

SOCIAL PSYCHIATRY AND PSYCHIATRIC EPIDEMIOLOGY

DOI: 10.1007/s00127-011-0415-3

ORIGINAL PAPER

Prevalence of child and adolescent psychiatric disorders in Santiago, Chile: a community epidemiological study

Benjamin Vicente, Flora de la Barra, Sandra Saldivia, Robert Kohn, Pedro Rioseco and Roberto Melipillan

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Abstract

Purpose

To determine the prevalence of DSM-IV psychiatric disorders in a representative sample of children and adolescents living in Santiago, Chile, as part of a national sample.

Method

Subjects aged 4-18 were selected using a stratified multistage design. First, ten municipalities/*comunas* of Santiago were selected; then the blocks, homes, and child or adolescent to be interviewed were chosen. Psychology graduate students administered the Spanish-language, computer-assisted version of DISC-IV that estimated DSM-IV 12-month prevalence.

Results

A total of 792 children and adolescents were evaluated, with a participation rate of 76.7%. The most stringent impairment DSM-IV DISC algorithm for psychiatric disorders revealed a prevalence of 25.4% (20.7% for boys and 30.3% for girls). The majority of the diagnoses corresponded to anxiety and affective disorders. Prevalence was higher in children aged 4-11 (31.9%) than in adolescents aged 12-18 (18.2%). This difference was mainly accounted for by disruptive disorders in the younger age group. Anxiety disorders had the highest prevalence, although impairment was low. In contrast, most children and adolescents with affective disorders were impaired.

Conclusions

In Santiago, the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents was high. This study helps raise awareness of child and adolescent mental health issues in Spanish-speaking Latin America and serves as a basis for improving mental health services.

Keywords Child - Adolescent - Psychiatric epidemiology - Psychiatric disorders - Mental health

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Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol
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Received: 30 March 2010 / Accepted: 6 July 2011
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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in a representative sample of children and adolescents from a Chilean population. This initial report presents the prevalence of disorders found in the capital city of Santiago, where 54.5% of the nation's children and adolescents reside ($N = 1,150,270$). The complete survey, once all data are available, will include Santiago, one city in northern Chile, and two cities in southern Chile. These cities were selected using socioeconomic, ethnic, and demographic criteria; the same cities were used for a previous epidemiological study of the adult population [1].

The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that psychiatric disorders with onset in childhood and adolescence should be a matter of concern in terms of public health. In the USA, the Epidemiological Catchment Area Survey of adult populations retrospectively showed that the age of onset for core psychiatric disorders was earlier than formerly believed [2]. The National Comorbidity Survey-Replication study recently confirmed these findings [3].

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Published online: 28 July 2011

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