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Abstract #63936

Homelessness, Domestic Violence, and Child Mental Health

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Most prior studies of the mental status of homeless children rely on standardized measures such as depression scales rather than direct assessment of children referred based on need. This presentation focuses on 267 consecutively assessed homeless children referred by their primary pediatrician during a 2 year period (1997-98) and assessed by a clinical psychologist. Within this referred population, (mean age=59 months; 64% male, 36% female; 60% African-American, 40% Hispanic) we found 15% diagnosed with depression, 18% with attention deficit disorder (ADD), 8% with mother-child problems, and 5% with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In this population, 26% cited domestic violence as the reason the family became homeless. Comparison is made with 109 patients identically referred and assessed during 2001. In 2001, this pediatric primary care program had increased services to families in domestic violence shelters, and 57% of the children referred for behavioral health assessment had been recently exposed to family violence. Demographically this group is very similar (mean age=64 months; 63% male, 37% female; 63% African-American, 37% Hispanic). Prevalence of diagnosed depression is consistent, 16%. Prevalence is lower for ADD (11%, $p=0.06$) and mother-child problems (4%) while prevalence of PTSD is higher (8%). Nutrition deficits – obesity, failure to thrive, iron deficiency anemia – in these referred populations are higher for the predominantly homeless patients (24%) than the predominantly domestic violence sheltered group (17%), as are prevalence of asthma (42% compared with 29%, $p<0.05$) and recurrent otitis media (45% compared with 22%, $p<0.05$). Programmatic and policy implications are discussed.

Learning Objectives:

* Participants will better understand the mental health problems of children in homeless shelters; Participants will better understand the differences between children mental health and medical issues affecting children in homeless shelters compared with children in domestic violence shelters.

Violence: Etiology and Prevention Among Youth

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