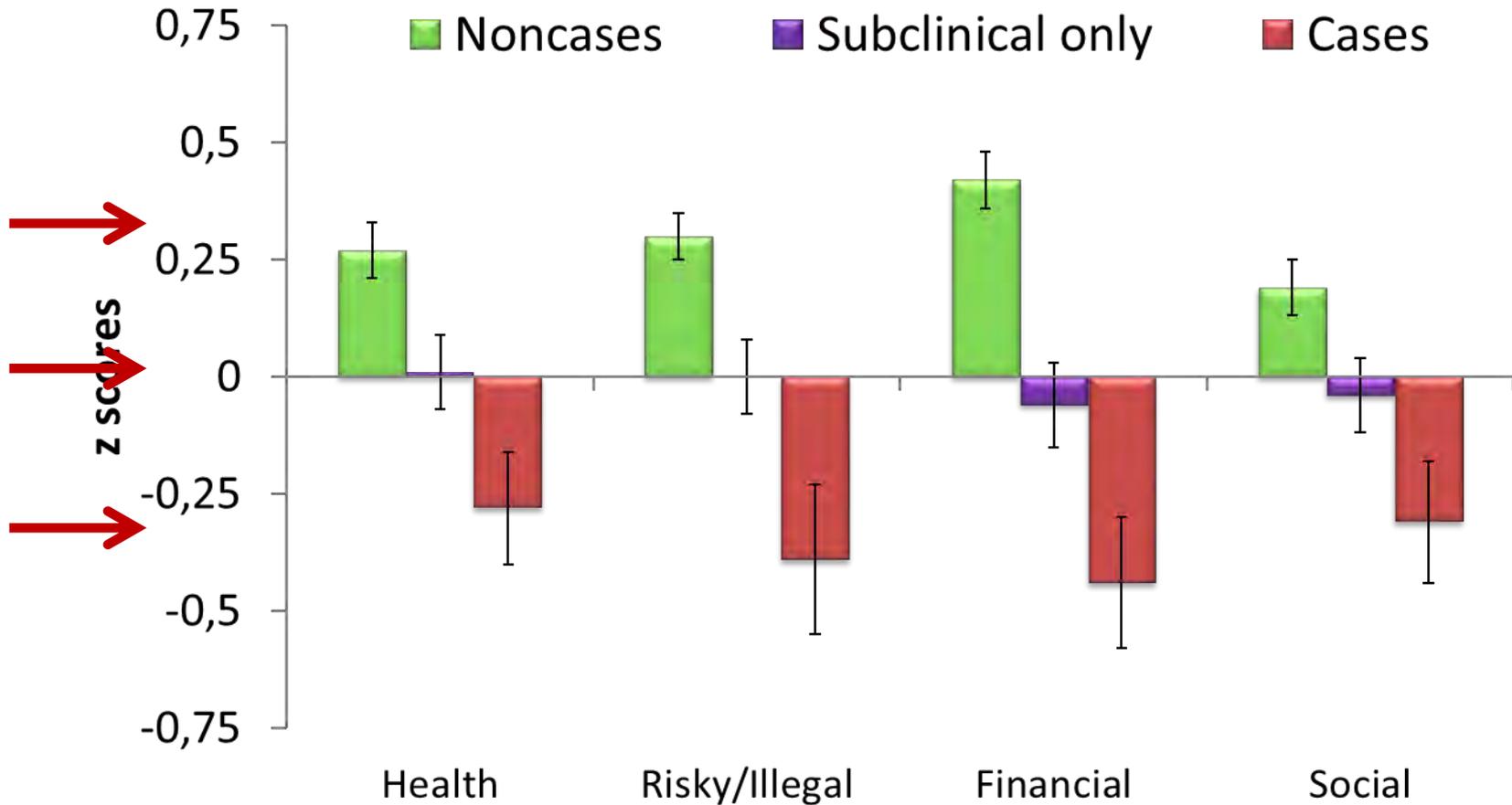
4. How do children and adolescents with mental illness fare later in life?



