Assessing the Impact of Social Factors on the Mental Health of Chinese at Risk Adolescents in Hong Kong

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Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of family, peer and school factors on the mental health of Chinese male and female at risk adolescents and secondary school students in Hong Kong. Questionnaire surveys based on various standardized assessment scales were conducted with 398 (183 female and 215 male) Chinese at risk adolescents and 320 (160 female and 160 male) Chinese secondary school students between 12 and 18 years of age in Hong Kong. Compared to secondary school students, at risk adolescents had poorer relations with parents, more negative family and peer influence, a more negative school environment, and poorer social functioning. Findings also revealed that female participants had more somatic symptoms, anxiety, and depression compared to males. The importance of environmental factors on the mental health of Chinese adolescents supports previous research in Western countries. Implications for intervention and prevention were discussed from a cross-cultural perspective.

Adolescents are at a period of biological and psychosocial development which puts them at risk of developing physical and psychological problems. Theorists have long speculated and studied the risk and protective factors associated with the development of behavioural, health and psychological problems in adolescence in Western countries. Jessor (1992) proposed a psychosocial framework for understanding adolescent risk behaviours and health outcomes. This model includes the following five interrelated domains of risk and protective factors: biology/genetics, social environment, perceived environment, personality and behaviour. Some of these risk factors include negative family influence, family and peer conflicts, poverty, low self-esteem and poor academic achievement. Conversely, some of the protective factors include...