



# TRAUMA, ARMED CONFLICT AND RISK EATING BEHAVIORS IN COLOMBIAN POPULATION

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## Abstract

Exposure to traumatic events is a risk factor for ED. People exposed to armed conflict and socio political violence present a chronic stress response that can lead to various psychopathological outcomes. (problematic eating behaviors, among others).

**Methods:** In the National Survey of Mental Health, 12.311 Colombians were studied. History of traumatic events as family violence, other forms of social violence, sexual abuse, and exposure to situations derived from armed conflict, and their association with general psychopathology were explored.

**Results.** 29.3 % of adolescents and 40% of young adults, reported to have been exposed at least to one traumatic event in the last year. Additionally 18,7% of young people in Colombia had suffered forced displacement due to armed conflict or insecurity. 11.4 % (CI 95% 8,2-15,5) of adolescents exposed to traumatic events reported diet behaviors versus 7,9% (CI 95% 5,9-10,3) in the non-exposed. 8,6% (CI 95% 6-12,2) reported binges, compared with only 4,2% in the non-exposed. In people between 18 and 25 years of age, the prevalence of diet was 12,3% (CI 95% 9,3-16,1) and of binges was 8%(CI 95% 5,7-11,3) between those exposed to any traumatic event compared with 8% and 4,9% in the non exposed.

**Conclusion:** Similar to what have been observed with sexual trauma and physical and emotional maltreatment, the exposure to traumatic events related with socio political violence seems to be associated with risk behaviors for ED.

## Introduction

Even if trauma is not a specific risk factor for ED, frequently precedes symptom appearance and contributes to their maintenance in time.

Colombia, is a country with a population of around 46 millions, and a history of more than 50 years of internal armed conflict , that adds to other forms of violence that affects civil population.

Modalities of violence impact can be appreciated in figure 1 and table 1

Figure 1. Modes of Sociopolitical Violence in Colombia



Table 1. Impact of violence in Colombia along 50 years (Grupo de Memoria Histórica- 2014)

220.000 deaths: 8/10 civilians
25.007 disappeared
1.754 victims of sexual violence
6.421 children and adolescents recruited by armed groups
7.000.000 people displaced (women and children).
400.000 refugees

## Methods & Materials

In the National Survey of Mental Health, 12.311 Colombians were studied. History of traumatic events as family violence, other forms of social violence, sexual abuse, and exposure to situations derived from armed conflict, and their association with general psychopathology and risk eating behaviors were explored. Eating behaviors were explored using 5 items of EAT-26 and 2 items of BULIT for dieting, restrictive eating and binges or purging behaviors.

## Results

Around 30% of adolescents and 40% of young adults report having been exposed to at least one traumatic event in the last year. 18.7% of young people were victims of forced displacements due to events related with armed conflict. 88% of them and 46% of adults perceive psychological trauma (Tables 2 and 3). When exploring eating behavior , it was observed that ED risk behaviors were more frequent in people exposed to traumatic events in the last year compared with non exposed. This finding was observed in both adolescents and adults. See Table 4.

Table 2. Exposure to experiences associated with violence, and psychological trauma perception, in Colombian adolescents between 12 – 17 years of age , by gender.

Traumatic events and severity indicators of the experience	Men		Women		Total	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
At least one traumatic event	30.7	27.3 - 34.4	27.9	24.7 – 31.5	29.3	26.9 – 31.8
Only one traumatic event	24.6	21.4 – 28.0	21.7	18.8 – 25.0	23.1	20.9 – 25.5
Two traumatic events	3.7	2.5 – 5.3	4.2	2.9 – 6.1	3.9	3.0 – 5.2
<b>Displacement by Armed Conflict or insecurity</b>						
Lifetime	14.5	10.2 – 20.1	22.0	17.0 – 28.0	18.3	14.9 – 22.4
<b>Severity of Traumatic Experience</b>						
Death of a closely related person because of traumatic event	31.8	25.7 – 38.5	33.6	27.2 – 40.6	32.6	28.2 – 37.5
Psychological Trauma Perception	88.9	83.5 – 92.7	87.3	81.7 – 91.4	88.1	84.4 – 91.1

Table 3. Traumatic Events: Exposure to experiences associated with violence, and psychological trauma perception in Colombian people between 18-44 years of age.

