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Psychotic Experiences in the Context of Depression:  
The Cumulative Role of Victimization

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**Abstract**

Previous studies have reported an association between depression and psychotic experiences, but little is known about what drives this co-occurrence. This study tests the hypothesis that exposure to trauma and bullying may strengthen the relation between depression and psychotic experiences. A total of 799 college students completed self-report questionnaires on psychotic experiences, depression, bullying, and sexual trauma. Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to test the direct relationship between depression and psychotic experiences, as well as interactions. Approximately 20% of respondents reported a history of being bullied, and 7% reported exposure to childhood sexual trauma. There was a significant direct relationship between depression and psychotic experiences. The association between depression and psychotic experiences was significantly stronger among respondents who were victims of both bullying and sexual violence compared to those who experienced either exposure alone, or who were not exposed to either form of victimization. These findings suggest that cumulative exposure to trauma and victimization may contribute to the co-occurrence of depression and psychotic experiences. History of victimization should be assessed among individuals with depressive symptoms to improve treatment plans and outcomes.

**Keywords:** psychosis, depressive symptoms, trauma, bullying, sexual abuse

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