

Community violence exposure and associated psychopathology: Comparing juvenile delinquents and school students

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Background: Research has consistently reported that exposure to community violence is a risk factor for child and adolescent mental health. The aim of this study was to investigate potential differences in the relationship between community violence exposure and psychopathology among adolescents.

Methods: Participants were 1361, 12-17 year old adolescents ($M=16.4$, $SD=0.9$) in three different groups, juvenile delinquents ($N=344$) and school students ($N=1017$, 35% boys) from Northwestern Russia.

Results: Juvenile delinquents reported higher levels of both witnessing and victimization. As for differences in problem scores according to the degree of severity of violence exposure, direct victimization was associated with reporting significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, somatization, alcohol use, binge drinking and aggressive beliefs among all adolescents. The main effect for the degree of exposure to violence for the total group was significant with increasing problems scores by increasing exposure to community violence. The main effect for group was also significant demonstrating differences between variables of interest between the study groups. Considering that the differences by outcome, country and gender could have been masked by use of the MANCOVA analysis, each outcome was examined separately. The results obtained have been largely similar.

Conclusions: Our findings that problems scores increased along with severity of violence exposure and generalizability of this pattern to all three groups expand previous research about a consistent relationship between community violence and psychopathology. Findings are of relevance both for identifying adolescents at risk for psychopathology as a result of exposure to community violence and for prevention.

Biography

Roman Koposov has completed his PhD from UiT-The Arctic University of Norway. He is an Associate Professor at the Regional Centre for Child and Youth Mental Health and Welfare, North, UiT-The Arctic University of Norway. He has published more than 48 papers in peer-reviewed journals.

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