

## Impact of Childhood Trauma on Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review

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### ABSTRACT

Experiences of traumatic events during childhood are shown to have long-term adverse consequences in adolescence. There are many ins and outs for childhood trauma such as sexual abuse, emotional abuse, mistreatment, and aggression by their primary caregivers. Individuals' experiences in adolescence are strongly impacted by childhood trauma in several dimensions, such as psychosocial well-being, mental health, cognitive function, and physical health. This review study will explore the significant impact childhood trauma has on the adolescent stage. Also, this study will scrutinize the significance of early intervention and assistance to reduce long-term impacts and offer insights into the widespread and persistent consequences of childhood trauma on individuals as they navigate adulthood. The aim of the present review is 1) highlight the types of childhood adversity, such as domestic violence, abuse, and neglect, etc. 2) the consequences of childhood adversity on the mental health outcomes of adolescents 3) inform the evidence-based strategies for preventing and addressing the consequences of childhood trauma.

**Keywords:** *Childhood Trauma, Trauma, Traumatic Events, Adolescence*

### **Background and context:**

*In reality, my childhood was filled with significant trauma. However, I took myself to essentially raise and nurture my growth afterward."*

— *Michael Gruber, The Good Son*

Childhood trauma may be described by any negative occurrences that happen during childhood, that have enough capacity to influence a child's development and well-being. These traumatic happenings might include emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, negligence & revelation of dysfunctional behaviors in the home such as domestic violence or drug misuse. According to APA (1994), childhood trauma is an overwhelming experience that surpasses a child's capacity for coping, which may involve a single frightening or destructive episode or a sequence of them. There are numerous studies explored that childhood adversity have a significant and enduring impact on the emotional health of a child. Hence, it is vital to comprehend these adverse impacts of childhood adversity to formulate efficacious remedies and provide suitable assistance to those who had

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Received: April 18, 2024; Revision Received: May 12, 2024; Accepted: May 16, 2024

## Impact of Childhood Trauma on Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review

childhood trauma. Childhood trauma, categorized by contradictory experiences during the early years, casts an extensive shadow over an individual's life. Tinna Sif. (2020) found that if childhood trauma is not properly managed, it can result in unhealthy physical and mental repercussions of self-blame, and low self-esteem. We have explored the compound interactions between childhood trauma and later developmental phases in this thorough review. We examine how trauma presents itself in adolescence, illuminating the difficulties experienced by people who bear its imprints.

Our goal is to offer a comprehensive understanding of the effects of childhood trauma by combining the best available research and highlighting the vulnerabilities as well as the resilience aspects.

### *Significance of the study:*

This review would help in understanding the affects of childhood trauma on the mental health outcomes of adolescents. It will also go over resilience and protective variables that might lessen the detrimental effects of childhood trauma on mental health outcomes. Moreover, this review will inform the evidence-based strategies for preventing and addressing the consequences of childhood trauma. Specifically, the review will develop our understanding of the long-lasting impact of childhood trauma, inform clinical practice, and contribute to the well-being of children as they navigate the challenges of adolescence.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This review paper used the literature review method of investigation. Google Scholar, PubMed, and PsycINFO databases were used for doing a systematic search to find pertinent studies that have been published in the last ten years. The search was conducted using the following keywords: "childhood trauma," "mental health outcomes," "abuse," "neglect," "household dysfunction," and "intervention."

### *Childhood Trauma*

Childhood trauma may be described by any adverse manifestations that happen during childhood, which have the potential to impact the overall development of the child and well-being (Alvina Mathew, 2023). Childhood trauma referred to as early life stress and hardship in childhood, primarily describes one or more adverse life events that happen to children or adolescents (usually before the age of 16). M. Gigilashvili (2022) found that childhood trauma may lead to the expansion of temperament ailments in adulthood. These occurrences surpass the person's capacity for adjustment, extending the duration of stress (Pechtel and Pizzagalli, 2011), and impacting children's and teenagers' physical and emotional well-being (Norman et al., 2012). A comprehensive meta-analysis on bipolar disorder (B.D) conducted by Bortolato in 2017 revealed that the two most significant etiological risk factors are childhood adversity and irritable bowel syndrome, with the former likely being linked to the latter (Bortolato et al., 2017).

