

EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP  
TO PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA SYMPTOMS IN A SELECT GROUP  
OF JAMAICAN ADOLESCENTS IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

Exposure to Violence and Its Relationship  
to Psychological Trauma Symptoms in a Select Group  
of Jamaican Adolescents in High Schools.

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This study examined the relationship of exposure to violence to psychological symptomatology, specifically anxiety, depression, anger, posttraumatic stress, and dissociation in 392 students, aged 13 – 16 years in four high schools in Kingston and St. Andrew. The participants completed four self-report measures, which ascertained demographic information, assessed acting out behaviours, and level of exposure to violence, and the presence of psychological symptomatology. The participants were divided in two groups, low level of exposure to violence (LEV n=87) and high level of exposure to violence (HEV n=305). Factorial and correlational analyses revealed a significant relationship between level of exposure to violence and psychological symptomatology. Results indicated that persons with a high level of exposure to violence had a greater likelihood of developing psychological symptomatology and diagnosis. MANOVAs revealed that there are no significant interactions between gender and level of exposure on psychological symptoms, but there are main effects for both. Males had a higher level of exposure and displayed more depressive symptoms than females. Anger had the highest but moderate correlation ( $r=.389$ ) with

exposure to violence. In addition, there was a positive moderate relationship between high exposure to violence and acting out behaviours. Parental status, single-parent or dual-parent headed household, was not significantly associated with the level of exposure to violence or the presence of psychological symptomatology in students. Finally, school location, volatile or non-volatile community, did not have an effect on psychological symptoms or level of exposure to violence. The results of the present study are consistent with prior research and provide further evidence of a relationship between violence exposure and psychological symptomatology. The understanding that violence exposure is significantly related to adolescent trauma indicates a need for improved identification and intervention efforts. The identification of adolescents who display psychological symptomatology as well as acting-out behaviours may lead to the proper assessment, and the development of effective strategies and intervention programmes.

**Keywords:** exposure to violence; psychological trauma symptoms; psychological symptomatology; acting-out behaviours; adolescents