Cumulative Health Vulnerabilities Among Adolescents by Age and Neighborhood Opportunity

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Early detection of health vulnerabilities in adolescents is integral to promoting healthy behaviors into adulthood. Our objective was to quantify the prevalence of health vulnerabilities among adolescents and examine differences by age and neighborhood opportunity. In a cross-sectional analysis of electronic health record data for adolescents aged 13 to 18 years with preventive visits in a large pediatric primary care network between September 2021 and September 2022, we examined 5 health vulnerabilities: Tobacco use, substance use, firearm access, condomless intercourse, and depressive symptoms. Health vulnerabilities were assessed via self-reported adolescent health questionnaire and the validated Patient Health Questionnaire-Modified. Prevalence of health vulnerabilities were calculated alone and in combination, and compared by age and by quintile of neighborhood Child Opportunity Index (COI) score. Multivariable logistic regression estimated associations of neighborhood COI with reporting ?2 health vulnerabilities. Among 40 197 adolescents (57.7% aged 13-15 years, 66.3% living in "high"/"very high" COI neighborhoods), 29.7% reported at least 1 health vulnerability and 7.9% reported ?2 vulnerabilities. Cumulative health vulnerabilities were more prevalent among older adolescents and adolescents from lower opportunity neighborhoods. In adjusted models, lower COI was associated with 65% higher odds of having ?2 vulnerabilities (odds ratio 1.65, 95% confidence interval 1.43-1.91) compared with adolescents from the highest COI quintile. Understanding the relationship between health vulnerabilities and neighborhood opportunities among adolescents may allow pediatric primary care providers and health systems to offer more tailored community support services and transdiagnostic specialized care navigation to address the health needs of teens with multiple vulnerabilities.

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