

Adverse Childhood Experiences: Prevalence and Related Factors in a Representative Sample of Young Adults in Albania

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Abstract

Background: Adverse childhood experience (ACE) comprises a wide range of childhood abuse and neglect and household dysfunction forms that have a deep impact on the future health of affected individuals.

Aim: The aim of this study was to assess the prevalence of ACE and the factors related with it in a sample of young adults in Albania.

Methods: In 2015 a cross-sectional survey was carried out employing a representative sample of young adults (n=957) studying in four public universities in Albania (530 females or 55.4%); mean age: 22.5 years. The Family Health History questionnaire (containing 68 questions) was used to collect information on a wide range of childhood experiences. The ACE questionnaire containing 10 variables was retrieved and an

ACE score was calculated. General Linear Model was used to compare the mean number of ACEs across categorical independent variables.

Results: The prevalence of at least one ACE in this sample of students was 69.5% whereas the prevalence of ≥ 4 ACEs was 16.2%. The most prevalent ACE was emotional abuse (35.4%), followed by physical neglect (34.3%), violent treatment of mother (23.9%), physical abuse (21%) and substance abuse (18.7%). The prevalence of physical abuse, sexual abuse and substance abuse was significantly higher among males than females. Male sex, low parental education, father's unemployment and young age of mother at birth were all significantly associated with a higher mean number of ACEs compared to their respective counterparts.

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Conclusion: The prevalence of child maltreatment in Albania is rather high. Appropriate, carefully planned and well-thought strategies and interventions are needed for the prevention of adverse childhood experience in Albania.

Keywords: Albania, adverse childhood experience, child abuse, prevalence, cross-sectional.