Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in children with intellectual disabilities (ID): an exploratory case-file study in Dutch residential care

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Introduction

International research indicates that ACEs play a key role in child development and subsequent adult health. Children with ID and their families are underrepresented in international ACEs research, while they have been found to be more likely to be exposed to a wider range of adverse life events or traumatic events than their peers.

Main explorative research question:

What is the relationship between ACEs, living circumstances and mental – and physical health in children with ID and their parents?

Sources

- Reports previous and external involved youth care organisations
- Reports multidisciplinary team ‘De Hondsberg’: psychologists, psychiatrists, (system) therapists, pedagogues, physicians, residential care mentors

Method

- Design: Exploratory case-file study
- Sample: N = 69 (46 male, 23 female)
- Age: 11.3 (SD = 3.1, range 2-16)

Model of adverse childhood experiences

Expanded ACEs framework

Economic hardship (30%), victim of bullying (13%), > 1 placements in residential care (40%), problematic caregiver-child relationship (37.1%), hospitalization (34.3%), not attending school (23.2%)

Results

Child factors significantly (<0.05) related to number of ACEs
- Trauma / Stressor-related problems
- Mean number settings
- Rule breaking behavior
- Attachment problems
- Sexual risk taking behavior
- Somatic complaints
- Thought problems

Parental factors significantly (<0.05) related to number of ACEs
- ID
- Limited parenting competence
- Problems parent-child relationship
- Debts
- Involved with justice

Conclusions

- 49.3% experienced 2 ≥ ‘original’ ACEs (m=2.1; SD = 1.8) → related to the presence of ACEs in the parents
- 64.3% experienced 2 ≥ ACEs from the original + significant ACEs from the expanded ACEs framework
- Both child- and parental ACEs were related to attachment- and trauma/stressor-related disorders
- Living circumstances and multiple ACEs of the expanded ACEs framework (especially parental characteristics) were found to be related to ACEs in children with ID

References