### **Effects of childhood trauma:**

It is essential to highlight that societal embarrassment fear of disclosure, and lack of awareness of traumatic events are some of the reasons why the incidence of childhood trauma may be neglected. Furthermore, the frequency of childhood trauma may vary throughout communities due to environmental and socioeconomic factors. Therefore, to have a thorough knowledge of the incidence and effects of childhood trauma worldwide, continual research and ongoing awareness-raising initiatives should be done.

## Impact of Childhood Trauma on Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review



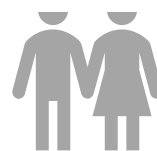
Psychological disorders



Higher Stress Sensitivity



Changes in Brain Development



Distressed Interpersonal relationships

### ***1. The increasing incidence of psychological disorders:***

Adolescent psychological illnesses are significantly impacted by childhood trauma. A large body of research has demonstrated a robust correlation between childhood trauma and a range of mental health issues, such as drug abuse disorders, depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD, and borderline personality disorder. According to Hovens et al. (2010), childhood trauma has been connected to the emergence of anxiety and depression in later life. Additionally, because emotional and behavioral patterns have changed with maturity, a history of abuse may be easier to recognize. Accordingly, victims of childhood maltreatment are likely to develop a variety of problems (Lindert et al., 2020). The likelihood of certain mental illnesses later in life is increased when trauma is experienced as a youngster. There are many different ways that childhood trauma affects mental health outcomes. Stress and unpleasant feelings can be difficult to control when coping systems and emotion regulation are disrupted by traumatic experiences. Mood and anxiety disorders may arise as a result of long-term stimulation of the stress response system, which includes dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. Furthermore, the detrimental cognitive schemas and beliefs that may develop as a result of childhood trauma can contribute to the maintenance of mental disorders.

### ***2. Higher Stress Sensitivity***

Trauma experienced as a child might make people more vulnerable to stress in their lifetime. Early-life negative events can modify the neurobiological stress response systems, rendering people less equipped to handle stress and more susceptible to its negative effects. This greater susceptibility to stress might show up as an excessive reaction to stressful circumstances in the future, which raises the risk of mental health conditions including mood disorders and PTSD. Furthermore, the development of adaptive coping mechanisms might be interfered with by early trauma, leaving people with little tools to manage stress. The absence of appropriate coping mechanisms can lead to maladaptive coping methods that worsen mental health issues, such as substance addiction, self-harm, or dangerous behaviors.

### ***3. Changes in Brain Development***

Trauma experienced as a child can have a significant impact on how the brain emerges, especially in areas related to stress response, emotion control, and the ability to think. research employing. Neuroimaging methods have revealed anatomical and functional changes in important brain areas, including the hippocampus, amygdala, prefrontal cortex, and HPA axis. Those who have suffered childhood trauma may have diminished volume and poor functioning in the prefrontal cortex, which is in charge of executive processes and emotional control. This may result in issues with impulse control, emotional control, and decision-making, which may hasten the emergence of mental health conditions.

### ***4. Distressed Interpersonal relationship***

Trauma experienced as a child can interfere with the development of stable bonds and damage relationships with others as an adult. Pearlman et.al. (2005) found that childhood trauma can affect the development of social skills, empathy, and trust, making it more

## Impact of Childhood Trauma on Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review

difficult to build and maintain relationships. People who have gone through traumatic experiences as children may struggle with intimacy, find it hard to set boundaries, and have patterns of insecure attachment. Furthermore, childhood trauma affects interpersonal interactions in ways that go beyond personal experiences. According to MacIntosh, H. B. (2017), People who have gone through childhood trauma may be more likely to become victims of abuse in violent relationship reenactments.

### *Impact of Childhood Trauma on Adolescent Development*

The transitional stage between childhood and maturity known as adolescence, is a unique developmental stage. Early in the 20th century, Sawyer, S. M., et.al. (2018) officially acknowledged this stage as a crucial transitional period between the ages of 10 and 18. People struggle with identity construction, emotional upheaval, and cognitive development during adolescence. During this period, the prefrontal cortex, which controls executive processes, develops significantly.

