

The Long-Term Effect of Child Abuse on The Health And Well-Being of Adolescents

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Key Points

- Early years of life are crucial to a child's development
- Stress has significant effects on brain development
- This article will review some literature on adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and their long-term effects on those who suffer from them
- Children exposed to different type of abuse or neglect of ACE show an increased risk of altered mental and social behaviours later in life
- Depression during the early years of growth has significant effects on brain development. It leads to an increased risk of various problems.

Introduction

Early years of childhood are crucial to a child's development. Exposure to harmful external substances during this period can have lasting effects on this development. Unfortunately, many children experience such stress in the form of abuse or maltreatment.

Stress has significant effects on brain development. It leads to an increased risk of mental retardation, poor development of the hippocampus and hyperreactive ventral striatum. This can cause memory loss, mental retardation, high risk of depression and addiction, and high risk of various physical health problems during any stage of life. It also profoundly affects behaviours such as increasingly problematic behaviour, declining social behaviour, lack of emotional awareness and control, and increased risk of depression. The traumatic experience of childhood brings a significant impact to life. This article will review some literature on adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and their long-term effects on those who suffer from them.¹

The Psychological Effect of Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)

Along with many other factors, ACE also influences the morphology of the hippocampus, which plays a significant role in the formation of new long-term memories. Thus, causing detrimental effects on a person's memory and learning.

The HPA-axis, (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis), is an essential system for responding to stress. It contains an explosion of central and peripheral events leading to the release of cortisol from the adrenal gland and in turn, mediating the long-term effects of stress. In addition to the stress response, HPA-axis also regulates the cardiovascular system, immune function, function of reproduction.² Exposure to chronic stress may cause disruption in the HPA-axis, leading to functional impairment and changes in body's response to stress exposure in later life.

It has been found that different types of ACE often lead to tireless working of the HPA-axis in adulthood. This same effect of hyperactivity is found in people suffering from major depression.^{3,4}

The Effect of Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) on Physical Health

In addition to the noticeable neurological effects, ACE can have long-term side effects on the body. It is associated with muscular and respiratory problems, cardiovascular diseases and intestinal and physiological disorders. Victims of child abuse may also suffer from an increased rate of inflammation, metabolic syndrome, arthritis, heart disease, cancer, and shortened telomeres, associated with a short lifespan.^{5,6}

The Emotional Effect of Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)

Children exposed to types of ACE, like abuse or neglect, show an increased risk of altered mental and social behaviours later in life.^{7,8} ACE is often linked to social exclusion and difficulty in managing emotions and strengthening social relationships. Other forms of internal abuse can leave young people emotionally deprived, making it difficult for them to respond positively to other people's feelings and reducing their chances of successful social interactions. Guessing how other people will react to their negative responses can also be very difficult for them and because of this, their chances of successful social interactions are further reduced.⁷

Some patients of ACE feel that they are still struggling emotionally as adults because of their age-related effects of emotional abuse, traumatic events, contact abuse, and physical abuse.

Continued child abuse causes a decline in an individual's self-esteem, feelings of guilt, dislike sentiments, and persistent strong negative beliefs that are difficult to resist. These lead to a variety of frustration, like anxiety, self-harm, haste and difficulty in lasting relationships, in dealing with continuous issues that they cannot control.

Emotional abuse is the backbone of all other forms of abuse.⁹ Childhood abuse and its resultant emotional trauma has made it incredibly hard to survive.

Prevention of the Negative Effects of ACE

ACE can have devastating effects on the mental and physical health of those who have been through it. It is important to ensure that the intervention will work. Creating supportive characteristics in guardians or parental figures is a fundamental factor in accomplishing an outcome. Time seems to be a crucial factor in the process. Educating mothers and enabling healthy child development can decrease the drawn-out outcomes of ACE and reduce the long-term consequences of these early life struggles. A rich and prosperous environment can be only prevailed by conquering the effects.^{2,10}

These findings suggest that the adverse effects of stress in various stages of early life are treated by utilizing proper energy in later phases of life.

Conclusion

This article aims to provide a review of some literature on the adverse effects of child abuse, especially its long-term effects on the brain and behaviour of those suffering from it. I hope to show students that ACE and child abuse are major health problems that can have a long-term impact after childhood.

In summary, depression during the early years of growth has significant effects on brain development and influences practices like an expansion in hazardous conduct, a decline in social behaviour, a lack of emotional awareness, and an increased likelihood of depression.

Taking everything into account, it is evident that ACE has a lasting severe physical, neurological, and mental effect on its victims. It should be considered a severe health problem. As of yet, there is still a lot unknown when it comes to its potential treatments and preventions.

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