



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2007

16 Scientific Advances in Understanding Child and Adolescent Brain Development and Its Applications in the Legal Realm: From Barring the Executions of Juvenile Offenders to the Individual Forensic Pediatric-Psychiatric Evaluations

Manuel Lopez-Leon, MD, New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, North Brooklyn Medical Associates, 338 1st Avenue, New York, NY 10009*

The goal of this presentation is to examine the recent break-through research that supports scientifically the argument that adolescent brains are different than the brains of mature adults. This information was used

by various medical societies in their *amicus briefs* sent to the Supreme Court in support of the abolition of capital punishment in adolescents when arguing the *Roper v. Simmons* case.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by creating awareness of the recent scientific research that has provided insight into understanding brain development in children and adolescents. It will also create awareness that this information has implications in the legal arena as used by legislators to justify legal decisions. The scientific research also has clinical implications when doing forensic psychiatric evaluations in children and adolescents.

This presentation will also provide insight into the existing research in adolescent brain development and how this information is relevant when doing forensic pediatric-psychiatric evaluations. This information intends to clarify the evaluation of criminal responsibility, and premeditated versus impulsive violence.

Research shows that adolescents tend to rely more on instinctual structures, such as the amygdala, and less on the more advanced areas of the brain, such as the frontal lobes. They also lack fast routes for thoughts to travel and control emotions. This predisposes them to impulsive acts. However, why aren't all adolescents violent? What is the difference between impulsive violent behaviors and premeditated behaviors when forming a forensic opinion?

Juvenile Offenders, Capital Punishment, Forensic Pediatric- Psychiatric Evaluations