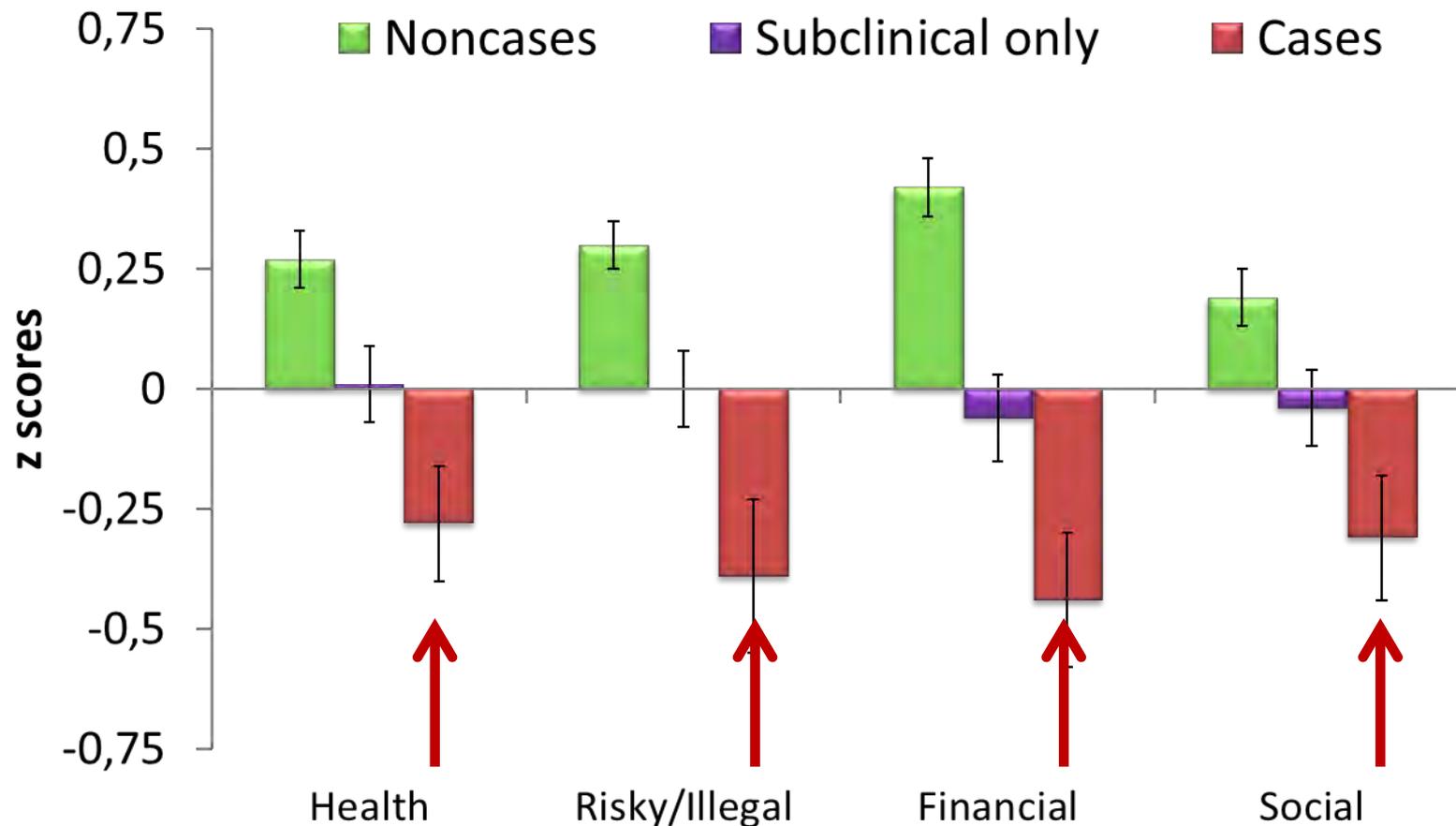
Long-Term Costs: By Age 30



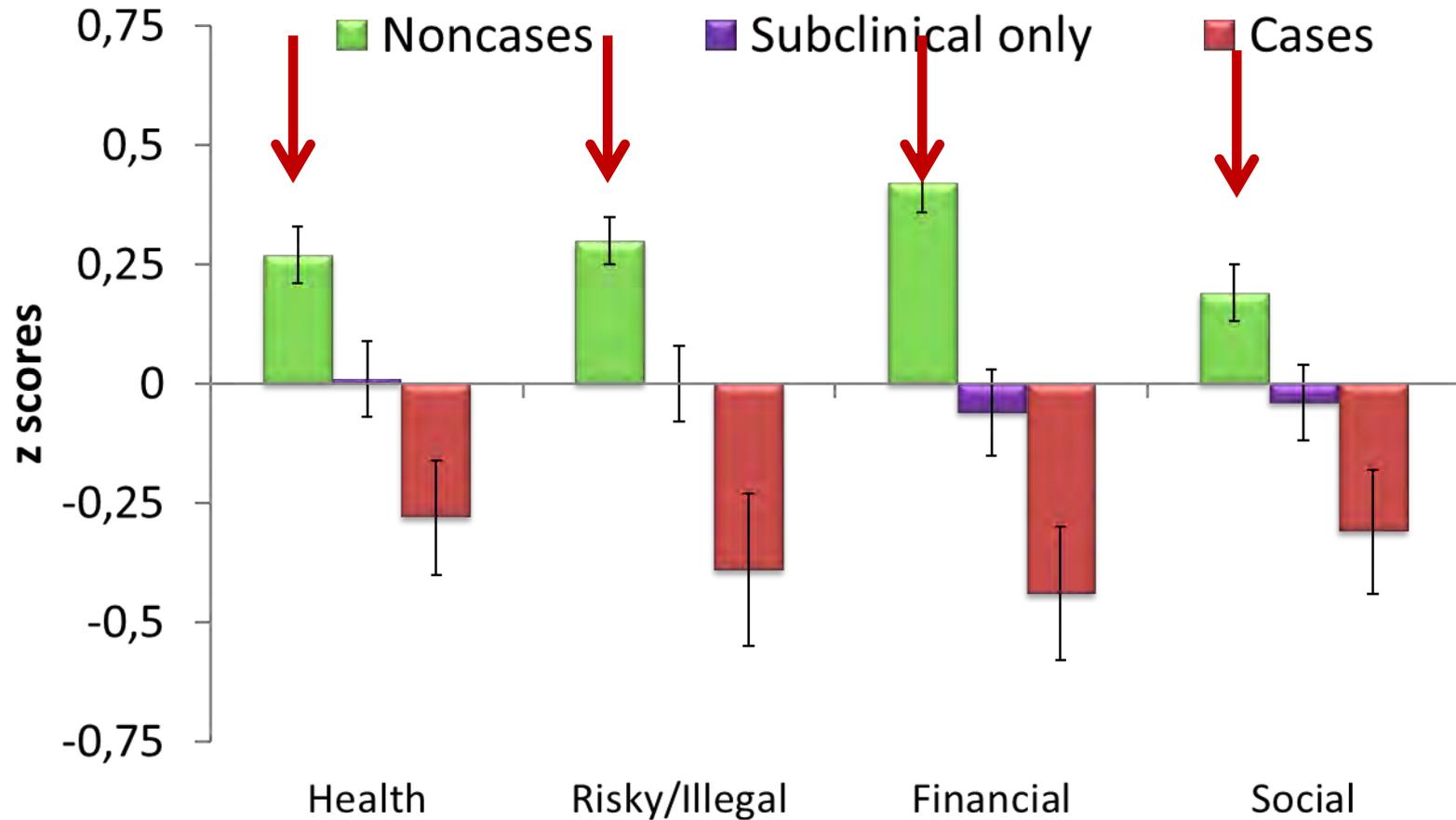
Long-Term Costs: By Age 30



Long-Term Costs: By Age 30



Long-Term Costs: By Age 30



Associations of Childhood and Adolescent Depression With Adult Psychiatric and Functional Outcomes

William E. Copeland, PhD, Iman Alaie, MSc, Ulf Jonsson, PhD, Lilly Shanahan, PhD

Outcomes worse when youth mental illness is chronic and untreated.

Long-Term Costs of Youth Mental Illness

... higher risk of premature mortality ...

Global burden of disease attributable to mental and substance use disorders: findings from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2010

Harvey A Whiteford, Louisa Degenhardt, Jürgen Rehm, Amanda J Baxter, Alize J Ferrari, Holly E Erskine, Fiona J Charlson, Rosana E Norman, Abraham D Flaxman, Nicole Johns, Roy Burstein, Christopher J L Murray, Theo Vos

JAMA Psychiatry | **Original Investigation**

Association of Youth Depression With Subsequent Somatic Diseases and **Premature Death**

Marica Leone, BSc; Ralf Kuja-Halkola, PhD; Amy Leval, PhD; Brian M. D'Onofrio, PhD; Henrik Larsson, PhD; Paul Lichtenstein, PhD; Sarah E. Bergen, PhD

Long-Term Costs of Youth Mental Illness

Estimating the true global burden of mental illness

Daniel Vigo, Graham Thornicroft, Rifat Atun

**Globally, mental illness accounts for 32%
of years lived with disability!**



Take-home message no. 4:

Mental illness in childhood and adolescence is associated with a substantial risk for later poor health, mortality, and disability.

5. How can we foster health (from a mental health perspective)



What can we do?

Prevent

Recognize

Treat

Prevention

CAREGIVERS

- Support mental health of parents & caregivers
