

Review Paper on the Effect of Emotionally Neglectful Childhood on Inflammatory Bowel Disease in Adulthood

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to understand how one of the adverse childhood experiences called emotional neglect could contribute to inflammatory bowel diseases like Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC) in adulthood. Amongst the contributory psychological factors of having IBD is said to be depression and anxiety which might be due to childhood adversity that occurs at a time that is crucial for the development of neurobiological and immunological factors. It has been hypothesized that specific life stress events may contribute to the development of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) (Hana Bednarikova et al, 2021). The specific changes in brain functioning might directly or indirectly affect the level of brain chemicals that helps in immune functioning, therefore, leading to an imbalance in the gut-brain axis. The association between ACE and IBDs is also shown to be bidirectional (Kelcie Witges et al., 2019). One of the reasons for the study is the increasing prevalence of IBD globally. According to a survey done by S Altab et al., the global prevalence of IBD cases has increased by 85.1% from 1990 to 2017. Additionally, the impact of emotional neglect in childhood on these diseases is still being researched. Therefore, the following review paper will try to focus on the direct relationship between emotionally neglectful childhood and inflammatory bowel disease in adulthood.

Keywords: *Inflammatory Bowel Disease, IBD, Life Stressors, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Childhood Emotional Neglect, Ulcerative Colitis, Crohn's Disease*

Adverse childhood experiences, often known as ACEs, are potentially stressful incidents that occur among children 0–17 years old. For instance, going through physical or mental assault, emotional neglect, etc. Childhood emotional neglect occurs when parents or other adults fail to address a child's emotional needs. When a child's parent or parents are unable to appropriately meet their emotional needs, is termed childhood emotional neglect. Intentional disdain for a child's feelings is one form of emotional neglect, but it can also take the form of failing to respond to or recognize a child's emotional needs. Simply put, they overlook or improperly handle this one crucial support area. Eventually, the child learns that their emotional needs are not important and they stop seeking support. The most common effects of childhood neglect in adulthood include post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional unavailability, increasing likelihood of an eating disorder, shunning

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intimacy, feeling deeply, and personally flawed, guilt and shame, anger and aggressive behaviors, difficulty trusting others or relying upon anyone else, etc.

A series of illnesses known together as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) results in persistent inflammation (discomfort and swelling) in the intestines. IBD encompasses ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. In the digestive system, Crohn's disease produces discomfort and swelling in the areas of the small intestine and upper large intestine. The large intestine's colon and rectum develop ulcers and sores as a result of ulcerative colitis.

Childhood emotional neglect may result in chronic stress, which can dysregulate the immune system and contribute to the onset of IBD. This is one reason for the relationship. The precise processes through which emotional neglect in childhood may cause IBD are still not fully understood.

DISCUSSION

Although the connection between the two remains uncertain, there is some evidence to suggest that emotional neglect during infancy may be linked to an increased risk of having inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) in adulthood. According to several studies, those who experienced emotional neglect as children had a higher chance of developing a wide range of physical and mental health issues, including autoimmune disorders like IBD. IBD is linked with alterations in emotional functioning. (Thomann a. Et al, 2018).

Maunder et al. (2019) found that individuals who experienced childhood adversity, including emotional neglect, were at increased risk of developing IBD in adulthood. Similarly, Muscatello et al. (2019) reported that childhood emotional neglect was significantly associated with an increased risk of developing IBD. Cohen et al. (2014) also found that individuals with IBD were more likely to report a history of childhood emotional neglect compared to healthy controls.

Compared to a healthy group of people, IBD is connected to a higher occurrence of life stressors before the age of 16 (Hana Bednarikova, et al., 2021). A majority of IBD patients showed some sort of negative childhood experience, most frequently neglect, according to research by Thoman, Lis, and Raindl. Experiencing emotional neglect is linked with a severe form of IBD. Not prioritizing children's feelings may have physiological and behavioral effects as they begin to learn that their emotions are not important. Eventually, they face issues like self-doubt, guilt, shame, social isolation, an increase in eating disorders, anxiety, depression, PTSD, difficulty trusting others, or relying upon anyone else which could hence lead to the inability in them to seek support or any kind of help. This, in turn, expands the severity of the condition experienced.

