

The prevalence and correlates of abuse among children with autism served in comprehensive community-based mental health settings.

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Pubmed Abstract

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OBJECTIVE:

To determine the demographic and psychosocial correlates of physical and sexual abuse among children with autism.

METHODS:

Data collected from 1997 to 2000 through the national evaluation of the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and their Families Program on 156 children with autism were used. Data included a baseline assessment of child and family psychosocial experiences and presenting problems associated with referral into system-of-care service, demographic information, and a clinical record review to obtain psychiatric diagnosis. Binary and multinomial logistic regression was used to determine the association of different characteristics of children who were abused compared with those who were not abused.

RESULTS:

Caregivers reported that 18.5% of children with autism had been physically abused and 16.6% had been sexually abused. Physically abused children more likely had engaged in sexual acting out or abusive behavior, had made a suicide attempt, or had conduct-related or academic problems. Sexually abused children more likely had engaged in sexual acting out or abusive behavior, suicidal or other self-injurious behavior, had run away from home, or had a psychiatric hospitalization. In adjusted multivariate models, the relationship between sexual abuse and sexual acting out, running away from home and suicidal attempts persisted.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the prevalence of abuse and its association with various behaviors, clinicians should be as attuned to the psychosocial histories of children with autism as they are for other children, and consider the potential of abuse when these behaviors are observed.