

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and Later-Life Depression: Perceived Social Support as a Potential Protective Factor

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Abstract : Introduction and Aim: Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are all too common and have been linked to poorer health and wellbeing across the life course. While the prevention of ACEs is a worthy goal, it is important that we also try to lessen the impact of ACEs for those who do experience them. This study aims to investigate associations between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and later-life depressive symptoms; and to explore whether perceived social support (PSS) moderates these. Method: We analysed baseline data from the Mitchelstown (Ireland) 2010-11 cohort involving 2047 men and women aged 50-69 years. Self-reported assessments included ACEs (Centre for Disease Control ACE questionnaire), PSS (Oslo Social Support Scale), and depressive symptoms (CES-D). The primary exposure was self-report of at least one ACE. We also investigated the effects of ACE exposure by the subtypes abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. Associations between each of these exposures and depressive symptoms were estimated using logistic regression, adjusted for socio-demographic factors that were selected using the Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG) approach. We also tested whether the estimated associations varied across levels of PSS (poor, moderate, and good). Results: 23.7% of participants reported at least one ACE (95% CI: 21.9% to 25.6%). ACE exposures (overall or subtype) were associated with a higher odds of depressive symptoms, but only among individuals with poor PSS. For example, exposure to any ACE (vs. none) was associated with 3 times the odds of depressive symptoms (Adjusted OR 2.97; 95% CI 1.63 to 5.40) among individuals reporting poor PSS, while among those reporting moderate PSS, the adjusted OR was 1.18 (95% CI 0.72 to 1.94). Discussion: ACEs are common among older adults in Ireland and are associated with higher odds of later-life depressive symptoms among those also reporting poor PSS. Interventions that enhance perception of social support following ACE exposure may help reduce the burden of depression in older populations.

Keywords : adverse childhood experiences, depression, later-life, perceived social support

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