

# Chapter 6

## **The Impact of Abuse and Neglect on Children's Lives**

# Social and Emotional Impact of Maltreatment on Children and Adulthood

- Difficulty forming attachments
- May not understand social cues
- Feels constant stress
- May show anger or behavioral problems
- Have a low self-esteem
- Feels negative about self and others
- Depression
- May do less well in school

# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- A cluster of emotional, psychological, and physical symptoms following an extremely stressful event
- Suffer from an over-reactive response system
- Exhibit symptoms as anxiety, dissociation, and behavioral problems
- Psychological distress can take place because of emotional neglect from a caregiver

# Attachment

- A special bond formed between an infant and primary caregiver
- Occurs as the result of bonding experiences with consistent adult caregiving
- Sensitive periods in a child's life when bonding experiences need to be present for the brain to develop appropriately
- What happens to children who do not form attachments as a result of neglect or abuse?

# Emotional Disabilities and ADHD

- Children who have been abused are at a greater risk for emotional disabilities including: anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive behavior, suicide ideation
- Young children may not experience these difficulties immediately, but will later in life
- More girls who have been abused exhibit symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder

# Aggressive and Sexual Behavior

- The child may model what they have seen or what has been done to them to others
- A child who has been sexually victimized may act provocatively
- As a child grows older and matures there may be sexual acting out, promiscuous behavior or sexual problems
- Maltreated children are often more aggressive

# Social Skills

- Maltreated children may have fewer friends
- Their interactions and relationships are often inappropriate
- They lack prosocial skills, the set of skills that helps a child get along with peers and adults
- Their world view is skewed by abuse and their perceptions of others and distrust interfere
- They exhibit more cheating, stealing and lying behavior

# Physical Impact of Maltreatment Children and Adulthood

- Chronic maltreatment can lead to physical changes in the body
- May suffer from nutritional deficits that results in impaired growth
- A lack of dental and medical care may result in long-term disabilities and health issues
- Chronic illness and stress may be experienced

# Impact of Parental Drug and Alcohol on Children

- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: causes a variety of physical, social, intellectual and emotional difficulties
- Children exposed to drugs experience similar difficulties
- A child born to a drug addict will be addicted
- Children exposed to amphetamines and other drugs by parents at home may experience addiction to substances and an increased risk of drug abuse when they are older

# Failure to Thrive (FTT)

- A term used for infants and children who do not grow or sometimes lose weight
- FTT patients account for 1%-5% of pediatric hospital admissions; can be genetic or physical
- Extreme cases can cause death
- May be the result of inadequate parenting, love and nurturing, neglect, rejection or lack of affection
- Children suffering from FTT benefit from multidisciplinary teams focused on their treatment

# Psychosocial Short Stature (PSS)

- Failure to grow or delayed puberty that results in an extremely short stature
- Is usually associated with emotional neglect or abuse
- PSS can begin at birth with FTT or when a child is older and has endured parental rejection
- PSS is difficult to diagnose

# Death

- The ultimate outcome to an infant, child, adolescent or adult who suffers from severe child maltreatment
- Can result directly from physical abuse or neglect
- Can indirectly result from abuse or neglect, such as a child left outside in the cold
- Suicide or follows a reckless lifestyle
- In 2005, 1,460 fatalities of children resulting from abuse and neglect (United States Children's Bureau, 2006)

# Additional Health Consequences

- Infectious diseases
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Pain disorders
- Cancer
- Heart disease
- Alcoholism
- Drug use
- Overeating and other addictive behaviors
- Physical problems may be caused by changes in the brain and nervous system from abuse and neglect

