Links between Childhood Deprivation, Psychosocial Adversity, Emotional Development and Behavior

Name

Institution

**Introduction**

This paper is aimed at explaining and documenting potential links between childhood deprivation, adversity, emotional development and behavior of a child based on the contemplated observation as a human service professional, working with children. First section will present brief preface about the potency of social factors in determining cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral appropriateness. It will be presented precise explanation of deprivation and adversity that child may experience due to his family and environmental conflicts and unfavorable circumstances and how these factors disrupt his emotional and behavioral development. Next, I will retrospect and communicate my personal perspective on the problem topic. In the end, conclusion section will attempt to infer significant take-away messages, deducing deliberate inferences from the textual activity.

**Main body**

**Preface**

Human being, being a social animal, is having a lingering desire to have social approval and desirability—the most satisfactory explanation of why society is so important in our cognitive and behavioral modifications. Social factors include each and every individual that we come in direct contact and have frequent interactions with e.g., parents, siblings, teachers, relatives, peer groups, friend circle, classmates, colleagues and other members of community.

John Locke, an English philosopher, attempted to propound the most intriguing yet compelling notion about the significance of social factors as powerful determinants of human personality. He suggested that at the time of birth, human mind is similar to blank slate; *tabula rasa;* free from any learning and memory. With the passing time, he interacts with his parents and other individuals, his hippocampus starts developing short term memories and attempts to imprint *tabula rasa* following a series of events and experiences.

Quoting what Piaget proposed, “children are active and motivated learners”; they use upcoming stimulus and memories to mould their preexisting set of schemas and knowledge about themselves, others and future. In a nutshell, social factors are highly influential for determining the human personality. Other theorists that support social factors include Sigmund Freud, J. B. Watson, Albert Bandura, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler.

Contemplating the neurobiological explanations behind personality alterations under the social influence is unimaginably simple—the brain plasticity. It is referred to as the ability of brain cells to undergo modification and rewiring particularly in response to the stimuli that it acquires from its surrounding environment. Brain or Neuroplasticity helps child demonstrate growth in multifaceted aspects of his development till ageing and recover injuries. Environmental enrichment is the key to develop radical connections in the developing infant that relies largely upon olfactory, auditory, tactile, visual and motor stimuli. The likelihood of recovering from brain injury or trauma is positively correlated to the frequency and intensity of sensory and motor stimuli received by the child.

Our genes are responsible for establishing basic structure of brain and strength of neural connections. However, a process called developmental plasticity enables the child to undergo continued development. Developmental plasticity is the key element in determining human personality because it is strongly linked with the neurological patterns.

**Deprivation and adversity**

The above section makes the idea clear that how social factors impact our personality and mental health in more holistic terms. Deprivation is another scathing phenomenon in which child does not acquire adequate resources to nurture his physical, emotional and social life (McLaughlin et. al., 2015). For example, malnutrition and deprivation of parental love disrupts his physical and emotional development gravely. Adversity is referred to as set of some redundantly unwanted factors that affect child’s quality of life, physical and mental health to a questionable degree (Maughan et. al., 1997). The terms adversity and deprivation are often used interchangeably giving away the same nature of ramifications. Human brain undergoes rapid developmental transitions from prenatal period to first five year of life and its “sturdy” or “fragile” architecture is determined by the nature of experiences during these years. During first five years, human brain circuitry is more conductive and welcoming for external influences—either better or worse (Dennison et. al., 2019). During the course of these sensitive periods, vigorous cognitive and emotional development is silhouetted by dependable and responsible interactions with adults whereas normal brain functioning can be interrupted by extreme or chronic adversity. For instance, newly born children if subjected to server neglect conditions in orphanage demonstrate exceptionally reduced brain activity as compared to the children undergoing parental care (Dennison et. al., 2019). Some of deprivations and adverse factors are elaborated below:

1. **Poverty/economic hardship**

Poverty is referred to as level of fiscal remittance below the expected or required level followed by the inconsistent and uncertain fulfillment of basic survival needs i.e., food, shelter, clothing and safety against environmental hazards (storm, heavy rain, floods). Child develops learned helplessness and sense of losing control over situations because of lingering sense of uncertainty. Additionally, malnourishment disrupts brain development which in turn affects their emotional and behavioral development (Maughan et. al., 1997).

