

The Impact of Exposure to Community Violence on the Psychological Well-being of Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

CVE is recognized as a global public health problem by the World Health Organization. Those exposed to high levels of CVE report feelings of fear, anxiety, internalizing behavior, and negative life experiences. The present study aimed to examine adolescents exposed to community violence experience more psychological distress compared to adolescents that were not exposed to community violence. The current study found that those participants who did not experience community violence had significantly lower psychological distress scores than those who did experience community violence. It also demonstrates a positive and statistically significant association between psychosocial distress and community violence experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

Understanding the connection between CVE and psychological distress amongst adolescents is pertinent to the understanding of how to support youth within their communities.

Purpose of Research

The current study will examine of adolescents exposed to community violence experience more psychological distress compared to adolescents that were not exposed to community violence

Hypothesis

Adolescent psychological well-being will be negatively affected when exposed to community violence and that CVE leads to an increase of psychological distress amongst adolescents. CVE and psychological distress will demonstrate a dose-response relationship on that more CVE will be associated with more psychological distress symptoms.



LITERATURE REVIEW

- The pervasiveness of CVE exposure during the adolescent years is significant. There are numerous studies to support numbers and exposure rates.
- CVE is linked to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and somatic symptoms
- CVE can negatively impact adolescents' mental health in ways such as PTSD, depression, suicidal ideations, substance abuse, detachment, anxiety, aggression, difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbances, hypervigilance, and irritability.

METHODS

Research Design

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from the National Survey of Adolescents in the United States in 1995.
- Cross-sectional data was collected by telephone to survey American youth aged 12-17 years old living in the U.S.
- The adolescents must have been living in a U.S. household with a telephone, reside with a guardian or parent, and speak English or Spanish.
- The study provided descriptive information on the familial and non-familial violent assault, delinquent behaviors, mental health problems, substance use, abuse, and dependence experienced by adolescents.
- The survey was structured with Likert scales and 'yes or no' questions.

Sample

- The total of 4,023 adolescents participated in this study.
- The initial sample was constructed using a multistage, stratified, area probability, random-digit-dialing sampling procedures conducted in four steps.
- 50.2% males; females 49.8%; Average age = 14.64

Measures

Independent Variables: Community Violence Exposure

CVE was assessed using six survey questions to confirm whether or not the participants had witnessed in their lifetime six different violent acts in two ways

- Participants were categorized as either having CVE or not having CVE.
- The yes responses were recoded to 1, and all other responses were recoded as 0. All six items were added together to create a total score ranging from 0-6.

Dependent Variables: Psychological Well-being

- Psychological well-being was assessed using 20 questions from the survey.

RESULTS

Community Violence Exposure

- 73.2% experienced community violence and 26.8% did not.

Psychological Well-being

- A Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to examine the difference in psychological distress in participants who experienced community violence and those who did not experience community violence. Participants who did not experience community violence had significantly lower psychological distress scores (Mean rank = 1419.06) than those who had experienced community violence.
- A Spearman's *rho* correlation coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between psychological distress and number community violence experiences. The results indicated a positive and statistically significant association between psychosocial distress and community violence experiences, $r_s(4018) = .398, p < .001$.

Variables	Mean rank	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Community Violence Exposure		2221156.00	<.001
Yes	2226.00		
No	1419.06		

DISCUSSION

Significance of the Findings:

- 73% of the participants have experienced community violence
- Those participants who did not experience community violence had significantly lower psychological distress scores than those who did experience community violence.
- Demonstration of a dose-response relationship on that more CVE will be associated with more psychological distress symptoms by indicating a positive and statistically significant association between psychosocial distress and community violence experiences.

Strengths and Limitations:

- The current study did not reflect the disparities within culture, poverty, and race in terms of these being predictors of community violence within certain communities. T
- The original study was conducted in 1995, a newer set of data could have been beneficial in gathering more relevant information.
- There was no standardized scale to evaluate the psychological distress amongst the participants.
- The study is consistent with previous research and the hypothesis, it is well understood that CVE does directly negatively affects the well-being of the adolescent populations most exposed.
- This study incorporated a variety of inferential analyses such as Mann-Whitney *U* test and Spearman's *rho* correlation coefficient to evaluate the relationship between the variables.

Implications & Future Research

- An increase of research and awareness in this area will be effective in meeting the needs of adolescents at risk based on the violence rate within their community.
- Conducting a needs assessment on the communities of interest can positively influence the decision-making in policy and prevention.
- Educating the surrounding community members will better support the movement away from allowing community violence and identifying what perpetuates community violence.
- Further research can progress by focusing on the frequency of community violence exposure rather than the different types of violence exposure.