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Forensic use of the DSM-5 quadrant in juvenile fire setter and bomb maker cases: A mitigation of criminal responsibility?

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Forensic mental health specialists have an ethical and legal obligation to develop assessment and culturally responsive treatment protocols that take into account the full range of symptoms that reflect underlying psychopathology. These symptoms are most often assessed using the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). The DSM-5 is the most commonly used diagnostic reference for mental health practitioners and the recency of the current edition makes it necessary to reevaluate how it can be used with juvenile forensic cases, particularly with respect to criminal responsibility. This is especially relevant when public safety behaviors such as juvenile fire setting or bomb making (JFSB). From a forensic treatment standpoint, the motivations for JFSB are more likely than not to stem from psychopathology that must be accurately identified and disentangled from other risk and other vulnerability factors. The DSM-5 is an assessment tool that provides detailed information regarding the types of symptoms, behavioral characteristics, and serves as a starting point for potential treatments for a wide range mental health diagnoses that occur internationally. There are four DSM-5 diagnostic symptomatology patterns that are commonly observed with juvenile fire setters. These overlapping diagnostic patterns are referred to as the JFSB DSM-5 Quadrant. When developing assessments for juveniles, forensic mental health specialists must demonstrate the competencies necessary to determine what particular clinical features of these four JFSB-relevant disorders may be present in these juveniles. As with adults, juveniles with psychological disorders could be determined as not being responsible for committing a crime (e.g., fire setting or bomb making). It is imperative to explore how the disorders commonly seen in JFSB could impact criminal responsibility. This presentation explores JFSB, DSM-5 Quadrant and criminal responsibility.

Biography

Ronn Johnson is licensed and board certified clinical psychologist with extensive experience in academic and clinical settings. He is a Diplomate of the American Board of Professional Psychology. He has served as a staff psychologist in community mental health clinics, hospitals, schools and university counseling centers. The University of Iowa, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Central Oklahoma, and San Diego State University are among the sites of his previous academic appointments. His forensic, scholarship, and teaching interests include: ethical-legal issues, police psychology, women death penalty, and counter-terrorism.

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