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Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and generalised anxiety disorder in adolescents after a natural disaster: a study of comorbidity

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Abstract

Background: Information on mental health sequel in adolescents following natural disasters from developing countries is scant.

Method: Around one year after a super-cyclone, proportion of adolescents exhibiting post-traumatic psychiatric symptoms, prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression and generalized anxiety disorder, comorbidity and impairment of performance in school were studied in Orissa, India. Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview for children and adolescents was used for evaluation and diagnosis. The criteria for diagnoses were based on Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – IV.

Results: Post-disaster psychiatric presentation in adolescents was a conglomeration of PTSD, depression and anxiety symptoms. The prevalences of PTSD, major depressive disorder and generalised anxiety disorder were 26.9%, 17.6% and 12.0% respectively. Proportion of adolescents with any diagnosis was 37.9%. Comorbidity was found in 39.0% of adolescents with a psychiatric diagnosis. Adolescents from middle socioeconomic status were more affected. There were gender differences in the presentation of the symptoms rather than on the prevalence of diagnoses. Prolonged periods of helplessness and lack of adequate post-disaster psychological support were perceived as probable influencing factors, as well as the severity of the disaster.

Conclusion: The findings of the study highlight the continuing need for identification and intervention for post-disaster psychiatric morbidities in adolescent victims in developing countries.