

Consequences

Prevalence of Child Maltreatment

- 905,000 children were confirmed by Child Protective Services as being victims of maltreatment in 2006 (DHHS 2008).
- An estimated 8,755,000 victims of maltreatment live in this country (Finkelhor et al. 2005). This means that more than 1 out of 7 children between the ages of 2 and 17 have experienced some form of maltreatment. This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, neglect, and custodial interference or family abduction.

Consequences of Child Maltreatment

Most of the studies examining the consequences of child maltreatment have used a retrospective approach. This requires conducting studies to determine if any association exists between a history of childhood abuse and/or neglect and current health conditions in adults. Fewer research projects have employed a more rigorous longitudinal approach. This type of research strategy identifies children who are at risk or who have already been maltreated and follows them for a long period of time, sometimes decades, to see what conditions develop.

Physical

- In 2006, approximately 1,530 children across the country died from abuse or neglect—a rate of 2.04 deaths per 100,000 children (DHHS 2008). This is slightly higher than the 2005 rate, which was 1.96 per 100,000 children (DHHS 2008).
- Maltreatment during infancy or early childhood can cause important regions of the brain to form improperly, which can cause physical, mental, and emotional problems such as sleep disturbances, panic disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (DHHS 2001).
- The stress of chronic abuse causes a "hyperarousal" response by certain areas of the brain, which may result in hyperactivity, sleep disturbances, and anxiety. It also makes victims more vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, and learning and memory difficulties (Dallam 2001; Perry 2001).
- Approximately 1,300 children experience severe or fatal head trauma as a result of abuse each year. Nonfatal consequences of abusive head trauma include varying degrees of visual impairment (e.g., blindness), motor impairment (e.g., cerebral palsy) and cognitive impairments (National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome 2005).

Psychological

- Child abuse and neglect are associated with an increased risk of major depressive disorder in early adulthood (Widom et al. 2007).
- In one long-term study, as many as 80 percent of young adults who had been abused met the diagnostic criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder at age 21. These young adults exhibited many problems, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicide attempts (Silverman et al. 1996).
- Other psychological and emotional conditions associated with abuse and neglect include panic disorder, dissociative disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and reactive attachment disorder (Teicher 2000).
- The National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being found that children placed in out-of-home care due to abuse or neglect tended to score lower than the general population on measures of cognitive capacity, language development, and academic achievement (DHHS 2003).

Behavioral

- Children who experience maltreatment are at increased risk for adverse health effects and behaviors as adults, including smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse, eating disorders, severe obesity, depression, suicide, sexual promiscuity, and certain chronic diseases (Felitti et al. 1998; Runyan et al. 2002).
- Those with a history of child abuse and neglect are 1.5 times more likely to use illicit drugs, especially marijuana, in middle adulthood (Widom et al. 2006).
- Studies have found abused and neglected children to be at least 25 percent more likely to experience problems such as delinquency, teen pregnancy, low academic achievement, drug use, and mental health problems (Kelley et al. 1997).
- A National Institute of Justice study indicated that being abused or neglected as a child increased the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 59 percent. Abuse and neglect also increased the likelihood of adult criminal behavior by 28 percent and violent crime by 30 percent (Widom & Maxfield 2001).
- A longitudinal study found that physically abused children were at greater risk of being arrested as juveniles. This same study also found that abused youth were less likely to have graduated from high school and more likely to have been a teen parent (Langsford et al. 2007).
- Early child maltreatment can have a negative effect on the ability of both men and women to establish and maintain healthy intimate relationships in adulthood (Colman et al. 2004).