



Child & Adolescent Services Research Center



RESEARCH BRIEF

Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders in Youth Across Five Sectors of Care

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Within the past decade, there has been growing recognition that youths with mental health problems are served by multiple public sectors of care, including Mental Health (MH), Alcohol and Drug Services (AD), Child Welfare (CW), Juvenile Justice (JJ), and Public School Services for Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED). To date, though, there has been no systematic study allowing a comparison of prevalence rates for psychiatric disorders across different sectors of care, data which has important implications for service delivery policies and efforts to develop integrated, evidence-based systems of care.

Methods

The *Patterns of Care* study included a survey of a random sample of 1715 children and adolescents ages 6-17 from open cases of youth active in one or more of five San Diego County public sectors of care (AD, CW, JJ, MH, SED). This report includes data on 1618 subjects for whom DISC data is available. The majority of the participants are male (66%), and the racial/ethnic distribution is as follows: Caucasian 39%, Latino 26%, African American 21%, Asian American/Pacific Islander 6%, and Mixed or Other ethnicity 8%. Approximately 33% of participants were active in more than one sector and they are reflected in each of the sectors in which they had affiliation.

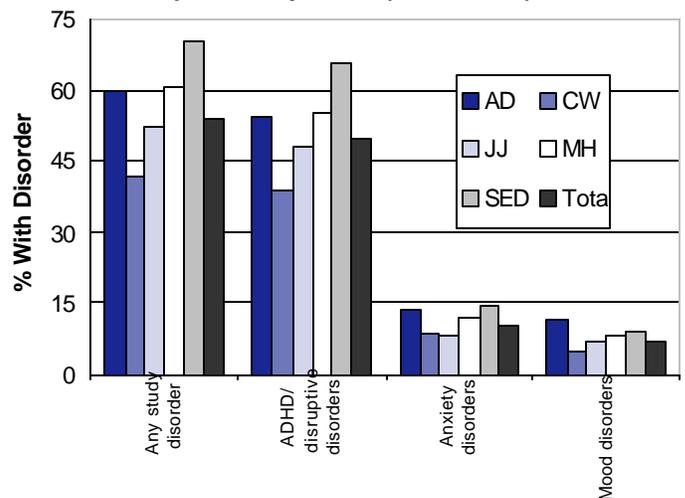
The computer-assisted version of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children IV (DISC-IV) (Shaffer et al., 2000) was administered to parents and youth by trained interviewers. Diagnoses were considered present for the youth if either caretaker report or youth report met full diagnostic criteria and at least one moderate level of diagnostic specific functional impairment was endorsed. Past year prevalence estimates are reported with sampling weights assigned to represent the original stratified enumeration sample.

Results

The past year prevalence of psychiatric disorders was high, with 54% of the total sample meeting criteria for at least one of the study diagnoses (see Figure 1); 23% met criteria for two or more disorders. Rates of ADHD/ODD/CD were much higher than rates of anxiety or mood disorders (49.7%, compared to 9.9% and 7.0%, respectively). ADHD and conduct disorder had the highest prevalence overall. The prevalence of any study disorder was highest in the SED

sector (70.2%), followed by MH (60.8%), AD (60.3%), JJ (52.1%), and CW (41.8%). The majority of the sector differences remained when age and gender were controlled for in regression analyses.

Figure 1. Prevalence Estimates of Diagnoses with Impairment by Sector (total N=1618)



Discussion

The prevalence of psychiatric disorders in this multi-service public sector, high risk sample (54% any disorder) was much higher than most estimates of community rates which approximate 20%. These data also suggest that the public sectors of care are primarily serving youth with ADHD and disruptive behavior disorders. In addition, although the prevalence rates are generally highest in sectors designed to treat youths with mental health problems, rates are also high in sectors not so designated, such as Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice.

Recognizing the extent of need, these service sectors should be supporting the implementation and testing of empirically supported interventions for ADHD and disruptive behavior disorders. In addition, improved screening, identification and referral mechanisms for all mental health problems are necessary in all service sectors.

A complete account of this study can be found in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, (2001), Vol. 40(4), pp. 409-418. For more information, please contact Dr. Garland at agarland@casrc.org