1. **Undergoing ethnic or racial discrimination**

Sociocultural studies estimate that discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity is the worst among all other forms of discrimination. This is because individual has no control over his racial and ethnic choices—it is something predetermined for him. During the sensitive periods of development, the time when individual’s self concept and identity is being developed, discrimination/unequal treatment interferes with his ego development adversely—providing basis to the psychological impairments (Margaret et. al., 2017).

1. **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is referred to as non-accidental physical harm encapsulating burning, hitting (with stick, hand, object or strap), choking, stabbing, throwing, shaking, biting, kicking, beating and punching inflicted by caregiver, parent or a person withholding child responsibility, leading to slight (cuts and bruises) to severe physical harm (Dennison et. al., 2019). Such actions fall under the category of physical abuse, no matter the caregiver had an intention to harm or not. However, paddling and spanking aimed at developing physical discipline is not counted in physical violence as long as it does not create physical injury.

1. **Neglect**

It is considered as the incompetency of caregiver, guardian or parents for fulfilling child’s basic needs in consistent and uniform patterns. There are many potential forms of neglect; physical (lacking supervision and provision of adequate shelter and food), emotional (permitting child using drugs, inadequate emotional care, inattention towards his emotional requirements), medical (inadequate provision of physical and mental treatment), educational (inability to attend child’s special needs and failure to educate him properly) (Teicher, & Samson, 2016).

1. **Living with mentally ill family member**

Children are active and motivated learners. They learn new things instantly and try applying it to their lives through imitation. When any mentally ill family member, for instance, that of psychosis frequently exhibits hallucinations and delusions, is observed by the child on daily basis; child starts acquiring the similar set to maladjusted behaviors. He learns it and accommodates this information to his preexisting schemas (cognitive frameworks)—determining the nature of cognitive and behavioral consequences (Teicher, & Samson, 2016).

1. **Inconsistent attachment styles with parents**

After birth, parents are the most proximal and powerful attachment figures for child as suggested by Freud. Based on the lacking consistency and warmth of parental care, child develops two types of deteriorated bonding with his parents insecure and avoidant and ambivalent and resistant. Insecure and avoidant attachment is referred to as parents’ inconsistent temperament towards child and in turn child’s avoidant attitude towards parental care. On the other hand, ambivalent style refers to the provision and withdrawal of care at extremes (sometimes highly caring but sometime too indifferent), child in turn completely resists parental care (Maughan et. al., 1997).

1. **Alcohol/drug abuse problems**

Child witnessing his parents undergoing drug abuse; becomes highly disturbed by the intoxication and withdrawal symptoms. Continuous exposure to drug abusing parents not only interferes with their mental health but also increases the likelihood of child to develop drug abuse (Maughan et. al., 1997). Alcohol or drug abuse has multifaceted aspects including prenatal exposure of child to the drugs e.g., if mother is illegal or prescribed drug abuser, methamphetamine is being manufactured in the presence of child, involvement of child in the distributing, selling or manufacturing of illegal drugs or giving alcohol or drugs to the child, and using prescribed or illegal drug by caregiver which affects care-giving practices of caregiver (Teicher, & Samson, 2016).

1. **Living with divorced parent**

Usually, mother is more emotionally nurturing than father because she stays at home catering emotional, physical and social needs of the child constantly. Father, on the other hand, is responsible for the financial remittance of child and spends most of his time outside home. Hence, this partition of responsibilities helps child to undergo his physical, emotional, social and behavioral development in the most balanced way. When parents are divorced, single parent is responsible for catering both the aspects of development; requiring the parent to participate in more idealistic way. Problems arise when parent fails to either fulfill economic necessities or emotional needs of the child.

1. **Sexual abuse**

It is another scathing adversity involving pornography, prostitution, exploitation, indecent exposure, sodomy, incest, penetration or twiddling child’s genitals by caregivers or parents. Formally sexual abuse is defined as the use, enticement, inducement, persuasion, and coercion of child to indulge or assist other individual to indulge in sexually explicit behavior or simulation aimed at the production of visual depiction of sexual content, statutory rape, prostitution, molestation and incest. Sexual abuse disturbs psychological functioning adversely (Teicher, & Samson, 2016).

