

Exposure to childhood violence linked to psychiatric disorders

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Investing in diminishing socioeconomic status inequalities and in preventing violent events during childhood may improve the mental health of youths from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, according to a study conducted by researchers at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and Federal University of São Paulo. The results showed that having experienced any traumatic event and low socioeconomic status were associated with an internalizing disorder such as depression and anxiety and an externalizing disorder including attention-deficit hyperactivity. The results are published online in the *Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry*.

The study was conducted in two different neighborhoods in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, one urban and one more rural. One-hundred and eighty 12-year-olds from public schools and their caregivers were interviewed to determine the influence of previous [violent events](#) and of [socioeconomic status](#) on the prevalence of psychiatric disorders.

Using structured interviews, the research team led by Silvia Martins, MD, PhD, Mailman School associate professor of Epidemiology, evaluated psychiatric disorders including: internalizing disorders (depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder) and externalizing disorders ([attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder](#), conduct disorder and oppositional-defiant disorder).

Nearly one-quarter (22 percent) of the youths had a psychiatric disorder. Depression and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder were the most

common diagnoses, at 9.5 percent, and 9 percent, respectively, followed by anxiety disorder at 6 percent.

A total of 14 percent of the sample had an internalizing disorder, nearly half of whom were males (45 percent). Another 15.5 percent had an externalizing disorder. Almost 60 percent of the adolescents with any diagnosis had experienced at least one violent event during their lifetime.

"If Brazil invests more to tackle socio-economic inequalities as well as to prevent exposure to urban violence in childhood and adolescence, the country will most likely be able to prevent the development of several cases of adolescent [psychiatric disorders](#)," said Martins.

More information: Thiago M. Fidalgo et al, Exposure to violence: associations with psychiatric disorders in Brazilian youth, *Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria* (2018). [DOI: 10.1590/1516-4446-2016-2122](https://doi.org/10.1590/1516-4446-2016-2122)

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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