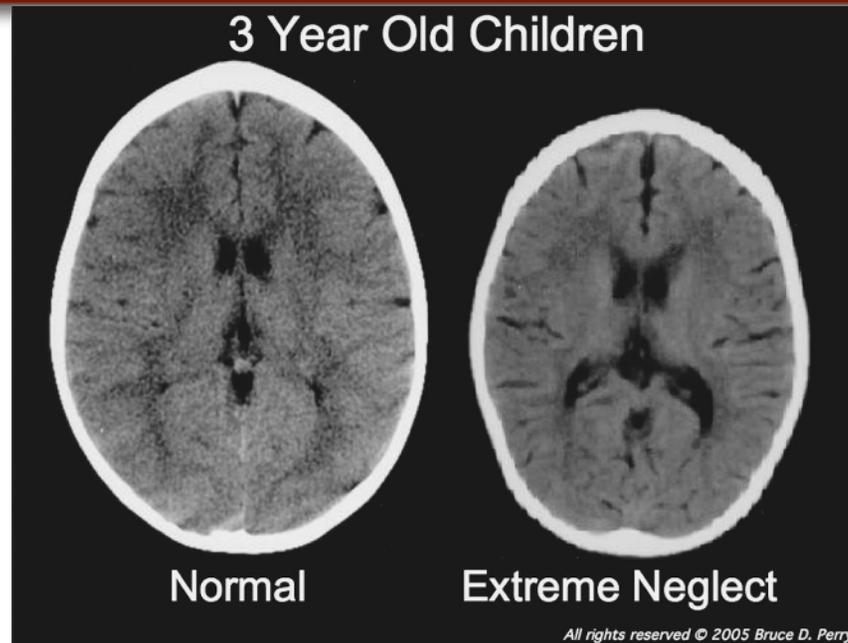
# Intellectual Impact on Children and Adulthood

- Brain development in the first three years of life is a process influenced by genetic and biological processes
- Environmental influences affect the brain
- Parental neglect and abuse can cause critical changes and developmental issues in brain development

# Brain development and changes as a result of trauma

- 1990's referred to as “the decade of the brain”
- Technological advances allow us to see what the brain looks like in various states, how outside factors affect the brain, how the brain works and how child maltreatment can alter the development of the brain
- Research has focused on how trauma and abuse affects brain development
- EEG readings, chemical changes, and traumatization affects the structure of the brain

# The Brain



- A dynamic organ
- Forms connections to millions of brain cells
- The connections allow us to process and store information
- The more connections, the more “staying power” until the information becomes permanent

# The Brain and Maltreatment

- During the first year, parts of the brain that deal with body control and emotional regulation may be affected
- The body may overproduce certain chemicals in the brain that result in delayed or lessened development of the higher functions
- Children may have smaller brains and may have experienced reduced development
- Overreact to situations, constantly watching and fearful
- May exhibit more learning and social difficulties

# The Traumatized Child

- Have different areas of the brain that are activated in social situations: miss social cues, misunderstand facial expressions or physical stances
- Lots of activity may activate the part of the brain that deals with “fight or flight”
- Emotional factors may interfere with learning information verbally that require large parts of the brain to be in use

# Long-term Consequences of Abuse and Neglect

- Criminal and violent behavior
- Socioemotional difficulties
- Substance abuse
- Alcoholism
- Negative physical and psychological effects

# Intergenerational transmission of abuse

- Behaviors that begin as a result of abuse in childhood will persist in adulthood and contribute to intergenerational transmission of abuse-when a parent who was abused abuses their child
- This is not a forgone conclusion since less than 1/3 of parents who were abused abuse their own children (Dixon, Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005)

# Treatment of Abused and Neglected Children

- Some form of therapy shows that maltreated children have less long-term trauma
- A complete assessment of the child and parent is critical before deciding the best intervention
- Goal-setting is done with parents and child
- All who work with the child should be involved in the treatment plan: teachers, child care providers, caseworkers
- Cooperation from the child is important to the success of the plan

# Establishing Goal Considerations

- The availability of needed services
- The ability of parents to afford services
- Transportation costs and issues
- The child's schedule
- Time factors
- Culturally appropriate

# Services and Treatment

- Focused around improving the child's life and giving them a toolkit to cope:
  - Skills to manage stress and anxiety
  - Self-esteem building
  - Social skills for dealing with peers
  - Anger management
  - Parent and authority figure interaction skills
  - Counseling
  - Problem-solving skills
  - Development of an understanding of cause and effect
  - Behavior management skills
  - Protective skills such as understanding touches and stranger resistance

# Developing the Toolkit and Learning to Cope with the Maltreatment

- **Parents** should receive parenting skills training
- Counseling
- Assistance with needed resources
- **Children** should receive specialized and therapeutic group programs
- Foster and child care
- Special school programs
- Art or music therapy
- New hobbies, athletics, art or music classes
- Individual or group therapy
- Play therapy