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Systematic Review Protocol

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Protocol status: In development

We are still developing and optimizing this protocol

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Keywords: mental health, child psychiatry, anxiety disorders, social stressors, family conflict, bullying, pediatrics, other mental disorders in preschool, family stressors on the development, developing mental disorder, family stressor, association with children, such as school bullying, school bullying, mental health, mental health problem, vulnerable to external stressor, family issue, other mental disorder, healthy development, including parental conflict, mental disorder, preschool, external stressor, parental conflict, powerful stressor, foundation for healthy development, anxiety, family instability, children, aged children, social factor

Abstract

Children's mental health is a fundamental component of overall well-being and lays the foundation for healthy development into adulthood. Children, especially those under 13, are highly vulnerable to external stressors. Social factors, such as school bullying, and family issues, including parental conflicts, divorce, or family instability, are powerful stressors that can significantly increase the risk of developing mental disorders. Despite a growing body of research in this area, there is a need to systematize the existing data to obtain a comprehensive picture of the impact of specific social and family stressors on the development of anxiety and other mental disorders in preschool and elementary school-aged children. This systematic review aims to summarize and analyze the results of original research to identify key risk factors and assess the strength of their association with children's mental health problems.

Before start

1. **Study Types:** Cohort studies, case-control studies.
2. **Participant Age:** Up to 13 years inclusive (under 14).
3. **Exposure:** The study evaluates the impact of social, family, or school-related stressors.
4. **Outcome:** The primary outcome is a diagnosed mental disorder according to international classifications (DSM, ICD).

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Reviews, meta-analyses, letters to the editor, case reports.
2. Studies examining the general impact of somatic diseases on mental health.
3. Studies examining any other psychiatric disorder aside from anxiety disorders in children.
4. Studies focused on children aged 13 and older.
5. Studies focused exclusively on Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) as the primary outcome.



Review Title

- 1 Impact of social and family-related stressors on the onset of anxiety disorders in children under 14 years.

Protocol Registration and Keywords

- 2 Registration: This protocol will be registered in the Protocols.io - international Open Science Framework (OSF) Registry.
Keywords: mental health, child psychiatry, anxiety disorders, social stressors, family conflict, bullying, pediatrics.

Administrative Information

- 3 Contact Person: Dr. Timur Syunyakov.
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Kamilla Kholmuradova - Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russian Federation.
Funding/Sponsors: There is no funding for this review.
Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Project Dates:
Start Date: 20.01.2025
Anticipated Completion Date: 20.12.2025
Current Stage of Review: The preliminary search and the screening of titles and abstracts have been completed.

Review Type

- 4 Systematic review. If a sufficient number of homogeneous studies are available, a meta-analysis will be conducted.

Field of Study

5 Biomedicine, Psychiatry, Pediatrics.

Description and Rationale

- 6 Children's mental health is a fundamental component of overall well-being and lays the foundation for healthy development into adulthood. Children, especially those under 14, are highly vulnerable to external stressors. Social factors, such as school bullying, and family issues, including parental conflicts, divorce, or family instability, are powerful stressors that can significantly increase the risk of developing mental disorders [1, 2, 3]. Despite a growing body of research in this area, there is a need to systematize the existing data to obtain a comprehensive picture of the impact of specific social and family stressors on the development of anxiety and other mental disorders in preschool and elementary school-aged children[4, 5]. This systematic review aims to summarize and analyze the results of original research to identify key risk factors and assess the strength of their association with children's mental health problems.

References:

1. Copeland WE, Wolke D, Angold A, Costello EJ. Adult Psychiatric Outcomes of Bullying and Being Bullied by Peers in Childhood and Adolescence. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2013;70(4):419–426. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2013.504
2. Singham T, Viding E, Schoeler T, et al. Concurrent and Longitudinal Contribution of Exposure to Bullying in Childhood to Mental Health: The Role of Vulnerability and Resilience. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2017;74(11):1112–1119. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2017.2678
3. Ariani, T. A., Putri, A. R., Firdausi, F. A., & Aini, N. (2025). Global prevalence and psychological impact of bullying among children and adolescents: a meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 385, 119446.
4. Smith, K. E., & Pollak, S. D. (2020). Early life stress and development: potential mechanisms for adverse outcomes. *Journal of neurodevelopmental disorders*, 12(1), 34.
5. Ran, G., Niu, X., Zhang, Q., Li, S., Liu, J., Chen, X., & Wu, J. (2021). The association between interparental conflict and youth anxiety: A three-level meta-analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 50(4), 599–612.