The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that adolescence is a stage of life with unique health requirements and rights, not just a calendar shift. Decisions taken at this time have an influence on one's physical and mental health well after the age of 18. Adolescent trauma can influence relationships, coping strategies, mental health, and future trajectories Vaughn-Coaxum, R. A., Wang, Y., et. al. (2018).

A study conducted by Monnat, S. M., & Chandler, R. F. (2015), revealed that individuals who have survived childhood trauma exhibit alcohol and drug addiction, by restraining the detrimental effects of their misfortunes on their health & creating a fictitious self-image as a coping mechanism. Early trauma can cause low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy can lead to the emergence of melancholy and anxiety. Maxwell, J. P. (2003).

According to Kovacs and Devlin (1998), internalizing difficulties are characterized by mood or emotion as their main characteristic. These symptoms include withdrawal, anxiety, depression, and anhedonia. Teen trauma is linked to both internalizing and externalizing issues, according to recent research made possible by NCTSN data. For example, logistic regression analyses revealed that each additional type of trauma or loss exposure reported by clinicians on a trauma exposure screen was associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in high-risk behavior in a study of 3,785 trauma-exposed adolescents ages 13–18 seeking services at NCTSN-affiliated agencies (Spinazzola et al., 2014). High-risk behaviors and their corresponding increased likelihood were: 1) running away from home, 14%, 3) engaging in criminal activity, 13%, 4) experiencing suicidality, 12%, 5) engaging in self-injurious behavior, 11%, 6) using alcohol, 11%, 7) abusing substances, 8%, and 8) skipping 6% at the school (Layne et al., 2014).

### *Consequences and Prospective Routes:*

It's critical to comprehend the long-term effects of childhood trauma by educating policies and procedures. Shonkoff (2012), said that policymakers, educators, and clinicians need to be aware of the extensive ramifications of childhood trauma. So, the contributions of protective factors, trauma-informed care, and early remedies are critical for the survivors of trauma.

### *Techniques for Managing Symptoms Associated with Trauma:*

❖ **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** CBT facilitates people in evaluating and altering harmful cognitive patterns that are associated with trauma. Nightmares and disturbed sleep after trauma may be indicative of the person's repressed sentiments of conflict. As a

## Impact of Childhood Trauma on Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review

result, addressing and accepting the incident or incidents may aid in lessening their impact on an individual's life. For instance, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) may help the patient get over unpleasant feelings related to prior hardships. Casement & Swanson, 2012 said this gives the person a sense of empowerment and control, which may lessen resentment toward the past and lessen the frequency of dreams they have about it.

❖ **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):** Gomez, A. M. (2012) explored that EMDR incorporates bidirectional stimulation, such as eye movements, with cognitive strategies. It is efficacious in lessening discomfort and digesting painful memories of childhood trauma. According to Stephen J. Drysdale. (2019) systematic review, revealed that alleviating trauma symptoms in children and adolescents in a variety of contexts may benefit from the psychotherapy technique identified as eye movement desensitization and reprocessing.

### ***Future Outcomes of Childhood Trauma:***

Research indicates that early intervention and preventive efforts should prioritize treating childhood trauma as it is directly linked to the start of problematic behaviors in children and adolescents. Hence, reducing health-harming behaviors, subsequent service needs, & expenditures can be attained through the creation of social and medical services that are inclined by the effects of childhood trauma.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is revealed that trauma endured as an individual leaves lasting traces that impact an adult's mental and physical health as well as relationships with other people. Moreover, adolescence and the early stages of adulthood serve as critical for comprehending the effects of trauma. Therefore, targeted treatments and support are necessary during these developmental stages. Social assistance networks serve as safeguards, minimizing trauma's detrimental consequences, and family, close friends & the community are important. Hence, to comprehend subtleties, investigate cultural differences, and improve solutions, further study is necessary.

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## Impact of Childhood Trauma on Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review

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## Impact of Childhood Trauma on Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review

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### **Acknowledgment**

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Goel, D., Kakkar, S. & Kumari, A. (2024). Impact of Childhood Trauma on Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review. *International Journal of Social Impact*, 9(2), 65-71. DIP: 18.02.008/20240902, DOI: 10.25215/2455/0902008