(and increase their mental health awareness and literacy)
- Support positive & consistent caregiving
- Reduce adversity & stress affecting families

Prevention

CAREGIVERS

- Support mental health of parents & caregivers (and increase their mental health awareness and literacy)
- Support positive & consistent caregiving
- Reduce adversity & stress affecting families

CHILDREN

- Build self-regulation (e.g., emotional, behavioral) and social skills
- Build healthy strategies to cope with stress and that are mental-health protective (e.g., sleep, exercise, nutrition)
- Foster educational well-being

Recognition / Treatment / Intervention

SYSTEMS, INCL. SCHOOLS & HEALTH CARE

- Create systems that recognize early mental health problems
- Low-threshold entries into professional support & treatment
- Evidence-based treatments
- Ongoing support on different phases of life



Take-home message no. 5:

Prevention, recognition, and treatment of mental illness in children and adolescents are key to fostering long-term health.

Key Question of this Conference

Can we take (mental) health in children and adolescents for granted?

NO!

1. Mental illness is the norm, NOT the exception.
2. Mental illness typically has its onset in childhood and adolescence.
3. School and social stress can increase risk for mental illness.
4. Childhood/adolescent mental illness, especially when untreated and persistent, is associated with poorer adult outcomes.
5. To foster health, we must also foster mental health and social well-being.

Acknowledgements

Select Funding Sources



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FONDO NAZIONALE SVIZZERO
SWISS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION



z-proso Collaborators



Discussion and Questions

