The Medical Anthropology Group
Department of Anthropology

"Understanding and Reducing Risk for Depression"

Ian Gotlib
Stanford University
November 7th, 2012, 5:30-7:00 pm
Building 50, Room 51A

The term 'biopsychosocial' has been used to capture the complexity of psychiatric illness, but for some people, that has meant thinking about the independent contributions to illness of heredity, culture, and personal history. Our research highlights the importance of focusing instead on the concepts of emotion dysregulation and reactivity. In an effort to understand the mechanisms involved in familial risk for depression, we have been conducting a large-scale study of young girls with a family history of the disorder. Our work finds that in many ways, the children of mothers with recurrent depression already resemble depressed adults on a variety of psychological and biological markers, despite not yet having (yet) experienced an episode of depression themselves. They are more likely to pay attention to negative than to positive stimuli, more likely to have increased cortisol secretion, and more likely to have greater reactivity in the salience network of the brain. These differences all reflect what can be called "psychobiological reactivity." In fact, greater psychobiological reactivity is predicting the onset of depression. We are now using these findings to reduce the risk for depression in young children. Our preliminary data suggest that cognitive- and neural-based interventions attenuate physiological and emotional reactivity to stressors in high-risk children.

Ian Gotlib is Chair of the Department of Psychology and David Starr Jordan Professor of Psychology. The Stanford Report created a neat video related to the work he will be discussing here:

http://news.stanford.edu/news/2012/february/depression-brain-imaging-020912.html

Cultures, Minds and Medicines

Fall Quarter Talks:

November 28:
Victoria Sweet, UCSF