Review Objectives / Research Question (PICO)

- 7 The main objective of this review is to systematically evaluate and synthesize available scientific data on the relationship between social and family stressors and the development of anxiety disorders in children under 14 years of age.
- P (Population): Children under 14 years of age.
- E (Exposure): Social (e.g., bullying, peer problems) or family-related (e.g., divorce, parental conflict) stressors.

C (Comparison): Children not exposed to the specified stressors, or with a lower level of exposure.

O (Outcome): Diagnosed anxiety mental disorders. Secondary outcomes are not considered.

Methods

8 Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

Study Types: Cohort studies, case-control studies.

Participant Age: Up to 13 years inclusive (under 14).

Exposure: The study evaluates the impact of social, family, or school-related stressors.

Outcome: The primary outcome is a diagnosed mental disorder according to international classifications (DSM, ICD).

Exclusion Criteria:

Reviews, meta-analyses, letters to the editor, case reports.

Studies examining the general impact of somatic diseases on mental health.

Studies examining any other psychiatric disorder aside from anxiety disorders in children.

Studies focused on children aged 14 and older.

Studies focused exclusively on Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) as the primary outcome.

9 Information Sources and Search Strategy

The search will be conducted in the following electronic databases: PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science. No restrictions on publication date or language will be applied.

Search Strategies:

PubMed: (TI=((("anxiety disorder*" OR "child anxiety" OR "pediatric anxiety" OR "generalized anxiety disorder" OR "GAD" OR "social anxiety disorder" OR "SAD" OR "separation anxiety disorder" OR "panic disorder" OR "panic attack*" OR "specific phobia*" OR "phobia*" OR "fear disorder*" OR "fearfulness") AND ("bullying" OR "peer victimization" OR "school bullying" OR "cyberbullying" OR "peer harassment" OR "peer aggression" OR "social bullying" OR "verbal bullying" OR "physical bullying" OR "relational bullying" OR "psychological bullying" OR "online harassment" OR "digital bullying" OR "cyber harassment" OR "peer abuse" OR "mobbing" OR "youth violence" OR "student bullying" OR "workplace bullying" OR "bully victimization" OR "family separation" OR "parental separation" OR "family conflict" OR "parental conflict" OR "divorce" OR "broken family" OR "disrupted family" OR "family breakup" OR "disintegrated family" OR "marital conflict" OR "parental alienation" OR "interparental conflict" OR "domestic discord" OR "household conflict" OR "family dysfunction" OR "disrupted home environment" OR "childhood adversity" OR "family instability" OR "parental neglect")) OR (AB=((("anxiety disorder*" OR "child anxiety" OR "pediatric anxiety" OR "generalized anxiety disorder" OR "GAD" OR "social anxiety disorder" OR

"SAD" OR "separation anxiety disorder" OR "panic disorder" OR "panic attack*" OR "specific phobia*" OR "phobia*" OR "fear disorder*" OR "fearfulness") AND ("bullying" OR "peer victimization" OR "school bullying" OR "cyberbullying" OR "peer harassment" OR "peer aggression" OR "social bullying" OR "verbal bullying" OR "physical bullying" OR "relational bullying" OR "psychological bullying" OR "online harassment" OR "digital bullying" OR "cyber harassment" OR "peer abuse" OR "mobbing" OR "youth violence" OR "student bullying" OR "workplace bullying" OR "bully victimization" OR "family separation" OR "parental separation" OR "family conflict" OR "parental conflict" OR "divorce" OR "broken family" OR "disrupted family" OR "family breakup" OR "disintegrated family" OR "marital conflict" OR "parental alienation" OR "interparental conflict" OR "domestic discord" OR "household conflict" OR "family dysfunction" OR "disrupted home environment" OR "childhood adversity" OR "family instability" OR "parental neglect")))

