

Understanding the Context of Trauma: The Social and Developmental Surround

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Toward the Context of Trauma: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Studies

The Eight "ACEs" Studied

Major Findings

- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Mother Treated Violently
- Household Member in Prison
- Household Member Alcoholic
 or Drug User
- Household Member Chronically Depressed, Mentally III, or Suicidal

• At Least One Biological Parent Died During the Person's Childhood •In an extensive series of studies by investigators affiliated with the Center for Disease Control, each of the eight ACEs has been found to be related to a wide range of psychological problems and medical disorders in adulthood.

•The presence of any one of the eight ACEs increases the likelihood of the presence of the others.

• As the number of ACES in a person's background increases, the risk for various psychological problems and medical disorders increases markedly.

Overriding Conclusion by One of the ACEs Studies Principle Investigators

"[The various types of Adverse Childhood Experiences] do not occur in isolation; for instance, a child does not grow up with an alcoholic parent or with domestic violence in an otherwise well-functioning household."

- Vincent Felitti

An Often-Forgotten Observation About the Nature of Being Human... Human beings are *not born*, they are <u>created</u>.

• Thought experiment: take care of all of a human infant's biological needs for food, shelter, and so on but shield it from all contact with other human beings for the first 18 years of its life...

What would that 18 year old be like?

• The processes by which homo sapiens infants become adult human beings are

 <u>human development</u>: the organized sequence of transformations through which a helpless infant becomes a capable adult

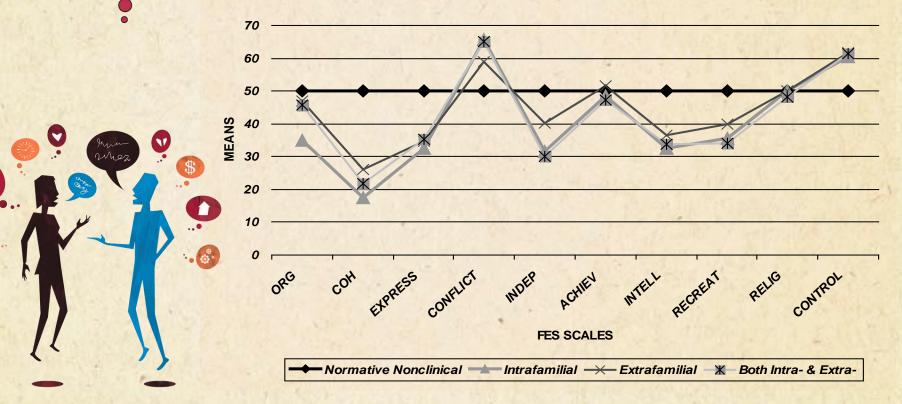
and

 <u>socialization</u>: mastery of the complex cultural conventions needed to navigate the complexities of adult life in contemporary society

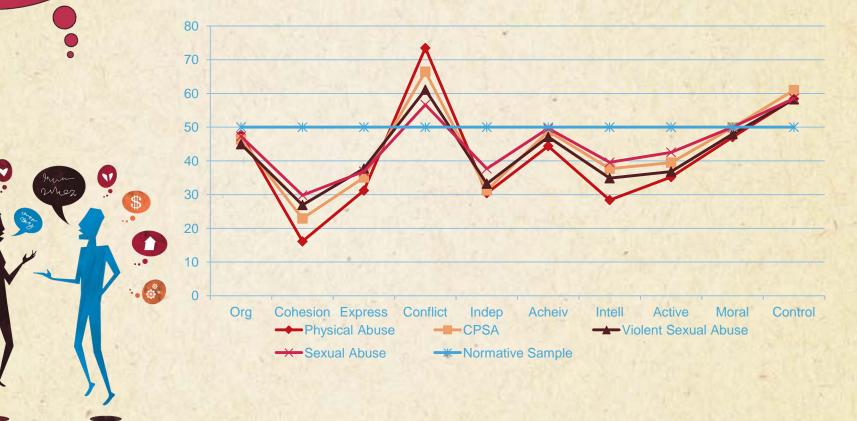
• The major agent that drives the development and socialization is <u>the family</u>.

