A systematic review of the co-occurrence of self-harm and violence: Is dual harm a unique behavioural construct?

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Introduction

- Dual harm is when an individual engages in both self-harm and violence during their lifetime
- It is unclear whether dual harm is a unique behavioural construct that has distinct psychological characteristics when compared to self-harm alone and violence alone (i.e., sole harm)

Research question: are there psychological factors that are uniquely associated with dual harm when compared to self-harm alone and violence alone?

Eligibility criteria

- Adults who have engaged in dual harm behaviour
- Papers assessing differences in psychological factors between those who have engaged in dual harm and sole harm

Exclusion criteria: not in English, qualitative studies, reviews, conference abstracts

Searches

- PsyINFO, PubMed, CINAHL, EThOS databases searched
- References of eligible papers and reviews searched, forward citation searching, contacted authors for other relevant papers

Methods

- Search results exported onto Endnote software
- Titles/abstracts, full texts screened
- Relevant data entered into data extraction form
- Risk of bias assessed with Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality tool

11,125 records identified → 7,739 titles/abstracts screened with 99% inter-rater reliability → 201 full texts screened with 95% inter-rater reliability → 29 eligible studies included in review

Results

- Psychological factors, including mood disorder, personality disorder and impulsive related traits, were significantly associated with dual harm
- Differences in these factors were mostly only found when dual harm was compared to self-harm alone or violence alone, but not when compared to both sole harm groups
- Suggests that rather than be linked to dual harm as a unique construct, psychological characteristics of dual harm may be driven by the individual self-harm or violent behaviours
- Most studies had moderate to high risk of bias

Discussion

Key findings and discussion

- No sufficient evidence for dual harm as a unique behavioural construct with distinct psychological characteristics
- May be the interaction and multiplicative effect of risk factors linked to self-harm and violence that lead to dual harm

Critical appraisal

- Dual harm research limited e.g., mostly in the West, cross-sectional designs, do not examine confounders
- Variability in definitions and measurements of harmful behaviours within literature

Implications

- Clinicians should identify risk factors of violence in those who have self-harmed and vice versa to lessen likelihood of co-occurrence
- Future research should address limitations in literature and use consistent conceptualisations of harmful behaviours