

Original article

Multiple-victimisation due to armed conflict and emotional distress in the State of Magdalena, Colombia[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Background: Emotional distress is common in Colombian armed conflict victims. Multiple-victimisation is associated with an increase in emotional distress than victimisation due a single event. However, the association between poly-victimisation and emotional distress among victims of the armed conflict in Colombia has not been documented.

Objective: To study the association between multiple-victimisation and emotional distress in victims of armed conflict in the State of Magdalena, Colombia.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was designed, with a secondary analysis of registration of the Psychosocial Care Program and Victim Integral Health (PAPSIVI) in the State of Magdalena, from 2013 to 2014. The profile formula grouped demographic variables, victimising events, and a set of symptoms of emotional distress (perceived discrimination, depressive and anxiety-stress). Odds ratio (OR, 95%CI) were established as measures of association.

Results: A total of 943 people were included, with 67.4% women, and ages between 18 and 94 years (mean 47.9 ± 14.2). A total of 109 (11.7%) suffered from multiple victimisation. Multiple victimisation events were associated with more emotional distress, depressive symptoms (OR = 1.5; 95%CI, 1.3–1.8), perceived stigma (OR = 1.3; 95%CI, 1.1–1.5), and anxiety-stress (OR = 1.2; 95%CI 1.0–1.4) than a single event.

Conclusions: There are more emotional distress in multiple victimisations than in a single victimisation event during armed conflict in this region of Colombia. Further studies are required on this topic.

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Polivictimización por el conflicto armado y sufrimiento emocional en el Departamento del Magdalena, Colombia

R E S U M E N

Palabras clave:

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Ansiedad
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Estudio transversal

Introducción: El sufrimiento emocional es frecuente en víctimas del conflicto armado colombiano. La polivictimización se asocia a mayor número de sufrimientos emocionales que la victimización debida un único evento. Sin embargo, hasta la fecha no se ha documentado la asociación entre polivictimización y sufrimiento emocional en víctimas del conflicto armado en Colombia.

Objetivo: Estudiar la asociación entre polivictimización y sufrimiento emocional en víctimas del conflicto armado del Departamento del Magdalena, Colombia.

Métodos: Se diseñó un estudio transversal, un análisis secundario del registro del Programa de Atención Psicosocial y Salud Integral a Víctimas (PAPSIVI) del Departamento del Magdalena, 2013-2014. El formulario de caracterización agrupó variables demográficas, eventos victimizantes y un conjunto de manifestaciones de sufrimiento emocional (discriminación percibida, depresión y ansiedad). Se establecieron razones de disparidades como medidas de asociación.

Resultados: Se incluyó a 943 personas, el 67,4% mujeres, con edad de 18-94 años (media, $47,9 \pm 14,2$). Un total de 109 (11,7%) presentaron polivictimización. La polivictimización se asoció a mayor sufrimiento emocional que la victimización por un único evento, síntomas depresivos (*odds ratio* = 1,5; intervalo de confianza del 95%, 1,3-1,8), estigmatización percibida (*odds ratio* = 1,3; intervalo de confianza del 95%, 1,1-1,5) y ansiedad-estrés (*odds ratio* = 1,2; intervalo de confianza del 95%, 1,0-1,4).

Conclusiones: La polivictimización incrementa el sufrimiento emocional más que la victimización por un único evento en personas víctimas del conflicto armado en esta región colombiana. Es necesario investigar más en esta área.

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Introduction

Poly-victimisation is defined as the simultaneous occurrence or presentation of multiple forms of interpersonal violence.^{1,2} Undoubtedly, these negative events play a fundamental role in the pathogenesis of symptoms related to mental disorders.^{3,4}

Victims of a single event, whether natural or the result of violent human actions, frequently relate emotional distress following the events.^{5,6} Likewise, it is observed that people who report poly-victimisation relate greater emotional suffering than those who report a single event in a given period.⁷⁻¹¹ Consequently, in people who present poly-victimisation, the frequency of emotional problems is higher, as is the probability of meeting the criteria for a mental disorder as a result.¹²⁻¹⁵

Poly-victimisation is not a one-dimensional phenomenon, but a diverse set of painful or traumatic experiences with unique implications for each group of victims of the internal armed conflict due to material and immaterial losses, lifestyle changes and coping with new challenges or risks.^{16,17} The internal armed conflict in Colombia is a significant cause of poly-victimisation; in addition to forced displacement, there are other forms of violence such as direct death threats, disappearances of relatives and acquaintances, murders, kidnappings, torture and sexual assaults, thus increasing the sources of suffering.¹⁸

Emotional symptoms and potential mental disorder cases are highly frequent among victims of the internal armed conflict in Colombia. In Colombian adults who have fallen victim to the internal armed conflict and been displaced, the prevalence of potential mental disorder cases exceeds 20%.¹⁹ However, in the general population, potential cases of mental disorders, anxiety and depression are observed less frequently, reaching 10% when quantified with the Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ).²⁰

Poly-victimisation has been studied in other countries, particularly in children and adolescents⁷⁻¹¹ and, most recently, among adult men and women in other situations besides those occurring in the context of the Colombian armed conflict.¹²⁻¹⁵ Poly-victimisation is a more stressful eventuality than re-victimisation, i.e., the repetition of the same situation of victimisation⁷; however, to date, the association between poly-victimisation and emotional suffering among victims of the Colombian armed conflict has not been quantified. A greater frequency and, consequently, a disproportionate number of cases of emotional suffering can be expected among those who report poly-victimisation than those who only present a single victimisation event in the context of the armed conflict.¹

In order to meet the needs of the people who have been directly affected by the armed conflict, the Programme for Psychosocial and Integrated Health Care for Victims (PAPSIVI) was

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