The Family of Origin Environments Of Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

COMPARISON OF FES MEAN T-SCORES



The Family of Origin Environments Of Survivors of Childhood Physical Abuse and Sexual Abuse,



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Characteristics of Family Environments of Adults Who Report a History of Child Abuse

• High in

- Conflict (arguing, disagreeing)
- Control (rigid rules, coercion)

• Low in

- Cohesiveness (lack of togetherness)
- Expressiveness (lack of communication of/about emotions including affection)
- Independence (assertiveness, exercise of autonomous choice)

• Intellectual-Cultural Orientation (interest in intellectual, cultural, political pursuits)

Consequences of Growing Up in An Ineffective Family Environment

Vulnerability to Traumatization

Increased risk for victimization in childhood and revictimization in adulthood (hunger for attention/affection, easily manipulated/controlled)

• Decreased resiliency, which makes it more likely that traumatic events will be traumatizing (that is, have long-lasting adverse impact)

Impaired Adult Adjustment

Gaps and deficits in the developmental
achievements required for effective adult functioning
Gaps and deficits in socialization and acculturation
and required for social adaptation

Trauma Exposure Versus Traumatic Impact

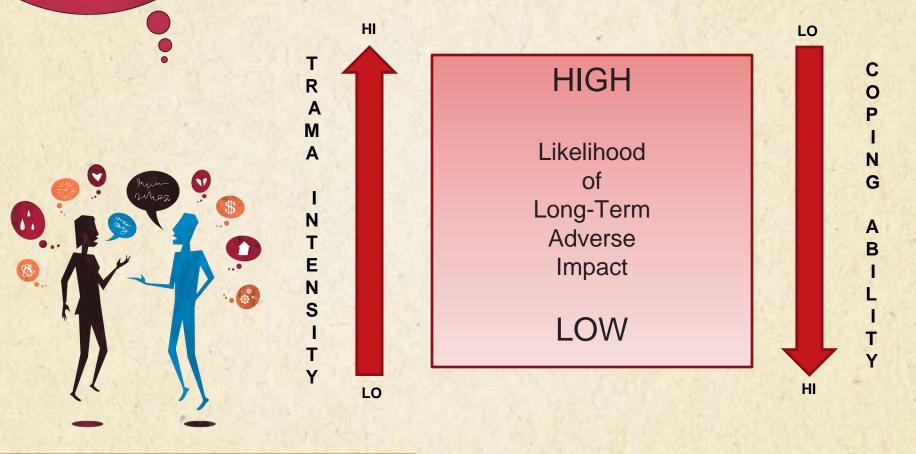
Trauma Exposure – The number and intensity of traumatic events an individual has encountered.
Traumatization – The severity of negative

psychological effects of the traumatic events an individual has encountered.

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Growing up in an ineffective family of origin environment increases an individual's risk for <u>both</u> trauma exposure <u>and</u> traumatization.

Vulnerability to Traumatization



Forms of Compromised Adult Adjustment Related to Inadequate Psychological Development and Socialization

• Interpersonal Relationships - restricted capacity to: feel connected to other people; balance emotional dependency and autonomy; judge who to trust

• Emotional Impairment – restricted ability to: distinguish thoughts from feelings; to recognize that one is feeling something; to identify what one is feeling; to express to others what one is feeling

• Behavioral Problems – restricted ability to: control impulses; think before acting; exert the discipline and persistence to pursue long term goals

• Cognitive Limitations – restricted ability for: critical thinking; solid judgment; sound decisionmaking

 People whose psychological development and socialization is limited by having grown up in an ineffective family of origin environment may physically look like other adults but often experience themselves as confused and frightened children unable to cope effectively in an adult world.

• They tend to feel deeply ashamed and to be intensely critical of themselves because they are have no idea why they are so incapable of managing day to day living as effortlessly as many of the adults around them seem to.

• While trauma compounds these difficulties, addressing and resolving trauma cannot instill capacities for adult living that were never developed in the first place.

Implications for Trauma-Informed Care

• Many trauma survivors, especially survivors of prolonged child abuse and repeated trauma throughout their lifetimes, are likely to have grown up in ineffective families and therefore to also have appreciable gaps in development and socialization.

• In order to work effectively with these trauma survivors service providers need to be aware of and sensitive to the interpersonal, emotional, behavioral and cognitive limitations with which they commonly struggle.

• Productively engaging with trauma survivors with difficulties related to restricted development and socialization requires striking a balance between recognizing these limitations while being able to recognize survivors' capacities to move beyond them.

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