

Ripple Effect of Parental Trauma on Children's Personality

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ABSTRACT

This study reveals the ripple effect of parental trauma on children. Ripple effect refers to how small changes occurring at the micro level can have a greater impact at the macro level. Our every action creates a series of ripples outwards affecting others and causing a larger impact. Parental trauma means when a parent is troubled by their trauma in life and is unable to give proper love, care, and affection to their child, and thus the child is neglected. The children also have emotional or physical repercussions of their parent's trauma due to which they may develop personality issues later in life. Personality is how a person thinks, feels, and behaves in day-to-day life which distinguishes him from others and is affected by childhood experiences. The single case study method has been used in this research paper. Data collection is done via interview technique. The result confirms the ripple effect of parental trauma on the children.

Keywords: *Ripple effect, Parental trauma, Children's personality*

Childhood lays the foundation of an individual's emotional landscape, shaping the way one manages their emotions during adulthood. Early childhood experiences have a significant impact on the brain development, personality, and behavior of an individual. Early childhood experiences are mostly the experiences from the immediate caregivers i.e. parents. Parents (esp. mothers) who themselves have troubled pasts are unable to give proper love, care, and affection to their children, and the child is neglected. These neglected children may develop personality issues that can impact their relationships in adulthood including their parenting style and thus a ripple effect sets in. An article published in the SafetyLit journal concluded that maternal emotional maltreatment has a pernicious effect on children's mentalizing (Bottos S et al. 2014). Another study reported that mothers with unresolved trauma have an insecure attachment style and are less likely to have children who are securely attached as compared to mothers without any unresolved trauma. Thus, unresolved trauma in mothers leads to the intergenerational transmission of insecure attachment (Iyengar U et al.2014).

Doroudchi A. et al. (2023) concluded that children witnessing domestic violence may have moderate or severe psychological, behavioral, or emotional complications. They exhibit declined educational performance and social abilities, aggressive behavior, and depression. Another article on "Psychiatric aspects of children who witness domestic violence"

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concluded that conduct disorder (15%) is common in children witnessing domestic violence followed by major depressive disorder (10%), and attention-deficit hyperactive disorder (8.3%). (Gomma Z et al. 2019).

Aim

To study the ripple effect of parental trauma on children's personality

METHODOLOGY

Participant: 67-year-old lady with troubled personal history and family history

Method:

- A single descriptive case study method was used.
- Data collection was done by interview technique.
- Open-ended questions were asked.

Case study

Background

Mrs X is a 67-year-old multigravida lady educated in MA (Hindi) and is a housewife. She was born in a joint family with 09 siblings, her birth order is 4. She has been married for 45 years and was the eldest daughter-in-law in a joint family of 15 members. During the marriage, her in-laws got upset over some demands which were not fulfilled by her family and broke all ties with her family. So, she had a troubled relationship with in-laws since day 01 of marriage. She used to get regular scoldings, had to do whole household chores alone and her jewellery was taken away in the pretext of buying a shop for her husband but the shop was finally given to her sister-in-law. She had four kids [02 daughters & 02 sons] and was tortured because the first 02 kids were females. She started verbal fights with everyone in the house including her husband, got separated from the main family, and started living in separate portion in the same house after 09 years of marriage. The husband was not very understanding and supportive, and the brothers-in-law used to beat the children just for fun but the husband never said anything instead used to beat his children. Moreover, the husband was always busy earning money and never took care of his wife and kids. Fights with her husband intensified, and she indulged in too much worship and rituals.

On certain occasions, she used to leave home after fighting with her husband, and thus, in the whole chaos, the children got neglected. The elder son started stealing, so was sent to boarding school. In the meantime, Mrs X's mother got sick, developed some psychiatric issues, used to cry the whole day & night, and eventually died. Also, her husband had a business loss and went bankrupt. The family has to bear the burden of the severe financial crisis. The husband had to hide at some relative's place for five years due to debts and Mrs X used to cry the whole day and the house and kids were completely neglected. The eldest daughter took responsibility for the house and the elder son took responsibility for financial matters and cleared all debts. Mrs X neglected her health completely and was diagnosed with HTN, and DM 10 years back followed by stroke and mood disorder (most of the time she is depressed, sleeping too much, crying over small issues, and not taking care of her personal hygiene while at other time she is hyperactive, doesn't sleep whole day and night).

Relevant Facts

Mrs. X was 4th order child in a big joint family and so received compromised parental attention and care. She was lazy and stubborn since childhood. She got married in a joint

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family where she had to do whole household chores alone and was maltreated after marriage by her husband and in-laws. All this led to fights with everyone in the house. Thus, her children grew up in a family where they saw verbal abuse among their elders almost daily, physical abuse by their uncles for fun, and neglect from both parents. All four children developed various personality issues and do not have cordial relationships with each other and with their parents. All children still hold their parents responsible for the problems they face today in their lives.

The eldest daughter has low self-esteem and is unsatisfied with her life, the second daughter is manipulative and goes to any extent to use others for her benefit. The elder son has anger issues and picks up fights easily, the youngest son is the most affected one. He has broken all ties with his family, does not trust anyone, is highly egoistic, mistreats his wife and daughter keeps them under strict control, and drinks alcohol daily in the evening.

DISCUSSION

Mrs X was 4th order child in a big joint family. As per Alfred Adler's birth order theory, middle children are often squeezed between the older and youngest child and hence receive less love, care, and attention. They may become competitive or rebellious. A study published in 'The Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine' stated that middle-born children are less family-oriented and maladaptive perfectionism is more common among them (Louis PT et al. 2016). The youngest son of Mrs X fits perfectly in Adler's birth order theory which says that the youngest child will either be the most successful or become evasive and avoidant towards the rest of the family. Eckstein D et al. (2010) concluded that the youngest born has a high social interest, is most rebellious, most likely to be an alcoholic, and overrepresentation of psychiatric disorders.

As per Erik Erickson's theory of psychosocial development, the trust vs mistrust stage is from birth to 18 months of life. Children who learn to trust their caregivers at this stage are more likely to form trusting relationships with others throughout their lives. Both Mrs. X and her youngest son developed a mistrust of their caregivers at this stage as the mothers were busy taking care of household chores due to big families and children were neglected (generally elder children take care of the younger ones in such families).

As per the intimacy vs isolation stage of Erickson's theory, childhood abuse and neglect can lead to isolation which can have a detrimental effect on life leading to loneliness and depression. Mrs X did not receive the love and affection of her husband & used to quarrel often. This led to loneliness and depression in her. Her youngest son does not have a trustworthy relationship with any of the family members (not even his wife and daughter) or relatives and friends. Mrs X also fits into the generativity vs stagnation stage of the theory which says that stagnation leads to a less stringent healthcare routine which explains her DM, HTN & stroke conditions.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, parents who are still suffering from the traumas of the past are unable to render adequate love, care, and attention to their kids. The attachment style and parenting style are affected in such parents. As a result, the children are neglected and develop personality issues in later life. The same goes for children who witness domestic violence in their families. These children are unable to connect with their children and thus the ripple effect sets in wherein the parental trauma affects the personality of children in later life. So it is not the one time trauma that happens but any event in life has some ripple effect in the same or

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next generation. Understanding the impact of ripple effect will help us in taking the charge of our life and enhancing our internal locus control.

Future Implication

This topic needs extensive research so that the ripple effect of parental trauma on a child's personality can be controlled and adequate measures can be taken to stop the intergenerational transfer of the effect of trauma in families.

Limitations

The conclusion is derived from a single case study, so may not be applicable in all cases.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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