

Investigating the association between children who witness domestic violence in their household and being clinically diagnosed with childhood depression

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Conflictos de interés: Los autores declaran no tener conflictos de interés alguno.

Abstract

Introduction/Objective: Depression is the most common psychiatric disorder in the general population. In particular, childhood depression is undertreated. Domestic violence affects more than 32 million Americans, and children who witness violence are more likely to display internalizing behaviors. Although the association between childhood abuse and depression in adulthood has been established, the objective of our study was to determine the association between children witnessing violence at home and being diagnosed with childhood depression. **Methods:** We used the 2011 NSCH database, which randomly surveyed parents in the U.S. Our cross-sectional study sample was limited to children 8-17 years old, and whose parents responded to specific survey questions. The exposure was children who witnessed domestic violence at home and the outcome was the diagnosis of childhood depression. Data analysis included 1) a descriptive analysis of population baseline characteristics, 2) a bivariate analysis of the baseline characteristics with the exposure and outcome, and 3) a multivariate logistic regression to control for potential confounders. **Results:** Our sample included 54,268 children. The unadjusted binary logistic regression indicated that children who witnessed domestic violence were 4.5 times more likely (95% CI 3.6- 5.5, $p < 0.001$) to be diagnosed with childhood depression. However, the adjusted analysis did not find an association between witnessing domestic violence and childhood depression (OR 1.0, 95% CI 0.6-1.4, $p: 0.834$). Other variables independently associated with childhood depression include, but are not limited to: children whose school contacted the household about problems more than 10 times (OR 8.4, 95% CI 5.9-12.1, $p: < 0.001$), poor general health of the child (OR 7.7, 95% CI 2.6-22.6, $p < 0.001$), and poor mental health of the mother (OR 7.4, 95% CI 3.0-18.5, $p < 0.001$). **Conclusions:** Our study found that children witnessing domestic violence do not have an increased risk of childhood depression. We found other factors such as problems at school or instability at home had a significant influence on whether a child was clinically depressed. Further research should be conducted to explore the associations of these other factors with childhood depression.

Keywords: domestic violence; childhood depression

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