

Trauma, Development, and Sprituality Essay

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Abstract

There is a level of trauma experienced by all members of society, as it is impossible to live in the world without experiencing some loss, abuse, or pain. Although everyone's experience differs, trauma can affect how a person develops, especially when trauma is experienced as a child and not adequately processed. Even so, many people who experience trauma can be resilient and may even develop a spiritual belief that can help the healing process for them. What does research tell us about trauma and how it affects development? Does Spiritual development help or hinder the healing process? How do spiritual viewpoints influence trauma resilience? How can a child show strength outside the influence of spirituality after experiencing trauma? These are questions I hope to answer in this paper.

Keywords: *trauma, development, spiritual guidance, spiritual discipline, resilience, abuse.*

Introduction

Trauma is the prolonged mental/emotional distress caused by stressful events such as death, loss, illness, abuse, neglect, etc. Trauma can happen at any time in a person's life, but healing from that trauma depends on the person's resilience. When it comes to children, trauma can have harmful effects on development. Trauma is unexpected; therefore, children can have difficulty being resilient. There is some research on how a connection to a spiritual belief can counter the effects of trauma and build resilience. In this paper, we will discuss the effect of trauma on development, the factors of trauma that lead to developmental delays, and the effects of spiritual development on trauma. We will also discuss resilience and other forms of action that can promote resilience in children. Finally, we will cover suggestions for further studies on this topic.

Trauma

As mentioned above, several contributing factors can influence the chance of children developing trauma. Some factors include abuse, neglect, adoption, foster care, sudden illness/death/loss of limb, loss of parent/sibling, divorce, etc.

Abuse can be further broken down into physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Even so, these three can overlap. "Physical abuse is often accompanied by derogation or scorn (i.e., psychological abuse) or neglect. Sexual abuse can be, but is not always, accompanied by violence (physical abuse) or threats of violence (psychological abuse). The sexual abuse itself may also be painful, paralleling physical abuse." (Trickett and McBride-Chang, pg 312). The result of this on children can impact them not just through physical development, but also social and emotional development. In research, there are some minor problems with recounting the effect of trauma on a child, as over time, memories can be distorted due to the level of trauma experienced by them. Sometimes, a child can block out memories, causing memory loss of incidents of abuse. Even so, the effect of abuse is prevalent. These effects are highlighted in Table One of The Developmental Impact of Different Forms of Child Abuse and Neglect article. For social/emotional development, sexual abuse can cause inappropriate sexual behavior and internalizing problems. Physical abuse can cause insecure attachment and behaviors, including aggressive, noncompliant, demanding, withdrawn, wary, and poor social problem-solving. (Trickett et al., Table 1, pg 317).

Neglect can also have devastating effects on children, as Neglect is the lack of a caregiver to meet a person's physical, emotional, and mental needs. This can mean developmental delays in essential physical functions such as fine and gross motor skills, and speech and language delay for children. "Additionally, neglect is understood to have unique impacts on attachment, as lack of mentalizing from a caregiver deprives the infant of understanding of their internal world and distress in a way distinct from abuse, affecting the development of emotion regulation, empathy, and subsequent interpersonal functioning" (IPF; Howe, 2005). Outside of the development in the

home, children could also face peer trauma, such as bullying and abuse. “The most commonly researched adolescent IPF(interpersonal functioning) outcome concerning neglect was bullying victimization.” (Z. Haslam and E.P. Taylor, pg 5). Finally, any form of child mistreatment can lead to problems in development, whether it is a combination of the above-stated or outside societal factors.

Outside of abuse and neglect, Trauma can result from losing a loved one, illness, divorce, adoption, or foster care. In each of these factors, a child must grasp the grief process, whether from the physical death of someone or the emotional and psychological death. Depending on the child's age, the grief stages can harm the child's well-being. Also, open and honest conversations with caregivers are vital to processing grief. “ The consequences of isolating a child from conversations about death can be grief that does not evolve [[12], [13], [14]] or dissolution of trust between caregivers and the child [4,8]. Avoiding acknowledging a child’s grief experience denies them the ability to establish a future in which they can live a healthy new normal without the deceased in it [15].” (Megan Tracewski and Kate Scarlett, pg 204). A child might exhibit fear and anger over the grief they are experiencing. Most of the time, this shows up in the child's socioemotional development. Children who experience adoption and/or foster care might even be in a continued state of grief, going through the stages repeatedly throughout their lives as they try to reconnect their identities and understand their past. The repeated cycle of grief can often lead children in adoption and/or foster care to delay their physical, emotional, and mental development. That is why fostering resilience is so essential in treating the trauma experienced.

