BACKGROUND

Mental illness and substance abuse have been identified as predictors of violent behavior by adolescents. My research examines the strength of the relationships between depression and alcohol abuse as independent variables and fighting and weapon use as dependent variables in a national sample of adolescents.

METHODS

- My analysis used data from Wave I of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), which involved students in grades 7-12
- The key dependent variables are fighting and weapon use
- The key independent variables are alcohol abuse and depression
- The control variables are maternal relationship, sex, race, Hispanic, urban/rural neighborhood, and ability to pay bills (a proxy for poverty)

RESULTS

- Table 1 reports the results for juveniles who have engaged in a physical fight and hurt someone badly. In the main results for this investigation, juveniles who abuse alcohol more severely and those who are more depressed are more likely to use physical violence against someone.
- Table 2 reports the results for juveniles who have used a weapon on someone else or carried a weapon to school. Juveniles who abuse alcohol more severely and those who are more depressed are again more likely to use or carry a weapon.
- Using an interaction term for alcohol abuse and depression showed that the combination of alcohol abuse and depression did not produce a greater likelihood of either type of violence.
- Alcohol abuse is a stronger predictor of fighting/physical assault for boys than for girls

CONCLUSION

- My results imply that it is important to reduce alcohol abuse and depression among juveniles in order to reduce violence
- My results found that both alcohol abuse and depression predict two types of juvenile violence
- Policy efforts should have an emphasis on reducing alcohol abuse among males specifically to reduce physical assault and weapon use
- Future research should look into the extent of violence for other mental illnesses and substances other than depression and alcohol