

Linking Sex Differences in Childhood Adversity to Rates of Adult Anxiety Disorders

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Researchers have investigated the link between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the risk of having an anxiety disorder in adulthood. ACEs are events that can be traumatic and include abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. Currently, approximately 61% of individuals worldwide have experienced at least one ACE (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Conducted research has also explored differences between females and males, or sex differences, in the rates of adult anxiety disorders. On average, females have more anxiety disorders than males. However, little research exists on exploring whether sex differences in ACE exposure drive sex differences in rates of adult anxiety disorders. The current literature review aims to bridge the gap between research on the prevalence of ACEs and anxiety disorders. Analysis of relevant research articles revealed that males experience more physical abuse, whereas females experience



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more sexual abuse (Davies et al., 2022). As suggested by nearly 62% of articles, females on average experience more ACEs and variation in patterns of ACEs (Haahr Pedersen et al., 2020). Patterns of ACEs refer to types of ACEs that tend to occur together commonly. These results emphasize the potential role of childhood experiences in an individual's risk for psychopathology in adulthood. Specifically, experiencing a higher number of ACEs and more complex patterns of ACEs

ABSTRACTS

(i.e., patterns with higher numbers of ACEs) were positively associated with increased symptoms of anxiety (Elmore & Crouch, 2020). Understanding the relationship between sex differences in ACEs and adult anxiety disorders prompts the integration of standardized ACE assessments in clinics. For example, clinicians can use the 10-question ACE Questionnaire and demographic questionnaires to determine if patients' ACE history and sex increase their risk for psychopathology. After this, researchers exploring treatments can investigate whether different anxiety treatments for males and females would be more effective than the same treatment for both sexes. Researchers, clinicians, and educators are encouraged to collaborate to develop interventions focusing on sex and ACEs to reduce children's risk for psychopathology.

References

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