

Poly-victimization among Children with Disabilities Summary of Key Points

Heather Turner, Sherry Hamby, and Victoria Banyard

Recent research has found *children with disabilities* are at substantially greater risk of experiencing *poly-victimization*. Although there is no universal definition of *disability*, most definitions include a broad array of chronic conditions that limit functioning; including, but not limited to emotional and behavioral disorders, like depression; physical disabilities that create limitations in hearing, sight, or mobility; and developmental and learning disabilities, such as attention deficit disorder, autism, or cognitive disability.

Poly-victimization refers to the experience of multiple victimizations of *different kinds*, such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, bullying, witnessing family violence, and exposure to community violence. Poly-victimization is more highly related to trauma symptoms than experiencing repeated victimizations of a single, even serious, type of victimization.

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV), a study focusing on the victimization experiences of children in the U.S. ages one month to 17 years, defined poly-victimization as *exposure to seven or more different forms of victimization in the past year*. The study showed that:

- The percentage of children who qualified as poly-victims was almost twice as high (13.1%) among those diagnosed with any form of disability than among those with no disability (6.8%).
- 15 % of children diagnosed with Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) experienced poly-victimization.
- 11.6 % of children with physical disabilities and 11.7 % of children with a learning disorder (other than ADHD) were poly-victims.
- Almost a quarter of youth (23%) with internalizing disorders, such as Major Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), were poly-victims.

Implications

The finding that children with ADHD and those with internalizing disorders are most likely to experience poly-victimization suggests that disorders that are typically more “invisible,” but affect social skills and interaction patterns, may create the greatest vulnerability to victimization. It is important for practitioners working with children with disabilities, including those in clinical, school, or home settings, conduct comprehensive assessments of victimization exposure that take into account a wide array of different types of victimizations (e.g. child physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, bullying, community violence, property crime, etc.) in all major settings of life for the child with disabilities. Comprehensive victimization assessments will help practitioners create more effective interventions for children with disabilities. Intervening in one area of a child's life is less likely to be effective or helpful if children are unsafe elsewhere.

The research reported in this publication was produced by the Crimes Against Children Research Center of the University of New Hampshire with funding by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Production and dissemination of this publication is supported by the National Children's Advocacy Center under Grant No. 2012-VF-GX-K010, Awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these materials are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. | For more resources on poly-victimization visit <http://www.nationalcac.org>