

The Prevalence of Mental Illness and Associated Psychosocial Factors in Homeless Adolescents

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The Prevalence of Mental Illness and Associated Psychosocial Factors in Homeless Adolescents

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Background and Objective

Homelessness is a major social determinant of mental health. We set out to determine the prevalence of psychiatric illness in an adolescent homeless population and to report on the prevalence of psychosocial factors that could be associated.

Research Design and Methods

This is a retrospective, cohort study of patients who underwent state-mandated physicals at a homeless adolescent shelter in Pennsylvania from 2/19/2015-9/05/2019. Demographics and psychiatric and social histories were extracted. Categorical data was reported using frequencies and percentages. To test the study hypothesis that social history components were associated with psychiatric illness, a chi-square test of independence was conducted.

Results

435 charts were reviewed in the study cohort. Ages ranged from 11-20 with a mean age of 15.32 ± 1.62 . 42.5% (N=185) of the patients were male, 55.6% (N=242) were female, & 1.8% (N=8) were transgender. 54.9% (N=239) reported a psychiatric history, some with multiple diagnoses. Of these, the top 3 diagnoses reported were 55.2% (N=132) depression, 43.5% (N=104) ADHD, and 30.1% (N=72) anxiety. Regarding social history, 26.5% (N=114) reported trauma, 39.5% (N=170) reported self-injurious behavior, and 52.6% (N=226) reported aggression. 47.1% (N=205) reported illicit drug use, 12.0% (N=52) reported alcohol use, and 27.6% (N=120) reported tobacco use. A relationship existed between a psychiatric diagnosis & previous self-injurious behavior, $X^2(1, 432) = 30.4, p = 3.53E-8$, a history of aggression, $X^2(1, N=433) = 4.0, p = .046$, and a history of trauma, $X^2(1, 434) = 4.5, p = .034$. There was a relationship between a psychiatric diagnosis & tobacco use, $X^2(1, 434) = 6.1, p = .014$. No relationship existed between a psychiatric diagnosis & alcohol use $X^2(1, 433) = 0.32, p = .569$, or illicit drug use, $X^2(1, 434) = 0.41, p = .524$.

Conclusions

In our single site study, over half of the homeless adolescents reported a psychiatric diagnosis, most commonly depression. Histories of trauma, past aggression, and self-injurious behavior were present in a clinically substantial portion of the population. A psychiatric diagnosis was associated with a history of self-injurious behavior, trauma, aggression, and tobacco use. The proportion of patients who reported a psychiatric diagnosis did not differ by alcohol or illicit drug use.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS
REPORTING PSYCHIATRIC HISTORY

54.9%