Indicator	Male % (95% CI)	Female % (95% CI)	Total % (95% CI)
<b>TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES</b>			
Any traumatic experience	41. (38.7 - 43.2)	39.7 (37.8 – 41.6)	40.2 (38.8 – 41.7)
Traumatic experience due to domestic violence	5.3 (4.4-6.4)	9.4 ( 8.3-10.6)	7.7 (6.9-8.5)
Psychological violence	61.9 (41-79.1)	56.7 (47-66.1)	57.6 (48.8-66)
Physical violence	64.7 (43.5-81.3)	70.5 (61.2-78.3)	69.5 (61.1-76.8)
Sexual abuse		26.5 (19-35.7)	24.5 (17.9-32.6)
Traumatic experience due to physical violence (not domestic)	3.7 (2.9-4.7)	3.0 (2.4-3.7)	3.3 (2.8-3.8)
Traumatic experience due to organized crime	11.6 (10.2-13.1)	10.1 (9-11.3)	10.7 (9.8-11.6)
Traumatic experience due to Armed Conflict	8.4 (7.2-9.8)	7.5 (6.6-8.6)	7.9 (7.1-8.7)
<b>DISPLACEMENT DUE TO ARMED CONFLICT OR INSECURITY</b>			
Lifetime	17 (14.7-19.6)	19.9 (17.7-22.2)	18.7 (17.1-20.4)
Psychological Trauma in people exposed to organized crime		38.9 (30.3-48.2)	29.2 (23.2-36.1)
Psychological Trauma in people exposed to armed conflict	38.3 (25.8-52.7)	51.7 (39.2-63.9)	45.9 (36.8-55.4)

Table 4. ED risk behaviors in people between 12-25 years of age exposed to traumatic events in the last year.

ED Risk behaviors in 12-17 years	Exposed to any traumatic event in the last year		Non- exposed to traumatic event in the last year		
	%	CI 95%	%	CI 95%	
Dieting	11.4	8.2 - 15.5	7.9	5.9 – 10.3	
Binges	8.6	6.0 – 12.2	4.2	3.0 – 5.8	
Over-control related with food/ being pressured by others to eat	18.7	14.4 – 23.9	12.1	9.8 – 14.7	
ED Risk behaviors in 18-25 years		Exposed to any traumatic event in the last year		Non-exposed to traumatic event in the last year	
		%	CI 95%	%	CI 95%
Dieting		12.3	9.3 – 16.1	8.0	6.2 – 10.2
Binges		8.0	5.7 – 11.3	4.9	3.6 – 6.7
Over-control related with food/ being pressured by others to eat		21.9	17.8 – 26.6	13.5	9.8 – 18.5

Table 5. Prevalence of risk ED behaviors by BMI in Colombian people between 18-25 years of age

Risky Behavior for ED	Underweight		Normal weight		Overweight		Obesity	
	%	CI 95%	%	CI 95%	%	CI 95%	%	CI 95%
Dieting	16.2	9.3 – 23.7	10	7.9 – 12.6	7	4.6 -10.6	11.2	5.2-22.4
Binges	6.3	2.2-16.7	5.6	4.1-7.5	7.5	4.5- 11.7	6.7	2.7-15.8
Autocontrol y presión de los otros para que coma	40	28.1-43.2	19.4	11.1-15.5	6.6	3.9-10.8	6.6	3-14.1
Binges, food preoccupation and vomiting	2.3	0.5-9.2	0.4	0.1-1.2	0.5	0.1-1.7	0.4	0.1-2.2
Induced vomiting	5.6	0.5-40.1	0.2	0-0.7	23.2	4.6-65.5	1.8	0.3-10
Distress with eating	2.5	0.8-7.4	1.1	0.6-2	2.3	1.2-4.5	3.9	1.3-11.3

## Conclusions

- Eleven point four percent of adolescents and 12.3% of colombian young adults that were exposed to traumatic events in the last years presents diet behaviors, compared with 7.9% and 8% respectively with non exposed.
- 8% report binges versus 4% in the non exposed to trauma.
- Sixteen percent of colombian young adults that are underweight by BMI, diet in order to loose weight as do the 10% in normal weight
- Chronic stress derived form being exposed to a violent environment as the armed conflict that affect civil population , could be a fertile ground not only for anxiety and mood disorders but for eating risk behaviors that should be explored.
- Emotional climate of constant fear and anxiety in which the possibility of control does not exist or is very week, could facilitate over control eating behaviors and it`s failure ( binge and purge).
- Eating symptoms could be the expression of emotional deregulation in traumatized people.
- Others forms of violence as socio political violence, should be considered as potential factors associated with risk for ED .

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