

ADHD and Youth Violence: A Critical Appraisal of the Literature.

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Introduction

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a disorder diagnosed in those who are extremely energetic and have very short attention spans (American Psychiatric Association, 2015). This disorder has developed into its own field of research since the 1980s. Youth crime has always been connected to ADHD, but one subfield is how the level of youth violence is related to ADHD. A sizable amount of research has been conducted in this field, although there has not been any research done to validate the information. This forms the basis for the current study, as this report will assess the literature on youth ADHD and violence. It is hoped that the analysis will provide useful findings for policymakers to utilize when creating procedures to reduce violent acts ADHD youth commit.

Background

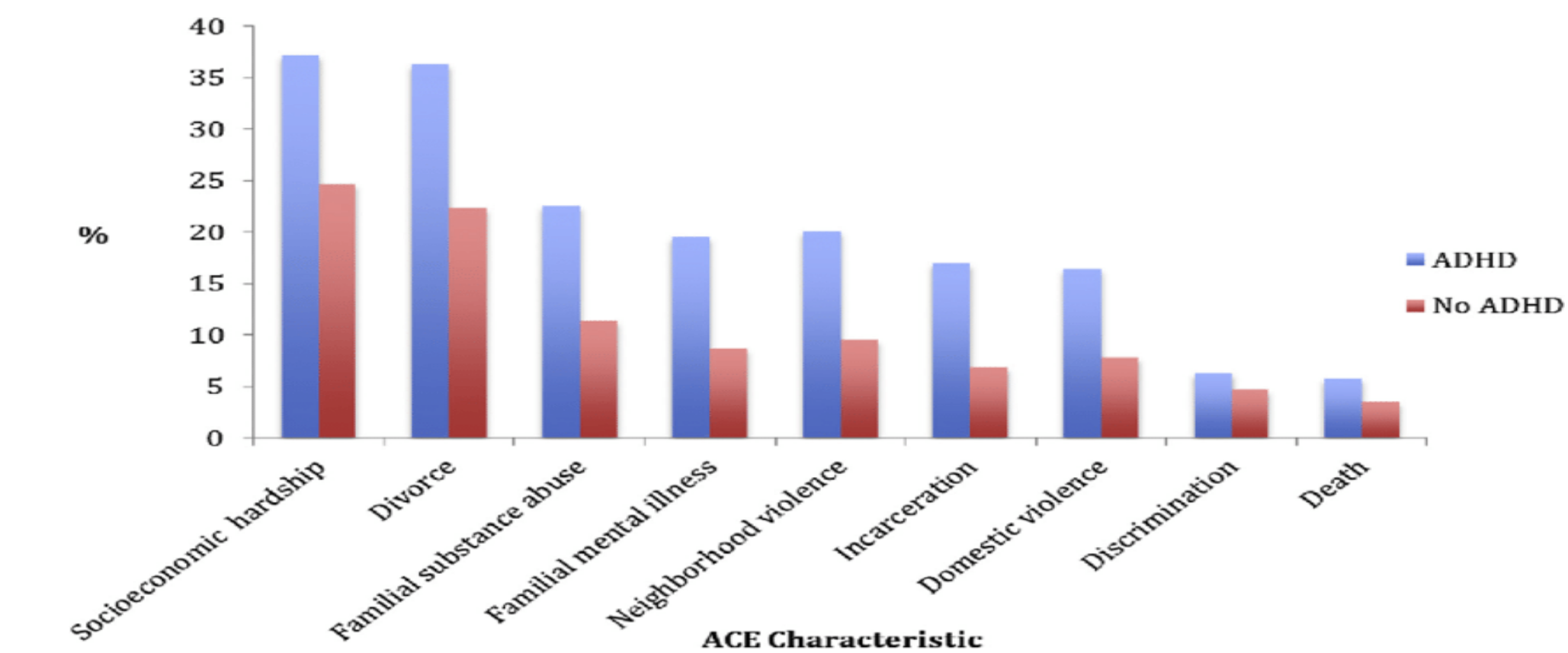
ADHD is thought to exist at a rate of just over five percent worldwide. The effects of the disorder can cause many adverse life situations for a child as they develop. The consensus of the literature indicates that youth who suffer the most extreme side effects of ADHD turn to violence. Thus, the research question was formed; what is the relationship between a youth's level of violence and their ADHD diagnosis? This information will be used when drafting policy aimed at reducing the level of violence committed by youth with ADHD.

Methods

To conduct the critical appraisal a literature review was first completed. The purpose of the literature review was to identify common themes in the literature and gaps that require further analysis. In conducting the literature review certain words and results were excluded such as magazines, periodicals and newspapers. This was done to reduce non scholarly material. Keywords excluded were terms like mental health or mental disorder. This was done to narrow the results, as terms such as those were too broad. The JIBC online library was the main system used to gather material, supplementary databases included Google Scholar and the NAIT online library system. The search was conducted through the JIBC EBSCO Discovery System, National Criminal Justice References Services (NCJRS) database and the ProQuest Criminal Justice Database.

Results/Findings

Within the literature, three themes emerged consistently. Poor school performance was an indication of violent behaviour by youth. ADHD youth with poorer school marks than their peers were more likely to engage in acts of aggression. Difficulty creating and sustaining relationships was another side effect of ADHD that impacted the level of violence a youth engaged in. Both relationships with peers and family relationships suffered as a result of ADHD. These youth created additional stress on their family and friends; therefore, they were unable to establish proper relationships which ultimately led to elevated levels of violence. Impulsivity and socioeconomic factors was another major theme that emerged. Socioeconomic factors were highly correlated with higher levels of impulsivity, a characteristic of ADHD. Youth with ADHD were more likely to be of lower socioeconomic status and therefore more involved in violent activities. The two major gaps consisted of a lack of research on female youth and ethnically diverse groups. There was a tendency to study white males or black males with little consideration for females or other ethnic groups.



From “Associations Between Adverse Childhood Experiences and ADHD Diagnosis and Severity,” by N. Brown, 2017, *Academic Pediatrics*, 17(4), p. 352. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2016.08.013>



From “ADHD in Children” by Kathleen Smith, n.d. (<https://www.psychom.net/adhd-children>)

Discussion

The current gaps in literature provide for a wide variety of speculation on the future of this research field. Comorbidity is one area that required further investigation. This will become important when assessing for conduct and defiance disorders in ADHD youth. Currently, there is little research on the coexistence of many mental health disorders with ADHD youth. Another section with promise is the inclusion of females to ADHD and violence. There is a lack of information in this area and some scholars feel as though the field requires more research. There is also a lack of information on ethnicities, specifically Asian and Hispanic, that requires additional research. When developing policies and programs for ADHD youth who are at risk of aggression it is important to develop them based on a wide variety of youth, not specific genders and ethnicities.

Conclusions or Recommendations

This body of research does have a significant ability to influence policy to prevent future violence among ADHD youth. Although there are still considerable problems with the literature such as a lack of female research, neglect to study minority ethnic groups and gaps in the literature. There is consistent thought among scholars that ADHD is associated with youth violence. One way this research can be utilized is to implement and develop programs for children in an educational setting. Prevention of violence will require youth to have additional support and be met with adequate assistance in school, an area where youth typically struggle. Future research should be conducted in these identified gaps to provide evidence for policy to be based upon.

References

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