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The association between intimate partner violence and anxiety and depression: Preliminary findings of a survey of university students

Arif Pendi¹, Alfonso J Valdez¹, Jose Aguilar², Danny Lee³, Joshua Lee⁴, Kasim Pendi², Kate B Wolitzky-Taylor⁴ and David Safani¹¹University of California Irvine, USA²University of California Riverside, USA³Virginia Commonwealth University, USA⁴University of California Los Angeles, USA

Introduction: Intimate partner violence (IPV) has been linked to the development of mental disorders such as anxiety and depression. However, the link between IPV and mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression has not been well-studied in university students. Given the large burden of anxiety and depressive disorders among university students and the high prevalence of dating violence, investigating the association between IPV and anxiety or depression has serious implications for on-campus screening efforts as well as the practice of psychiatry.

Methodology: An anonymous survey was disseminated via email to invite undergraduate and graduate students to complete an online survey form regarding their beliefs surrounding IPV, anxiety and depression. The survey included socio-demographic questions, HITS Domestic Violence Screening Tool, Generalized Anxiety Scale (GAS-7) and Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9). Respondents that were considered positive for IPV according to HITS were compared to the remaining respondents in terms of continuous scores on GAS-7 and PHQ-9 for anxiety and depression, respectively. Comparisons were made using t-test, two-tailed and assuming unequal variances.

Findings: Of 396 respondents, 18 students showed signs of IPV according to the HITS tool. This group exhibited greater intensity of anxiety (10.83 ± 5.711 versus 6.23 ± 5.355 ; $p=0.003$) and depression (12.06 ± 6.384 versus 7.34 ± 6.266 ; $p=0.007$) compared to the remaining respondents.

Conclusions: These preliminary findings indicate IPV was significantly associated with both anxiety and depression in a large sample of university students. Psychiatrists treating students that have experienced IPV may need to be aware of symptoms of anxiety as well as depression. Universities may need to screen for anxiety and depression in students that report IPV on-campus.

Biography

Arif Pendi has recently completed his Master of Science degree in Global Medicine after which he continued his research in the fields of psychiatry and orthopedic surgery. His current research interests include studying common mental disorders in college-aged men and women, the mental health consequences of intimate partner violence and the role of anxiety in predicting surgical outcomes after spine surgery. He also directs the operations of Free Minds United, a grassroots non-profit organization dedicated to mental health advocacy in the community.

arif.i.pendi@gmail.com

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