Childhood Maltreatment, Emotional Dysregulation, and Psychiatric Comorbidities (poster)

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Childhood Trauma & Psychiatric Comorbidities

Early childhood trauma is associated with:
- secure attachments
- neurodevelopmental delays
- deficits in attention and vigilance
- higher levels of anxiety and irritability
- hyperactivity
- poor impulse control
- stereotypes
- self-harm behavior

Children experiencing ED and additional trauma have higher levels of ED.

Emotion Regulation

The generation of emotion occurs as an interaction of several actions:
- Bottom-up (sensory) and top-down emotion regulation.

Response to emotional tasks are widely distributed throughout the brain:
- Higher cortical areas are not limited to emotional regulation.
- Limbic regions are not restricted to emotion activation.
- Emotional regulation involves a widely distributed functional network with bidirectional associations among many emotion-relevant brain regions.

Maturation

The maturation of neural and neuroendocrine systems associated with emotion can explain the increase in emotional instability and reduce in self-control throughout childhood and adolescence. These processes include:
- maturation of parasympathetic regulation in early childhood
- developmental changes in hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis

Maturation of these systems is shaped by early experiences and caregiving responsiveness.

Developmental influences promoting enhanced emotion regulation as children grow older include:
- acquisition of language (understand/communicate emotions)
- maturation of other cognitive functions including attentional system
- having a secure attachment with caregivers

It is possible that early life adversity changes the threshold of limbic reactivity, or changes perceptual and cognitive appraisals related to reactivity.

It is possible that early life adversity changes the threshold of limbic reactivity, or changes perceptual and cognitive appraisals related to reactivity.

Emotional Development

Maladjusted children (sexual trauma, neglect): deficits in delay in understanding and regulating emotions

Acting alone on the basis of nervous energy signals (safety/anger to parents and peers)

These skills can be taught as part of clinical interventions (Shipman 2000 & 2003) and in a national field trial study. Developmental Trauma Diagnosis is being evaluated for clinical utility and in a national field trial study.

Psychiatric Comorbidities

Adults who experienced early life trauma continue to be at risk for:
- anxiety and affective disorders
- addiction
- psychiatric illnesses
- personality disorders
- dissociative identity disorder
- suicidality
- substance use
- recidivism
- multiple medical problems, including diabetes, heart disease, immune disorders, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

References

Childhood maltreatment, emotional dysregulation, and psychiatric comorbidities. Yael Dvir, Julian D. Ford, Michael Hill, and Juan A. Fraser. Harvard review of psychiatry (2014)

Borderline Personality Disorder Precursor?

Conceptualization/emotional/behavioral dysregulation as potential precursors to BPD in children:
- affective negativity
- irritability
- liability
- impulsivity
- severe conflict/struggle in interpersonal relationships with peers and adults
- suicide/self-harm behavior

Found consistent evidence of a relationship between borderline traits and all of the precursors of SD (Rogers 2009)

Re-victimization

ED underlying mechanism for risky sexual behavior and sexual re-victimization among adult victims of child sexual and physical abuse.

A history of childhood physical and sexual abuse is highly associated with increased risk for adult/adult rape.

More than 50% of women sexually re-victimized.

Emotional dysregulation appears to be a mediating factor.

Other sexually risky behaviors (higher lifetime number of sexual partners including strangers) predicted by measures of emotional dysregulation.

The severity of physical and sexual re-victimization is predicted by childhood sexual abuse.

Worries with a history of sexual abuse in their own childhoods: risk for impairment in their internal attachment relationships and attachment behavior with their daughters.

Daughters showed impairment in emotional regulation, risk for exposure to sexual abuse (Min 2010, 2011, Hall 2009)

Conclusions

Complex and bi-directional relationship between childhood trauma and emotional dysregulation.

Childhood trauma is associated with:
- reduced ability to understand and regulate emotions mediated by relational/attachment difficulties with caregivers and peers
- heightened levels of internalizing and externalizing psychopathology (1998/2001)
- impaired social functioning beginning in childhood and continuing into adulthood.

Maturation of these systems is shaped by early experiences and caregiving responsiveness.

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