

Understanding the impact of micro- and macro-level violence during adolescence on mental health at the transition to adulthood

Project report

Principal investigator: Dr Rachel Latham, King's College London

Project background

This project was funded by the UKRI Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network as part of its workstream on the theme of understanding violence, abuse and mental health.

The project ran for a total of 8 months



Project team:

- Rachel Latham, King's College London
- Helen Fisher, King's College London

Project partners and collaborators:

- The McPin Foundation



Project summary

Background

Violence that is experienced personally through interactions with others (e.g., being physically abused) can have a detrimental impact on mental health, particularly when this happens during childhood and adolescence. However, we know little about whether the level of violence in the neighbourhood in which these experiences take place has an influence. We investigated how experiencing physical violence and living in a violent neighbourhood during adolescence combine to impact the development of mental health problems a few years later.

Because not everyone who experiences violence develops mental health problems, we also explored whether having supportive relationships with family and friends, higher intelligence, or coming from a wealthier family helps protect against poor mental health following exposure to violence.

Methods

We used information that had been collected from over 2,000 children in the UK who have been followed from birth to the age of 18. This includes their responses to questionnaires and interviews about their experiences of violence and mental health symptoms, as well as responses from their neighbours about the area in which they live. Four young people with experience of violence and mental health problems partnered with the research team to analyse and interpret the data.

Results

Adolescents who had personal experience of physical violence had a greater risk of having a mental health problem when they were 18 years old regardless of whether they lived in a neighbourhood with a high level of violence or not.

Those who experienced physical violence and lived in a violent neighbourhood had the highest risk of having internalising problems like anxiety and depression.

Supportive relationships (with family and/or friends) were found to help adolescents who had been exposed to violence to maintain better mental health.

Conclusions

Adolescents who experience physical violence and live in violent neighbourhoods are particularly vulnerable to developing some mental health problems. They may benefit from help such as increasing their support network.

Key messages

Top 3 key messages from the project



Early intervention is needed to support adolescents who experience violence, especially those whose personal experiences take place in the context of community-level violence as they may be especially vulnerable to developing internalising and thought disorders.

Interventions focused on improving the availability of social support, especially from family, may be effective in protecting mental health following adolescent violence exposure.



Young people with relevant lived experience can be successfully trained as peer researchers to help with the interpretation and scientific write-up of secondary data analyses.

Outputs

Blog: Bringing the voice of lived experience to mental health and violence research

- Published by ESRC Centre for Society & Mental Health on 7th March 2022
- Saffron, Bianca and Alysha are the peer researchers who worked on this project and have written an insightful blog on what their experiences were like as experts by experience who were integral to the running of the project.
- To read the blog click [here](#).



More outputs will be shared as part of this project including academic papers. We will be sure to signpost these when they become available.

The Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network

We will be sure to keep our members updated on any outputs linked to this project in the future. To keep updated you can sign up to our mailing list and receive our monthly newsletter. You can also follow us on our socials . All links can be found at the bottom of this page.

About the VAMHN

We are a network of individuals and organisations aiming to reduce the prevalence of mental health problems by addressing associated violence and abuse, particularly domestic and sexual violence. We bring together and support research by experts from a range of disciplines, sectors, and backgrounds - some with personal experience, others with expertise from the work that they do, and survivor researchers with both.

The activities of the network are organised into 3 themes:

- Measurement** Measuring the extent and impact of domestic and sexual violence in relation to mental health. Our first year activities focused on the theme of measurement
- Understanding** Understanding the pathways that lead to domestic and sexual violence and their relationship to mental health problems
- Intervention** Planning interventions and services to prevent, reduce and address domestic and sexual violence in people with mental health problems or at risk of developing mental health problems

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