

## Effects of Childhood Maltreatment

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### Abstract

*Childhood maltreatment has had a damaging effect on many people in our society. The abuser strips the victim's innocence and leaves him or her to maneuver through a lifetime of harmful residue. Creating a healthy societal awareness and offering effective counselling solutions are necessary to minimize the damage of maltreatment.*

Childhood maltreatment consists of physical and/or emotional treatment that creates ongoing extreme negative emotions from the event. Childhood maltreatment touches a large number of victims and has a number of negative effects that carry on throughout the person's life. In the United States there were nearly "800,000 verified cases of child maltreatment in 2007" (Twardosz, 2010, p. 59); this figure does not include all other child maltreatment that is not reported. Children are innocent victims in these cases, and many of the damaging effects of child maltreatment linger for a long time and are often never overcome. Maltreatment has a number of negative health effects on people. Shame is a harmful emotion that causes people to withdraw from society. To compound that, victims of maltreatment have a difficult time trusting people and developing close friendships, which further increases their feeling of isolation. Anxiety and depression are also negative side-effects of child maltreatment. Creating an awareness of the healthy benefits of rehabilitation in society is necessary. People who seek rehabilitation need consistent positive reinforcement, support, and effective counselling in order to be successful. Successful counselling improves the victims' quality of life and outlook for the future, thus reducing the negative effects of maltreatment.

Shame is a harmful emotion that can stem from childhood maltreatment. In a healthy home, children believe that their parents care for them unwaveringly. Children believe that their parents care unwaveringly for them. Children have an innate need to believe that this is true in their relationship. When children are abused and their overriding need to know that their parents care unconditionally for them is compromised, it leads children to believe that there is something deeply wrong with them. This, in turn, imposes a lifelong sense of shame on them (Webb, 2007). Although maltreatment is the fault of the perpetrator, the victims feel that there is something wrong with them. The victims internalize the negative treatment and allow it to diminish their confidence and chances of success. The individuals carry on, in a downward spiral, thinking that no one else would want them. Shame is the natural response of the innocent when maltreatment occurs.

Shame is an emotion that causes the victims to withdraw from their friends, and from society, and, as a result, the individuals are left feeling further isolated and worthless. This reoccurring feeling of shame is passed on from generation to generation until the act of maltreatment can be broken. Child maltreatment causes shame, and this emotion becomes the curse on the family, passed on from one generation to the next (Webb, 2007). Shame leaves people feeling helpless and powerless. The victims then transfer their shameful abusive tendencies onto their children, and the cycle continues. Victims must be able to overcome their feelings of shame if they are going to be able to successfully break the abuse cycle and become an active part of a healthy society.

Maltreatment damages the victim's personal relationships and ability to trust people. Youth who have been maltreated run a higher rate of relationship difficulties throughout their lives and have a higher risk of becoming involved in domestic violence as adults (Wolfe et al., 2009). When close relationships, which should offer security and warmth, are riddled with

maltreatment, the victim is filled with uncertainty for future relationships. It is disheartening to know that the majority of these children are maltreated by their parents (Taylor et al., 2009). The victims of parental maltreatment must establish new healthy relationships with people who genuinely care for and respect them. People who have good interpersonal communication have the most friends and tend to be the happiest percentage of society (Adler et al., 2005). With every successful relationship that is established, trust and faith in humankind will be restored.

Children who have been abused develop a number of negative health effects, including anxiety and depression, and are at a higher risk to develop destructive disorders throughout their lives. Negative disorders that affect this group are anxiety, depression, interpersonal problems, hyper arousal, and dissociation (Lawson, 2009). Anxiety is a disruptive disorder that causes people to further isolate themselves from society, and causes disruptive thought patterns. Any situation that heightens anxiety levels will be avoided by the sufferer. Anxiety disorders create a flood of emotion that induces a dysfunction state of mind (Siegel, 1999). Anxious feelings cause a person to function in a limited capacity. In an uncomfortable situation, anxiety will be the main focus and everything else will seem insignificant. All of the negative health effects caused by maltreatment limit the potential of the individual. Effective counselling services are the only good option for victims to overcome the decreased quality of life caused by anxiety and depression.

