Headaches and psychopathology in children and adolescents.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To examine the association between chronic headaches and DSM-III-R-defined psychiatric disorders, including depression, anxiety disorders, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, in a population-based sample of children and adolescents.

METHOD: 1,013 children aged 9 to 15 years in the Great Smoky Mountains Study were evaluated annually over a 3-year period using the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment, a child and parent diagnostic psychiatric interview. Headaches that lasted at least 1 hour and occurred at least once a week during the 3 months prior to the interview were studied.

RESULTS: Girls with depression and anxiety disorders had a significantly greater prevalence of headaches than girls without an internalizing disorder. This association was not found for boys. Conduct disorder was significantly associated with headaches in boys. Each of these associations was constant with age.

CONCLUSIONS: This study suggests that a distinct gender difference exists between boys and girls in the associations between headaches and psychopathology. Carroll's theory of dysfunction in central pain regulation as an underlying cause of depression is discussed in relation to the proposed serotonergic dysregulation common to headaches, depression, anxiety, aggression, and pain.

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