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The prevalence and symptomatology of several mental disorders often differentiate between the two sexes. According to international research findings (Cloninger et al., 1978), men display all different types of antisocial behaviour in a significant higher prevalence than women. On the other hand, mood and anxiety disorders as well as eating disorders are much more frequent among the female population (Robins et al., 1984). In addition, it has been documented that disorders usually first diagnosed in childhood (for example autistic spectrum disorder, conduct disorder, etc.) concern mostly boys whereas those usually first diagnosed in adolescence (for example mood and anxiety disorders or eating disorders) concern mostly girls (Hudziak, et al., 2008). Finally, it has been found that in cases where a disorder may present at similar rates between boys and girls at a younger age (for example enuresis and stuttering), these same disorders are more frequent among boys at later ages.

Scientific study of the above-mentioned differences may facilitate the understanding of both their etiological mechanisms and their outcomes. The investigation of the factors that put males and females at a more vulnerable position regarding different types of mental disorders may promote: a) the identification of risk factors for the development of several disorders in males and females and b) the planning of more effective therapeutic programmes for males and females.

The aim of this presentation is to provide a summary of the most important research findings regarding sex differences in the prevalence and the manifestation of several mental disorders, usually first diagnosed in childhood or adolescence. The main etiological theories of this phenomenon will be presented and the possible effects of sex differences on the outcome of psychopathology in boys and girls will be analyzed. To conclude, thoughts about the possible utility of the adoption of different diagnostic criteria for the two sexes for several developmental disorders will be discussed and relevant perspectives for the forthcoming DSM-5 will be presented.