Childhood maltreatment takes away a person's ability to perform everyday basic tasks. Early life maltreatment leads victims into a breakdown of fundamental self-regulatory functions (Ford, 2005), and these negative effects reduce the chances of the person developing a healthy lifestyle. Parents provide the fundamental building blocks that create a strong foundation for their children. A predictable, caring, and consistent parent is the most important influence in the development of children who are resilient, because this security promotes the attainment of self-regulatory capacities and promotes a secure attachment that stops the impact of trauma (Lawson, 2009). These positive characteristics describing an effective caregiver are the best defense that children have to create a strong identity that will serve them well during life's challenges. A person who is not reinforced this way struggles more with everyday problems. In contrast everyday challenges that seem almost unbearable to a victim of maltreatment may be easily handled by those with an unburdened past.

Depression develops in people who have been victims of childhood abuse. As time passes following the maltreatment, victims who do not have a chance to deal with their negative emotions become bitter and angry. When anger goes untreated for a long period of time, it destroys a person from the inside and eventually surfaces in the form of depression (Pelusi, 2006). Victims of childhood maltreatment have a strong correlation with adult onset of depression (Webb, 2007), which includes a number of negative feelings. Victims need to meet with a counsellor to work through the horrific events of their past. In my experience, bringing these events to light is the only way to deal with the emotional baggage from the event. Having a counsellor to assist in unlocking these memories is the best way to allow these difficult memories to surface. The longer people carry the injustice alone, the more deeply they will be affected. Depression will develop within victims of childhood mistreatment if they do not rehabilitate.

General awareness and credible counselling resources are crucial in helping children to deal with mistreatment issues. The sooner people can cope with their issues, the better off they will be. The longer the time between the abuse and treatment, the greater the amount of time and effort needed to curb the negative effects of maltreatment (Lawson, 2009). It is necessary to reach people in a manner that will empower them to retake their lives. The earlier the intervention, the sooner people can fully enjoy their lives, and the fewer economic and human resources needed for complete rehabilitation. Implementing awareness at the secondary level is necessary to reach a large group of those who are affected. Although rehabilitation takes time and effort, it makes the remaining time much more enjoyable. A healthy general awareness of this issue will give victims hope, which may empower them to seek rehabilitation. Victims need

to understand that they are not alone. When a general awareness of the topic of maltreatment is created in society and credible counselling services are offered, victims may retake their lives.

Disclosing traumatic experiences is an awkward task; therefore, it is important to have a capable counsellor and suitable environment for the participants. The counsellor needs to supply a comfortable and trusting emotional environment, so the victims feel safe and secure while disclosing their most personal material, which is most important during interpersonal victimization cases (Lawson, 2009). Victims are often maltreated by the people who are closest to them in their lives. Tainting a familiar relationship creates distrust for the sufferers, making it even more difficult for them to trust people and share their most protected shameful experiences. Each counsellor needs to get to know the client so that the client feels comfortable and has confidence in the counsellor. Building a relationship with the individual is the first step toward an effective counselling meeting. The victim's faith in people will be restored when the counsellor possesses desirable traits and creates a comfortable environment for the meeting.

Often, victims have been keeping their maltreatment a secret for years and are very apprehensive about telling anyone about their experiences. The best counsellor is totally non-judgmental and empathetic. An effective counsellor must have a keen interest in the person, be authentic, and must be genuinely interested in other people (Lister, 2008). Humans have an innate ability to measure the sincerity in other people. If the patients sense insincerity, they will shut down and lose faith in that professional. Patients are fragile and need complete genuineness and empathy throughout their meetings. Counsellors must be ethical and show complete discretion with every case. They must never reveal what patients say or do within the counselling meetings. When a positive environment is offered and the patient is supported in a caring manner, success of the victim's disclosure is maximized.

Child maltreatment damages many people in our society. Shame leads people to experience isolation from society and is a leading cause for continuing the cycle of maltreatment. People who have been maltreated have difficulty forming personal relationships, and they need help from counsellors who are ethically sound and caring. Anxiety and depression can also be minimized or eliminated through effective counselling. Creating an awareness of the healthy benefits of rehabilitation in society is necessary to encourage victims to step forward for help. Using social services to generate awareness and facilitate rehabilitation with professionals will create relief for some victims. Child maltreatment will continue to occur in our society; however, a comfortable awareness and sound counselling services can help victims to experience relief from its damaging effects.

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