

## **Prevalence and risk of violence against children with disabilities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies.**

Jones L, Bellis MA, Wood S, Hughes K, McCoy E, Eckley L, Bates G, Mikton C, Shakespeare T, Officer A.

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Abstract

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### **BACKGROUND:**

Globally, at least 93 million children have moderate or severe disability. Children with disabilities are thought to have a substantially greater risk of being victims of violence than are their non-disabled peers. Establishment of reliable estimates of the scale of the problem is an essential first step in the development of effective prevention programmes. We therefore undertook a systematic review and meta-analysis to synthesise evidence for the prevalence and risk of violence against children with disabilities.

### **METHODS:**

For this systematic review and meta-analysis, we searched 12 electronic databases to identify cross-sectional, case-control, or cohort studies reported between Jan 1, 1990, and Aug 17, 2010, with estimates of prevalence of violence against children (aged  $\leq 18$  years) with disabilities or their risk of being victims of violence compared with children without disabilities.

### **FINDINGS:**

17 studies were selected from 10,663 references. Reports of 16 studies provided data suitable for meta-analysis of prevalence and 11 for risk. Pooled prevalence estimates were 26.7% (95% CI 13.8-42.1) for combined violence measures, 20.4% (13.4-28.5) for physical violence, and 13.7% (9.2-18.9) for sexual violence. Odds ratios for pooled risk estimates were 3.68 (2.56-5.29) for combined violence measures, 3.56 (2.80-4.52) for physical violence, and 2.88 (2.24-3.69) for sexual violence. Huge heterogeneity was identified across most estimates ( $I(2) > 75\%$ ). Variations were not consistently explained with meta-regression analysis of the characteristics of the studies.

### **INTERPRETATION:**

The results of this systematic review confirm that children with disabilities are more likely to be victims of violence than are their peers who are not disabled. However, the continued scarcity of robust evidence, due to a lack of well designed research studies, poor standards of measurement of disability and violence, and insufficient assessment of whether violence precedes the development of disability, leaves gaps in knowledge that need to be addressed.