

The Effects of Child Abuse on Children's Psychological Health

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Child abuse is the psychological, neglectful or physical maltreatment of a minor by the custodians or caregivers. According to Ruff (2015), the abuse involves physical and emotional ill-treatment, neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation. A report by WHO (2016) indicates that a quarter of all adults worldwide have reported being physically abused in their childhood. Another report indicates that an estimated 36.3% of children across the world are experiencing emotional abuse (Johnson, 2016). These forms of maltreatment have devastating consequences on the victims and lead to both short- and long-term complications. According to Johnson (2016), child abuse has a pervasive negative effect on one's neural, psychological and emotional development. This paper examines the effects of child abuse on the victim's psychological health.

#### **Effects of Child Abuse on Psychological Health**

Child maltreatment has become a global problem and has serious life-long consequences on the victims. WHO (2016) reports that there are approximately 41,000 homicide deaths associated with minors under the age of 15 years, indicating the extent of the problem. The type of long-term consequence depends on the mistreatment that the victim has passed through. The major long-term effect of such maltreatment is the post-traumatic disorder (PTSD). Ruff (2015) defines PTSD as a maladaptive response that is triggered by an overwhelming event such as physical or emotional abuse. Individuals with PTSD exhibit symptoms such as aggression, altered mood state, anxiety, compulsive behavior, anger and alienation (Ruff, 2015). People with PTSD from child maltreatment could also have intrusive thoughts, nightmares, hypervigilance, intrusive dreams, neurosensory and palpitations. There are also a lot of risk factors resulting from childhood abuse PTSD. They include inadequate social support, diminished ego, chronicity, occupation, unsupportive environment, and displacement from home (Ruff, 2015).

Ruff (2015) also suggests that child abuse increases the risk of externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. The internalizing behaviors related to this form of abuse are depression and anxiety while externalizing problem majorly entails aggressive behavioral problems in children. Kids exposed to maltreatment at an early age continuously show an increase in behavioral problems. Reports on physical and sexual abuse show double figures of attempted suicide among young people in their late 20s (Ruff, 2015). Cumulative adversity causes an increase in risk. According to Ruff (2015), girls who have been exposed to extreme maltreatment are at risk of having alcohol problems in their adulthood or adolescence.

Neglect is among the most damaging form of maltreatment. Studies by Wilkinson & Bowyer (2017) show that it has significant implications in diverse developmental dimensions, including identity, health, emotional, education, behavioral development, social presentation, self-care skills and social and family relationships. Neglected toddlers at the age of 9 to 24 months show a significant decline in developmental scores. They also show a decline in their cognitive function, especially in their pre-school years. In addition, infants who develop secure attachment behaviors due to neglect may later in their adulthood display disorganized or insecure attachments (Wilkinson & Bowyer, 2017).

Physical mistreatment is the use of physical force against a child which has the potential of resulting in physical injuries. This kind of abuse increases the risk of disorders such as depression disorders, eating disorders, anxiety disorders and childhood behavioral disorders (Ruff, 2015). In addition, there is also an increase in suicidal attempts, risky sexual behaviors and drug use associated with physical maltreatment. Consequently, individuals will increase the chances of contracting cardiovascular diseases, obesity, type two diabetes, migraines and arthritis (Ruff, 2015).

Maltreatment in utero can also lead to complications in children. According to Wilkinson & Bowyer (2017), many children who are taken to care have been prenatally

exposed to maladaptive practices. Excessive use of drugs and alcohol during pregnancy has long-term consequences to the baby's mental health apart from increasing the rate of miscarriages. Use of alcohol during pregnancy can also cause Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and a baby will show stunted growth, dysfunction in the central nervous system and different facial patterns and characteristic (Wilkinson & Bowyer, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

Child abuse or maltreatment can result in devastating short term and long term effects on the child's psychological health. The period, type or form and adversity of the abuse amplify the effects. Victims of childhood abuse may take extreme and risky decisions such as committing suicide as a means of forgetting the psychological effects associated with it. In addition, maltreatment can also lead to effects that may cause an individual to dissociate themselves from the society or end up being drug addicts. It is important for the society to uphold children's rights to avoid cases of abuse that may lead to adverse psychological effects in their future.

## References

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