Scopus: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("anxiety disorder*" OR "child anxiety" OR "pediatric anxiety" OR "generalized anxiety disorder" OR "GAD" OR "social anxiety disorder" OR "SAD" OR "separation anxiety disorder" OR "panic disorder" OR "panic attack*" OR "specific phobia*" OR "phobia*" OR "fear disorder*" OR "fearfulness") AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("bullying" OR "peer victimization" OR "school bullying" OR "cyberbullying" OR "peer harassment" OR "peer aggression" OR "social bullying" OR "verbal bullying" OR "physical bullying" OR "relational bullying" OR "psychological bullying" OR "online harassment" OR "digital bullying" OR "cyber harassment" OR "peer abuse" OR "mobbing" OR "youth violence" OR "student bullying" OR "workplace bullying" OR "bully victimization") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("family separation" OR "parental separation" OR "family conflict" OR "parental conflict" OR "divorce" OR "broken family" OR "disrupted family" OR "family breakup" OR "disintegrated family" OR "marital conflict" OR "parental alienation" OR "interparental conflict" OR "domestic discord" OR "household conflict" OR "family dysfunction" OR "disrupted home environment" OR "childhood adversity" OR "family instability" OR "parental neglect"))

- 10 Web of Science: TS=((("anxiety disorder*" OR "child anxiety" OR "pediatric anxiety" OR "generalized anxiety disorder" OR "GAD" OR "social anxiety disorder" OR "SAD" OR "separation anxiety disorder" OR "panic disorder" OR "panic attack*" OR "specific phobia*" OR "phobia*" OR "fear disorder*" OR "fearfulness") AND ("bullying" OR "peer victimization" OR "school bullying" OR "cyberbullying" OR "peer harassment" OR "peer aggression" OR "social bullying" OR "verbal bullying" OR "physical bullying" OR "relational bullying" OR "psychological bullying" OR "online harassment" OR "digital bullying" OR "cyber harassment" OR "peer abuse" OR "mobbing" OR "youth violence" OR "student bullying" OR "workplace bullying" OR "bully victimization" OR "family separation" OR "parental separation" OR "family conflict" OR "parental conflict" OR "divorce" OR "broken family" OR "disrupted family" OR "family breakup" OR "disintegrated family" OR "marital conflict" OR "parental alienation" OR "interparental conflict" OR "domestic discord" OR "household conflict" OR "family dysfunction" OR

"disrupted home environment" OR "childhood adversity" OR "family instability" OR "parental neglect"))

11 Data Extraction

Two reviewers will independently extract data from the included studies using a standardized form, including: publication information, study and population characteristics, description of exposure and outcome, and main results.

12 Risk of Bias Assessment

The quality of the studies will be assessed by two independent reviewers using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS) for observational studies and the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool (RoB 2) for RCTs.

13 Data Synthesis

The results will be summarized in a narrative synthesis. Subgroup analyses are planned based on: the type of stressor (social/family), gender, and age group (preschool/elementary school), if sufficient data are available. If there is sufficient homogeneity among the studies, a meta-analysis will be considered.

Dissemination Plan

- 14 The results of the review are planned to be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal and presented at relevant scientific conferences.

Project Team

- 15 Dr. Timur Syunyakov (Owner) - Republican Specialized Scientific-Practical Medical Center of Mental Health, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
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Roza Userbayeva - Tashkent State Medical University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
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Kamilla Kholmuradova - Lomonosov Moscow State University, Tashkent Branch, 4th-year student, Faculty of Psychology.

Protocol references

1. Copeland WE, Wolke D, Angold A, Costello EJ. Adult Psychiatric Outcomes of Bullying and Being Bullied by Peers in Childhood and Adolescence. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2013;70(4):419–426. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2013.504
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