

Childhood Trauma Effects on the Development of Personality and Mental Health

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Abstract: Childhood traumas are represented by events influencing a person's life affecting personality development and mental health. These traumas can be of several kinds, interpersonal and events that happen outside on a wider scale. The effects of traumatic events are observed on physical health, founding of relations, but also on mental health through the possibility of developing mental disorders. Young children pose an increased risk for traumatic events due to their dependence on parents or careers. But not all traumatic events affect more people, sometimes they come back to normal life. But those who are severely affected by traumatic events may develop *mental disorders such as post-traumatic stress or schizophrenia*.

Keywords: Trauma; personality; mental health; effects; types; development

1. Introduction

Trauma is a type of damage to the mind that arises from a painful event. Trauma is usually the result of a much too high amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope or endure the emotions arising from the traumatic event. Trauma can have long-term consequences in the absence of treatment of adverse effects on the psychological life of the traumatized person.

Personality is the dynamic side of the life that uniquely influences the environment, knowledge, emotions, motivations and behaviors in different situations. The personality also refers to thoughts, feelings, social adjustments and behaviors consistently exposed over time, which strongly influences one's expectations, self-

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perceptions, values and attitudes. Personality also predicts human reactions to other people, problems and stress situations.

The onset of personality is done during the preschool period when the student begins to present unique traits. At this stage due to temperament, a side of the personality that is innate, there are distinguished positive characteriale traits such as initiative, independence, judgment, self-restraint, perseverance and many others.

Childhood trauma can occur when a child is a witness or experiences a negative experience in childhood. Trauma usually takes place during the period of 0-6 years. A lot of childhood events can overwhelm a child. These traumas may be in the form of abuse, negligence and violence, called interpersonal trauma. However, the child may experience traumatic events such as accidents, natural disasters, war, civil disturbances, medical procedures, the emergence of serious diseases or the loss of a parent or person with whom he created a link based on affection and safety. For a child exposure to stress repeatedly can cause a trauma like, living in a dangerous neighborhood or being the victim of bullying phenomenon. Incidentally, any event presenting the following characteristics may be considered traumatic: unexpectedly, repeated, someone was cruelly intentional, and the child was not prepared for such an experience. However, even if an event is upsetting for a child, it does not necessarily have to develop a trauma.

An event that is traumatic for a child is not the same for another person, although it is influenced to a greater or lesser extent. It also depends on how serious the event was. It is considered that infants and younger children are protected in the face of trauma due to their age, and because they cannot verbalize their reactions to the dangers and traumatic events, the adults have come to this conclusion. Research has shown that people at very young age can be affected by events that threaten their own safety but also those of parents. In conclusion even if children are young, they may be affected by different events and may develop a trauma.

2. Types of Trauma

Trauma can be divided into several categories. Interpersonal trauma can be understood in the form of trauma that acts directly on the child as sexual, physical or emotional abuse taking place at home or elsewhere. Trauma in which the child is not physically neglected but only psychic. And one last type of interpersonal trauma is when a parent or caretaker is affected by his own trauma. This can mean

that parents are unable to meet the emotional needs of children. Most of the time they have good intentions but their own trauma prevents them from establishing a secure link with their children. In the case of parents, they may suffer from severe health trauma, abuse of substances such as drugs and alcohol, separation or divorce of partners.

Due to the rapid development of the brain in the early years of life, trauma can be extremely damaging to the small child. They depend entirely on their parents for feeding, growing and protecting, which is why they are very vulnerable to a traumatic event. This leads to the impact of the harmonious development of the child's physical and mental life.

Sensations are the first to signal the traumatic event in the form of threatening visual stimuli, loud noises, violent movements and other types of stimuli. Frightening images tend to take the appearance of nightmares, new fears or the game with the ability to rebuild the event. Because of the exact understanding of the notions of cause and effect, the child believes that thoughts, fears and desires have the force to become real and can make things happen. Young children present a higher risk of being affected by a potential trauma.

2.1. Effects of Trauma in Young Children

Young children experience a trauma from both behavioral and physiological symptoms. Unlike older children, they cannot express in words the moments in which they feel scared, helpless or overcome. They have problems in regulating their behavior and emotions. They may be afraid of new situations, get scared easily, hard to be relieved, and even be aggressive and impulsive. They may also experience difficulty in sleeping, lose recently acquired knowledge and may present regression in operation and behaviour.

Children aged 0-2 years may experience the following symptoms from trauma: low verbal skills, memory problems, screech or excessive crying, low appetite, weight loss or digestive problems. In the case of children aged 3-6 years, difficulties are reported in concentrating and learning at school, developing learning disabilities, showing poor development skills, imitating the abusive event, may be verbally abusive, cannot make friends easily, lacks confidence and is considered guilty of the traumatic event.

