

Unseen wounds: The prevalence and correlates of mental health problems among 3877 psychologically maltreated Chinese adolescents



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BACKGROUND

Psychological maltreatment (PM) was highly prevalent around the world, being a serious public health concern. Studies remain limited pertaining to Chinese adolescents with PM. This study aimed to investigate the prevalence and correlates of depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and internet addiction among psychologically maltreated Chinese adolescents based on large sample size.

METHODS

Data were collected through the Guangxi Youth Mental Health Survey (online). Participants were invited to report their sociodemographic information (i.e., gender, age, sibling[s], residence, and family structure). The Chinese Social Support Rating Scale and Self-compassion Scale - Short Form were applied to access social support and self-compassion. The Chinese version of Adverse Childhood Experiences was utilized to measure life adversities. Depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and internet addiction were assessed by Patient Health Questionnaire - 9 (PHQ-9), General Anxiety Disorder - 7 (GAD-7), and Young's 10-item internet addiction scale (IAT-10), respectively. 3877 Chinese adolescents (mean age = 13.96 years, SD = 1.71, age range: 10~18, 59.4% female) who answer affirmatively on items whether frequently of very frequently experienced PM were selected for further analysis in the present study. Logistic regressions (depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and internet addiction as binary variable, respectively) were used to examine the association between sociodemographic and psychological factors and mental health problems.

RESULTS

The prevalence of depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms and internet addiction among adolescence with PM were 66.5%, 54.9%, and 45.1%, respectively. Logistic regression results show that compared with males, females are associated with a higher odds of depression and anxiety symptoms. Low academic performance and from non-intact family are significant risk factors for the onset of depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and internet addiction. Notably, self-compassion and social support are significant protective factors against depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms and internet addiction. Compared with peers in the urban areas, psychologically maltreated adolescents in the rural areas showed a higher likelihood of having internet addiction.

CONCLUSIONS

The prevalences of depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and internet addiction were high among adolescents with psychological maltreatment experiences, which should be addressed properly. Self-compassion and social support were protective factors and could be a way of intervention towards this unique group.

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