**10. Emotional Abuse**

Emotional or psychological abuse is termed as the set of actions that disturb child’ sense of self-worth, ego and emotional appropriateness. The most common sources of emotional abuse include rejection, threats, constant criticism and withholding guidance, support and love. Researchers estimated that when any psychological maladjustment is reported in child, the involvement of emotional abuse is present as an underlying reason in most of the cases.

**Links between childhood deprivation, adversity, emotional development and behavior**

The above presented textual activity has clarified many forms of adversities encountered by the children during their early stages of development. This section will attempt to define the link between these deprivations and adversities and their emotional and behavioral consequences. Many forms of child abuse and neglect have the potential to develop life-long impacts particularly their deteriorated sense of subjective and objective well-being. Physical wounds are easier to heal but abuse and neglect can have long lasting impacts; difficult to be treated. Such children are at higher risk of developing delayed emotional and cognitive development. Potential consequences of these adversities will be defined in the broader spectrum of emotional and behavioral development (Maughan et. al., 1997).

1. **Emotional consequences:**

Emotionally abused child demonstrates anti-social behavior with aggressive outbursts and hyperactivity. Aggression may have varying forms i.e., physical, verbal and relational aggression. Frustration aggression hypothesis and social learning theory best explain emotional consequences of child abuse and neglect (Margaret et. al., 2017). Child feels frustrated when his parent is indifferent to his needs, internalizes his frustrations and eventually a point arrives when he displaces his frustration in form of aggression—the most evident emotional problem. Social learning theory states that child learns aggressive and violent behavior from his parents/models. Moreover, suicide, homicidal and self-belittling attitude are other consequences of abuse (Margaret et. al., 2017).

1. **Behavioral consequences**

Behavioral maladjustment is based on the neurological and cognitive impairments caused by abuse and neglect. Most common behavioral problems include depression, anxiety, conduct disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, elimination disorders, oppositional defiant disorder and autism. Adverse life-experiences generate fight or flight response to the body releasing cortisol in blood stream which then affects brain function either minimizing or maximizing it. Parents and other external support system buffer against stress and brain functioning comes to its optimal levels. When support systems are absent and child undergoes series of stressful life experiences, the constant secretion of cortisol induces prolonged psychological impairments mentioned above (McLaughlin et. al., 2015).

**Describe the Human Services Professional perspective that you are taking and the behaviors you would expect to see in children from backgrounds of deprivation or adversity.**

Being a human service professional, the most significant factor in promoting wellness is observation. Typically, child undergoing multifaceted forms of abuse exhibits identical signs and symptoms in the initial stages. So it is important to observe and investigate the nature of abuse that child has been experiencing for long. Children having background of deprivation and adversity will have following disruptive behaviors:

1. They will exhibit depressed mood even without an apparent cause (sadness, lack of sleep, talk, hunger, interest, motivation, friendliness, and more suicidal ideation)
2. They will demonstrate anti-social or conduct issues (lie, aggression, violence, crime, law-breaking and even murdering)
3. They will have problematic relationship issues e.g., highly dependent or highly avoidant or unstable relationships
4. They will expectedly manifest poor academic performance both in educational and extracurricular activities
5. If abused sexually, they may exhibit sexually inappropriate behavior to adults or other children/ may reach puberty earlier than other children of similar age
6. They may develop strong affinity for drugs or alcohol.

**Conclusion**

This paper was concerned with the explanation and documentation of potential links between childhood deprivation, adversity, emotional development and behavior of a child based on the contemplated observation as a human service professional, working with children. First section presented brief preface about the potency of social factors in determining cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral appropriateness. It was presented the precise explanation of deprivation and adversity that child may experience due to his family and environmental conflicts and unfavorable circumstances and how these factors disrupt his emotional and behavioral development. Next, being a human service provider I reflected my thoughts and opinions regarding this issue. In a nutshell, parents and caregivers must develop contemplated insight about the fragility of human mind particularly during childhood so that no child could have disrupted or maladjusted life in future.

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