

Adverse Childhood Experiences as Psychosocial Determinants of Depression and Anxiety Among Metropolitan School Going Students: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract:

Background: Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) refer to some of the most intensive and frequently occurring sources of stress that children may suffer early in life. It can increase the risk of depression and anxiety during adolescence, with substantial implications for public mental health.

Objectives: To estimate the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences among metropolitan school-going students and to examine their association with anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 461 middle and high school students in a metropolitan city. Data on ACEs (10-item ACE questionnaire), anxiety (Generalized Anxiety Disorder GAD-2) and depression (Patient Health Questionnaire PHQ-9) were collected via a structured online survey hosted on Qualtrics. Depression was defined as PHQ-9 score ≥ 5 and a positive anxiety screen as GAD-2 score ≥ 3 . Pearson correlation was used to assess the relationship between ACE scores and depression and anxiety scores.

Results: The most prevalent ACEs were physical abuse by a parent/adult (ACE8, 29.1%), witnessing inter-adult violence at home (ACE5, 18.4%) and emotional abuse (ACE7, 20.6%). Overall, 68 students (14.7%) had PHQ-9 scores ≥ 5 and 30 (6.5%) screened positive on GAD-2. Depression was more common among females than males (20.8% vs 9.9%), as was anxiety (8.2% vs 5.1%). Total ACE score showed a positive correlation with PHQ-9 ($r=0.37$) and GAD-2 ($r=0.28$) scores.

Conclusions: Adverse childhood experiences are common and act as important psychosocial determinants of depression and anxiety among metropolitan school-going students. This study emphasises the need for school-based screening and early psychosocial interventions in adolescent mental health programs.

Keywords:

Adverse childhood experiences, anxiety, depression, adolescent mental health.