Resilience and the Spiritual Connection

Resilience is “The process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.” (American Psychological Association, 2022). For people, there are many ways to foster resilience in their lives. Building resilience can help children and adults face present and future traumas and promote healing from past traumas. Resilience is a trait gained when a child has other ways to express their feelings—involving your children in art forms, such as dance, art, and creative writing. After experimenting with implementing dramatic play with children “at risk,” Ruxandra Folostina et al. found that these children showed significant improvement in socio-emotional development. “In the final evaluation, based on observation, the following improvements have been reported: - Increase of concentration and decrease of impulsivity, decrease of counterproductive behaviors and attitudes; the representations of the teaching staff revealed that the children became quieter and calmer during class hours and also during the breaks; - They became in a small extent more creative, more brave in addressing situations or bold colors; - They preferred in particular projective games and less on the role or physicality; - The group cohesion level increased. Interpersonal relations began to harmonize. In the last two sessions, they have not rejected each other, but, on the contrary, they cooperated very well and respected each other.” (Rucandra Folostina et al. pg

2368). Art forms of expression were more prevalent among females. At the same time, males were more inclined toward sports. This is not to say there wasn't a crossover.

The effects of sports participation also have benefits in building resilience, promoting social development, and emotional expression. Besides the importance of training, team building, and competing, which build social development and self-discipline, children can express their emotions by playing the game. Sports have promising results for boys. "For boys, being in the 'Consistent participation' extracurricular sports trajectory predicted significantly higher levels of classroom engagement compared to boys in the 'Low-inconsistent' physical activity trajectory." (M.J. Herbec et al., pg 5). Not only did sports help sports, but they also guided behavior in the classroom. "Listening to your coach, playing cooperatively with your peers, having a good team spirit, being disciplined, and controlling your emotions are all skills put into practice in a sporting context. These skills are very similar to those valued by teachers and peers in a classroom setting. Coaches and instructors might have helped boys to stay on task (i.e., focus or play the sport or game), and this likely relates to what they are supposed to be doing in class (Fitzpatrick and Pagani, 2013). Moreover, boys could have gained social experience through the sporting environment, frequently based on positive/supportive relationships with/between adults, peers, and parents (Holt et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2020)." (M.J. Herbec pg 5).

Other than these two forms, children can build resilience through spiritual development and community services. According to the Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers, "Children who may feel helpless can feel empowered by helping others. Engage your child in age-appropriate volunteer work or ask for assistance yourself with tasks that they can master. At school, brainstorm with children about ways they can help others in their class or in grades below." (American Psychological Association, 2020). In helping others, Children can also be aware of people who have been through the same thing. This can help resolve the feelings of isolation or disconnection children experience when dealing with trauma. Also, children can easily compartmentalize their emotions by working with others in service. Sometimes, they can even heal traumas while working with someone in a similar situation. The outside perspective can give a child a deeper understanding of themselves.

Spiritual development is also a method of healing that children and adults use to process trauma and build resilience. "Religion/spirituality is known to have broad use as a coping resource, offsetting the deleterious mental health consequences of some of life's most difficult challenges, including the death of a loved one (Wortmann and Park 2008), financial problems (Bradshaw and Ellison 2010), and serious illness or suffering (Pargament 1997)." (Laura Upenieks, pg 2678).

Even so, it has been shown to affect children who have experienced abuse negatively. "Of all the dimensions of religiosity, church attendance and religious affiliation tend to decrease after

childhood abuse (Bierman 2005). There is also some evidence that those abused in childhood may view God as harsh, punitive, and ultimately distant from their lives (Reinert and Edwards 2009; Sansone et al. 2013). The latter finding is typically thought to reflect the tendency of some abused individuals to project a negative characteristic of their abuser (e.g., a parent) onto God or a divine power (Bierman 2005).” (Laura Upnieks pg 2679-2680) This does not always apply. Some examples would be in my family. In my family, I have nine siblings who were adopted from abusive and/or neglectful homes. I came from a highly abusive and neglectful home myself. Growing up, our mother instilled Christian values in all of us. Besides my younger siblings, who continue to follow their faith and participate in Christianity, I have personal experience growing in faith in adulthood. I believe this is due to gaining a stable home just in time. Sometimes resilience can be fostered simply by ensuring at least one stable adult in the child’s life who can guide them to healing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although trauma can harm a child's development and functioning in society, a child can heal from that trauma. Fostering resilience through the arts, sports, or spirituality is one way we can ensure this resilience is built in our kids, but the most important thing is to be there as a stable adult for them. Some suggestions for further studies could be how the different art forms can provide healing or developmental growth in children. The current research on this topic focuses solely on PTSD in adults. Also, the study of Sports and their positive effect on children at risk. Although I found some research on this subject, there is still more that could take place. Especially on how Sports can affect girls in their healing process.

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What is research saying about trauma resilience and spiritual development, and how can it counter the effects of trauma? Analyze the analysis and critically discuss the viewpoints. Ensure that the conclusion contains a good summary of the issues treated and offers suggestions for further studies