

Witnessing a Violent Death and Smoking, Alcohol Consumption, and Marijuana Use among Adolescents.

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Source

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Abstract

Witnessing violence has been linked to maladaptive coping behaviors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and marijuana use. However, more research is required to identify mechanisms in which witnessing violence leads to these behaviors. The objectives of this investigation were to examine the association between witnessing a violent death and smoking, alcohol consumption, and marijuana use among adolescents, to identify whether exhibiting depressive symptoms was a mediator within this relationship, and to determine if those who had adult support in school were less likely to engage in risky health behaviors. Data were collected from a sample of 1,878 urban students, from 18 public high schools participating in the 2008 Boston Youth Survey. In 2012, we used multilevel log-binomial regression models and propensity score matching to estimate the association between witnessing a violent death and smoking, alcohol consumption, and marijuana use. Analyses indicated that girls who witnessed a violent death were more likely to use marijuana (relative risk (RR) = 1.09, 95 % confidence interval (CI) = 1.02, 1.17), and tended towards a higher likelihood to smoke (RR = 1.06, 95 % CI = 1.00, 1.13) and consume alcohol (RR = 1.07, 95 % CI = 0.97, 1.18). Among boys, those who witnessed a violent death were significantly more likely to smoke (RR = 1.20, 95 % CI = 1.11, 1.29), consume alcohol (RR = 1.30, 95 % CI = 1.17, 1.45) and use marijuana (RR = 1.33, 95 % CI = 1.21, 1.46). When exhibiting depressive symptoms was included, estimates were not attenuated. However, among girls who witnessed a violent death, having an adult at school for support was protective against alcohol consumption. When we used propensity score matching, findings were consistent with the main analyses among boys only. This study adds insight into how witnessing violence can lead to adoption of adverse health behaviors.

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