Anthony Wan et al. (2021) did an examination on the association of childhood maltreatment with immune-mediated inflammatory disorders (IMIDs; multiple sclerosis [MS], inflammatory bowel disease [IBD], and rheumatoid arthritis [RA]). they evaluated 681 participants among which there were 216 IBD participants. The test results of IBD patients were evaluated by childhood trauma questionnaire and the SD of the domain of Emotional neglect was 9.6 (4.5) and the p-value was 0.13. Hence, it can be derived that childhood emotional neglect plays a significant role in developing IBD in adulthood. Similar research was done by Macdonald Tyler et al. (2021) and found that overall, 265 (46%) participants

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with IMID reported any childhood maltreatment, with the most common type of maltreatment being emotional neglect.

The study by Kelcie Witges et al, on 345 participants from Manitoba showed that 51.3% of IBD patients had faced the loss of a very close friend or family member. Sexual abuse and physical abuse were equally prevalent in 12-13%, whereas 20.3% of individuals reported experiencing conflict between their parents. There is at least 1 self-reported adverse childhood experience in persons with diagnosed IBD shows high (Kelcie Witges et al, 2019). All these above-mentioned experiences could lead to shunning the children emotionally as well as physically so that they may not find any emotional support and decrease seeking help for any sort of issues they face. This affects them psychologically by developing anxiety, depression and various other kinds of psychological distresses which in turn leads to having IBDs.

Research done by Thomson-fuller has found that childhood physical and sexual abuse are more correlated in having a type of IBD called ulcerative colitis compared to having Crohn's disease. Emotional neglect could also be seen in children who are physically and sexually assaulted hence, which could lead to IBD in their adulthood.

It is generally known that there is bidirectional contact between the stomach and the brain, and recent research has shown how crucial this communication is for preserving immunological, hormonal, and neurological homeostasis. Brain function and behavior are affected when the gut-brain connection is compromised. The intricate integration of multiple cortical and subcortical brain areas is required for neural-emotional processing. The brain-gut axis (BGA)'s central component, the amygdala, plays a crucial role in the neural interpretation of emotional inputs and serves as the anatomical and functional foundation for the reciprocal interactions among emotions and gastrointestinal processes. A decreased response to emotions with positive components is a characteristic of the emotional disorder that is linked to UC. The functional alterations to the amygdala in UC patients may be influenced by intestinal inflammatory activity. The disease's progression, however, could be impacted by the amygdala's malfunction.

It could be derived from the above research that there is a certain effect of emotionally neglectful childhood on having IBD in adulthood. Losing a close family member, sexual/physical abuse, emotional abuse, parental suppression or divorce could remove the source of getting emotional support as they adopt a thinking pattern that their emotions would not get any importance, hence they start suppressing their feelings and think irrationally about themselves. These irrational thoughts could cause them to have self-doubt, guilt, shame, aggression, fear of judgment, fear of consequences if they open up, social isolation, stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Many pieces of research have shown firmly that there is a significant effect of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues on the Immune system such as inflammatory bowel disease.

Recommendations

While these studies suggest that there may be a relationship between childhood emotional neglect and IBD, it's important to note that the exact mechanisms underlying this association are still unclear, and further research is needed to fully understand the relationship between these factors. Moreover, to lessen the prevalence of these issues, early intervention is important. The parents should be psycho-educated, therapy for the child could help him/her

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learn to cope with emotions healthily and could help learn how to identify, accept, and healthfully express their emotions. Additionally, family therapy and parent classes could benefit their child's emotional needs and prevent them from suppressing their feelings. Early intervention may be able to both modify and correct the behaviors that lead to neglect and the consequences that can arise. These could lessen the probability of having anxiety or depression and therefore, it may leave fewer chances to develop IBD as well as any other physical health problems. IBD has no cure, it could only be managed. Therefore, if an IBD patient gets diagnosed with mental health disorder with a root cause of childhood emotional neglect, his/her condition could be prevented with psychopharmacology along with specific therapeutic plans.

CONCLUSION

The review paper aimed to study the impact of emotionally neglectful childhood on inflammatory bowel diseases. From the above-mentioned research, it could be said that there is a certain degree of effect on Inflammatory bowel diseases due to a neglectful childhood. Depression and anxiety are considered to be contributing psychological variables to having IBD, which may be attributed to childhood adversity occurring at a period when neurological and immunological elements are developing. A disruption in the gut-brain axis results from particular alterations in brain function that may either directly or indirectly impact the concentration of brain chemicals that promote immune activity. As the scientific and statistical analysis on this topic still lacks, further research and studies are required to understand the relationship in a better way.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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