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Review Paper

Childhood Trauma and Emotional Well being

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ABSTRACT

Childhood trauma pertains to negative experiences in early life, such as abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence, that have a major impact on a child's emotional, cognitive, and social development. These experiences may threaten fundamental psychological processes, impede emotional control, and change the brain's stress response mechanisms. A research topic was developed to examine the impact of early trauma on later-life experiences. The meta-analysis followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) standards. 22 research papers were considered based on different domains of childhood trauma, ten were shortlisted addressing emotional abuse, emotional neglect and emotional well being. Attachment issues, frequently rooted in early childhood events, have a profound impact on emotional development and control over the lifespan. Emotional numbness, hypervigilance, or emotional overdependence are common traits of children who have had attachment trauma, which makes it more difficult for them to build secure and reciprocal relationships.

Keywords: *Childhood Trauma, Emotional Well being*

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Child maltreatment is widely acknowledged as a serious public health hazard, with severe implications for both the individual victim and society as a whole (Gilbert *et al* 2012). Childhood Trauma refers to any action or series of actions by a parent or caregiver that causes harm, poses a danger of harm, or threatens a child's well-being (McLaughlin 2013). Childhood trauma, encompassing experiences such as abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence, is widely recognized as a key element determining emotional development and psychological health throughout life. Research consistently shows that early adverse experiences can disrupt normal emotional regulation, attachment formation, and stress response systems, increasing vulnerability to mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Teicher and Samson 2016). Furthermore, trauma can disrupt the development of stable relationships, which are necessary for emotional resilience and social functioning (Schore 2001). It might cause maladaptive emotional reactions and increase vulnerability to psychological discomfort and emotional dysregulation. (Anda *et al* 2006).

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***Objectives*:**

- To review the prevalence of Childhood Trauma.
- To review the prevalence of emotional well being.
- To review the studies to analyse the impact of childhood trauma on emotional well being.

METHOD

A systematic search of the published literature utilizing the databases Researchgate, ERIC, Elsevier, science.gov, BASE, Sage, Taylor and Francis, and Science Direct was conducted, adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) criteria. A study question was developed about the influence of early trauma on emotional well being in later life. The review was gathered with post-traumatic stress disorders, maltreatment, unpleasant childhood experiences, and childhood trauma in mind. 22 research papers were considered based on different domains of childhood trauma, ten were shortlisted addressing emotional abuse, emotional neglect and emotional well being.

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

According to (Fernandes 2021), up to 74% of Indian children report physical abuse, 72% report emotional abuse, and 69% report sexual abuse. Additionally, up to 71% claim physical neglect, 60% report emotional neglect, and 58% indicate overall neglect. Research suggests that emotional neglect, physical neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse can lead to behavioral issues such as a lack of psychological control, inability to embrace emotions, and emotional transparency (Barlow 2017).

The World Bank reports that 97% of school-aged children have suffered childhood trauma (Prior *et al* 2021). Sexual abuse is the most commonly investigated form of maltreatment worldwide, with a median prevalence of 20.4% (13.2% to 33.6%) and 28.8% (17.0% to 40.2%) in North American and Australian females, respectively, with lower rates in boys. In North America (28.4% vs 13.8% respectively) and Europe (12.9% vs 6.2% respectively), the median rates of emotional abuse were nearly double for girls than boys, but were more similar across genders elsewhere (Moody *et al* 2018).

On the other hand, Emotional well-being is roughly characterized as the ability to experience happy emotions, cope with challenges, sustain rewarding interpersonal connections, and feel a sense of purpose and life satisfaction. Recent study stresses its dynamic nature, demonstrating how people control emotions in response to changing living situations and pressures (Lades *et al* 2020). Research indicates that 14% of the general population reported being emotionally abused by a parent or other caregiver residing in the house before the age of 18. The most common type of child maltreatment was emotional neglect (6.2%), followed by emotional abuse (4.8%) (Taillieu *et al* 2016). This may lead to adverse childhood experiences. "Adverse childhood experiences" (ACEs) refer to a variety of traumatic situations that children may encounter. Examples of trauma include physical, psychological, or sexual abuse, neglect, marital violence, or living in insecure, stressful, and chronic situations. Childhood trauma can have long-term effects on individuals' mental, emotional, and physical health (Maschi *et al* 2014). A prior study has shown that childhood experiences influence individual health in adulthood. Young people who experienced child abuse were more likely to develop a range of psychiatric problems including attention hyperactivity disorder with attention deficits, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, phobias, substance misuse, nicotine dependence, generalised anxiety

disorder, and severe depression (Sugaya *et al* 2012). In young adulthood (18 to 23 years old), a rise in these trauma-related depressive symptoms has been observed; its influence is considered direct at this age before later stages of adulthood in which numerous stresses may interact (Lob *et al* 2022). Furthermore, research indicates that emotional abuse and neglect are the sorts of maltreatment most closely linked to depressive consequences (Infurna *et al* 2020). Individuals who reported emotional maltreatment in childhood, for example, have been found to have a roughly three-fold increased risk of depressive disorder across their lifetime, with females having a larger risk than males (Humphreys *et al* 2020).

EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION

Emotional dysregulation is a prevalent consequence of childhood trauma, with maltreated children demonstrating increased emotional reactivity and difficulties controlling emotions (McLaughlin *et al* 2020). Trauma exposure during critical developmental periods might damage the brain's ability to regulate affect, increasing the risk of disorders like anxiety, depression, and borderline personality disorder (Cohen *et al* 2019). Emotion dysregulation is described by difficulties in a variety of areas, including the ability to monitor and evaluate emotional experiences, adjust their intensity or duration, and manage emotional reactions in response to situational demands. Abnormal regulation of emotions is implicated in trauma response and has been connected to a variety of mental diseases (Sheppes *et al* 2015). CT exposure could influence emotional mechanisms of control. Recent research have postulated emotional dysregulation as a psychological factor mediating the connection between early traumatic experiences and the likelihood of adult psychiatric symptoms (Janiri *et al* 2020). Emotional hyperreactivity mediates the link between early trauma and signs of emotional dysregulation, such as mood swings and self-harm. Similarly, emotional lability has been demonstrated to persist into adolescence and adulthood, creating a cycle of maladaptive coping and interpersonal conflict (Weissman *et al* 2021).

ATTACHMENT ISSUES

Children who have experienced trauma frequently develop insecure or disorganized attachment styles that last into adulthood. Trauma-related changes in caregiver-child attachment interactions impede the development of trust, emotional safety, and co-regulation abilities. These deficiencies hinder emotional self-regulation, making it difficult to develop relationships with others (Dagan *et al* 2022). Childhood trauma can profoundly impact the development of safe attachments and relationships. Individuals who have experienced trauma may struggle with trust, love, and support, which might impact their capacity to build meaningful adult relationships (Randhawa and Bisht 2024).

CT experience interferes with the developmental process and leads to an insecure attachment characterized by a) working models marked by increased pessimism, low self-esteem, hopelessness, and mistrust and b) an interpersonal conduct marked by avoidance and/or anxiety (Fonagy 2010). Attachment tendencies extend over to close connections, such as romantic partnerships in maturity (Van der Kolk 2005). Early attachment disruptions were associated with adult interpersonal dysfunction such as fear of abandonment, emotional reliance, and persistent mistrust in romantic or peer relationships. These tendencies not only worsen emotional dysregulation, but they also lead to the persistence of psychopathology such as borderline personality disorder, depression, and complicated PTSD. (Heleniak and McLaughlin 2020).

Children who have experienced attachments trauma frequently demonstrate emotional numbing, hypervigilance, or emotional overdependence, which complicates their ability to

form reciprocal and stable partnerships (Caldwell *et al* 2011). This makes individuals susceptible to re-victimization, social isolation, and codependent relationships in adolescence and adulthood (Weissman *et al* 2021).

IMPLICATIONS

Practice

In practice, healthcare providers, educators, and social workers must use trauma-informed care practices to establish safe, supportive settings for traumatized persons. Early intervention is crucial; prompt evaluation and therapy can help avoid long-term psychological consequences. Collaboration among professionals from various disciplines—such as healthcare, education, and social services—is critical for providing comprehensive care. Furthermore, cultural competence is essential because understanding the various ways trauma manifests across cultures ensures that interventions are respectful, relevant, and effective.

Policy

Trauma-informed approaches must be incorporated across systems, particularly in education, healthcare, and social services, to prevent re-traumatization. Providing equal access to inexpensive and effective mental health services is critical, particularly for underprivileged communities and those who have experienced childhood trauma. Public awareness campaigns and community-based activities can help prevent trauma and reduce its stigma, encouraging greater understanding and support for people who have been impacted.

Research

Long-term studies that examine the impact of childhood trauma on emotional well-being and mental health are required. Investigating the neurobiological mechanisms underlying trauma can reveal information on how brain development and emotional regulation are altered. Furthermore, assessing the efficacy of various trauma treatment techniques, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and other therapeutic interventions, is critical to ensuring that individuals receive the most appropriate and helpful care. These implications highlight the need for coordinated, culturally informed, and evidence-based approaches to the complex issues faced by childhood trauma.

FINDINGS

According to the study, childhood trauma is frighteningly frequent around the world. Early adverse experiences, such as emotional neglect, emotional abuse, and exposure to violence, have a profound and long-term impact on emotional health. They disrupt the development of emotional regulation, attachment, and stress response systems, raising the risk of mental health problems like depression, anxiety, PTSD, and personality disorders. Emotional dysregulation occurs as a primary result of trauma, with affected individuals exhibiting increased emotional reactivity, mood instability, and trouble controlling emotional reactions. This dysregulation frequently functions as a link between early trauma and subsequent psychopathology. Furthermore, trauma

impairs the formation of secure bonds with caregivers, resulting in insecure or disorganized attachment styles that last throughout adulthood. The review also addresses gender differences, pointing out that girls are more sensitive to emotional and sexual abuse and are more likely to acquire depression as a result of such experiences. Childhood trauma has

significant long-term implications, influencing mental health relationships patterns, and psychological resilience far into adulthood.

CONCLUSION

Childhood trauma, particularly emotional abuse and neglect, has long-lasting repercussions on emotional well-being. These negative experiences alter emotional regulation and attachment mechanisms, increasing susceptibility to mental health diseases throughout the lifespan. Emotional dysregulation is a crucial mechanism that links early trauma to adult psychopathology. Comprehensive trauma-informed interventions, prevention initiatives, and culturally responsive support systems are critical for mitigating these impacts. Future study should concentrate on long-term effects, neurobiological mechanisms, and the efficacy of treatment therapies.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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