2.2. Effects of Trauma in Adult Age

As a result of a traumatic event, long-term effects on physical health, the establishment of relations and mental health are occurring. Depending on the number and intensity of traumatic experiences, individuals may develop an increased risk in the emergence of diseases such as: asthma, depression, heart disease, heart attack, diabetes and other possible diseases. Suicide is another phenomenon that people who are physically or sexually abused can face, or have witnessed violence in the family as children. The child can develop a physical and mentally harmonious life if he has been provided with support from parents or caregivers. Relationships and attachment help the child to trust the outside world, interact with those around him and be able to link healthy relationships. But if the child loses confidence in the person who cares for him after a traumatic event, he can consider the world a frightening place where adults can injure him. This leads to difficulty in establishing relationships with people of the same age but also at adult age may encounter the same problem. Because of the precarious relationship with the caretaker, the traumatized child will have problems in having romantic relationships in the adulthood.

Another effect of childhood trauma is related to mental health because children can develop mental illness as they get older. But not all children who live traumatic events develop a disease most of them return to their normal way of functioning. But for those who can't get over the traumatic event, they can develop post-traumatic stress disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a mental disorder that occurs after experiencing a traumatic experience, it can happen in childhood or later in life. According to DSM IV *“the characteristic symptoms resulting from exposure to extreme trauma include persistent re-experimentation of the traumatic event (criterion B), persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma and paralysis of the general reactivity (criterion C) and persistent symptoms of increased excitation (criterion D).”* These symptoms must be constant for at least one month, and changes must significantly affect important areas of the person's life. In addition to post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorders, generalized anxiety, specific and social phobia, but also bipolar disorder II, before, during or after the onset of post-traumatic stress disorder, may develop. In the case of children suffering from PTSD they can feel and fear, depression, anxiety, anger and aggression, self-destructive behavior, feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and

encounter a difficulty in trusting others. Even children who do not develop PTSD can have changes in emotions and behaviour such as sleep problems, appetites, anger, irritability, sadness and the development of new fears. The symptoms of post-traumatic stress usually occur within the first 3 months of the occurrence of the traumatic event.

The trauma is discovered with the help of therapy, in which various tests and methods are used. These include the tree test. The first work devoted to this test was developed by Swiss psychologist Charles Koch in the year 1949. The tree test involves identifying various psychic problems based on the graphical representation of a tree. The test consists in drawing three trees equally or different depending on the choice of the subject, following which the therapist will take into account the following key elements: layout, different types of trees, roots, soil line, torso, crown, Branches, leaves, fruits, flowers, Wittgenstein's index, projection of unconscious concerns and many other elements taking into account each drawing. However, the tree test does not provide the diagnosis, but together with other tests and tools the therapist can make a correct diagnosis and may apply the appropriate treatment.

In the book titled "The Tree Test" Denise de Castilla presents several examples of the tree design interpretations applied to different people with multiple problems. It used in addition to this test the results obtained from the examination of the writing, the application of the Rorschach and Szondi tests. Both tests are used in analyzing the profound personality. The Rorschach test consists of examining 10 canvases that represent gray, black or colored ink spots, and providing explanations from the subject. The Szondi test requires the subject to choose from 8 photos two people who feel sympathetic with and two who seem less sympathetic. In this work, the author presents several case studies of which one is about an 18-year-old who has as a diagnosis schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is another form of deterioration of mental health and is a pathological state through which people suffer a rupture of the surrounding reality. Schizophrenia also presents other disorders such as delusional ideas, auditory hallucinations, illogical reasoning, affective indifference and social isolation. In the drawings presented in the case study could be identified a trauma that occurred at the age of 5 years for which the subject presented nervousness, impulsive reactions, anguish, feeling of non-reality of aspirations, strong need for communication, but also difficulties in affective communication.

In addition, it was noted that the trauma suffered gave him the feeling of separating part of himself, presenting feelings of fear, sadness and fear that he might encounter a threat directed at him. On the basis of the drawings, the subject exposed his anxiety, the feeling that he had no future, suffering, violence as well as the evolution of his disorder suffering unconsciously.

3. Conclusions

Childhood trauma can affect a person's life in both physical and psychological terms. They affect the behavioral, emotional, and mental health of the person. But not all people who suffer from trauma can develop serious problems, some of them are returning to the usual way of life. It all depends on the intensity of the trauma, its duration and the resistance of the person to traumatic events. In cases where trauma affects a person's life to a very large extent, this must seek help from specialists who can provide appropriate treatment.

4. Bibliography

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