

Differences and similarities between children and adolescent exposed to interpersonal traumas with and without Intellectual Disability: an explorative study

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Background: Individuals with intellectual disability (ID) are more vulnerable to traumatic and stressful events, increasing their risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Aims: This study aimed to investigate differences in psychopathology, post-traumatic symptoms, and adaptive functioning in a sample of Italian children and adolescents with and without ID. It also sought to determine whether the type of interpersonal trauma was associated with distinct psychopathological outcomes.

Methods and procedures: Sixty-six children and adolescents exposed to interpersonal trauma (physical/sexual abuse, domestic violence, neglect), were selected and divided into two groups based on the presence or absence of ID. Assessment consisted of structured parent interviews and parent-reported questionnaires. For each scale, comparisons between subtests were performed.

Outcomes and results: Children and adolescents with ID tend to exhibit more severe post-traumatic symptoms, anxiety issues, social problems, and poorer adaptive functioning, with the exception of the practical domain, which appears to be equally impaired in both groups. In terms of interpersonal trauma typology, exposure to physical/sexual abuse and domestic violence leads to greater post-traumatic symptoms compared to neglect.

Conclusion and implications: Interpersonal trauma significantly affect children and adolescents, with or without ID, highlighting the need for tailored treatments for both groups.

Keywords: intellectual disability; interpersonal trauma; PTSD; psychopathology; Child mental health; child trauma