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CONSTIPATION AND EXPOSURE TO STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS IN 10 TO 16 YEAR OLDS: SRI LANKAN EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION: Constipation is a common paediatric problem, but little is known regarding its aetiology. Emotional stress is considered to be associated with functional gastrointestinal diseases including constipation. OBJECTIVES: To assess the association between constipation and exposure to stressful life events in Sri Lankan school children and adolescents. DESIGN, SETTING AND METHOD: A validated, self-administered questionnaire was distributed to randomly selected children, aged 10-16 years, in 5 randomly selected schools, in 3 geographically and socio-economically different provinces in Sri Lanka. Constipation was defined using Rome III criteria. RESULTS: A total of 2770 questionnaires was distributed and 2699 (97.4%) which were returned were included in the analysis [1368 (50.6%) males, mean age 13.17 years, SD 1.72 years]. According to Rome III criteria 416 (15.4%) had constipation and they were compared with 2278 children without constipation. Prevalence of constipation was higher in those who were exposed to at least one stressful life event during the previous 3 months [Odd's ratio (OR) 0.38,p<0.0001]. During univariate analysis the stressful life events associated with constipation were: change in school or address, corporal punishment in school, separation from their best friend, preparation for government exams, exam failure, being bullied at school, sibling birth, severe illness or death in a family member, loss of job by a parent, separation or divorce of parents, parent remarriage to a step parent, hospitalization of the child himself/herself for other illness, frequent punishment by parents, father's alcoholism, domestic fights and living in an area affected by on-going separatist war (p<0.005). During multiple logistic regression analysis, separation from the best friend (adjusted OR 0.737, p<0.05), severe illness in a family member (adjusted OR 0.588, p<0.005); loss of job by a parent (adjusted OR 0.55 p<0.05), frequent punishment by parents (adjusted OR 0.581, p<0.01) and living in a war affected area (adjusted OR 0.666, p<0.001) remained to be significantly associated with constipation. CONCLUSIONS: Childhood constipation was significantly higher in those exposed to family and school related stressful life events and in those living in a war affected area.

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