

## ABSTRACT

### The Exposure To Violence And The Development Of Symptoms Of Psychological Distress In Boys Ages 10-15 Years In Two Schools In Jamaica

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Violence is a growing public health problem throughout the world. Violence impacts negatively on the quality of life and living conditions of many worldwide. The objectives of the study were to identify the exposure to violence, of males between the ages 10-15 years in two Jamaican schools, identifying the environments in which this took place, the weapons used and the development of symptoms of psychological distress in the boys exposed to violence.

The study used a survey design with an anonymous self-report questionnaire and two focus group interviews were conducted. The results showed that there were high levels of exposure to violence in respondents from both schools. More than 50% of the boys had been involved in physical fights, 39% of students carried weapons to school, 97.8% witnessed fights and 55.9% of boys had had a family member or friend murdered. Exposure to violence occurred in their communities, at school and at home. Respondents experienced symptoms of psychological distress such as, difficulty in sleeping, crying in their sleep, an increased heart rate and anger. Two boys stated that they would like to kill themselves.

In order to reduce the exposure of juveniles to violence and the development of psychological problems due to this, strategies involving non-violent methods of conflict resolution need to be taught to juveniles, their parents and caregivers.

A multifaceted approach also needs to be used involving the juveniles, various government associations as well as non-governmental institutions and the private sector, to provide support systems for victims and their families.