

Early Childhood Stress and its effect on Society

Science tells us that healthy development can be derailed by excessive or prolonged activation of stress response systems in the body and the brain. Sustained activation of the stress response system can lead to impairments in learning, memory, and the ability to regulate certain stress responses. Furthermore the relationships children have with their caregivers play critical roles in regulating stress hormone production during the early years of life.[\[1\]](#) Kirkwood's PhD thesis sets out a reminder that children are never too young to absorb what is happening around them.[\[2\]](#)

McEwen points out that individual differences in brain development emphasize that the parenting style, strict or permissive, is much less predictive of outcome than providing a consistent and supportive environment. Indeed, consistency of supportive parental care provides a foundation on which exposure to novel experiences and setting limits to behaviour can foster positive development, whereas chaos and unevenness within the family promotes poor self-control and emotional regulation.[\[3\]](#)

Abuse and neglect also lead to poor health, including poor cardiovascular control and increased inflammation that can have lifelong consequences (see chart below). McEwen goes on to state that the brain is central to stress and adaptation because it perceives possible danger and determines behavioural responses, ranging from fighting or fleeing, to vigilance and anxiety. The brain also determines health damaging behaviours such as eating too much, smoking or drinking, and sleeping badly. Another stressor is obesity, today an epidemic leading to increased incidence of diabetes at all ages. Counteractive measures, including diet and increased physical activity, are important for brain as well as for body health beginning in childhood as well as before and during pregnancy.

Human race is sensitive social being and lack of empathy, compassion, grace, recognition leads to one's efforts to ease pain and lack of inner happiness through one or the other kind of addiction. Traumatised people inflict the same pain to their loved ones, often unaware of their actions, unless they have addressed and overcome their own inner pain.

So where does this lead to in the future of our society? The first step is the realisation of our responsibility towards each other (partner, family, social circles). Parents' responsibility towards their child depends on their personal behaviour towards each other. Lack of compromise thus inculcating anger towards each other leading to unhappiness and state of mind and deep psychological impacts, which are likely to inflict pain to the child, even in the womb; inability or neglect of proper nutrition, especially for the would be mothers; misuse of drugs – tobacco, alcohol and substance abuse leading to adverse effects on the growing foetus; when the child is born, inability or neglect of the new born; bonding – breastfeeding and tender care; nutritional needs during weaning and thereafter; family behaviour inflicting pain on children (anger and arguments leading to violence towards each other in front of children); lack of communication and punishment to children for any wrong doing; the list is endless.

All these factors add to the struggle at home front for girls, creating a major hurdle. Gender bias has a great deal to do with the neglect on women's progress in the world. This has led to male domination in making decisions for caring and development of the offspring. Even among caring parents, encouraging girls to aim and achieve higher is seldom, compared to boys. Science Support and Systems Programme Manager, DELTAS Africa, Alphonsus Neba, said the gender balance wasn't coincidental; it was a product of an active and intentional undertaking. She went on to say, "We recognise that women are highly competent and competitive but face daunting challenges, which not only invariably limit or exclude their participation in science and research careers but create the false

narrative that they are less competent, thereby preventing them from achieving their full potential in research careers. In fact, the challenges that women face are so professionally incapacitating that their male counterparts will hardly cope with just a fraction of such challenges if the tables were reversed... other issues such as equality, discrimination, harassment, bullying, sustainability, and equal pay, amongst others".[\[4\]](#)

Look at the streets in India and many other countries, where children are born and living their whole life under the flyovers. Homeless people sleeping in streets from London to Sydney. We are shocked and angry when we hear about mass shooting, rape of a child or a gang rape and various criminal activities. Look at the children earning their livelihood from rag pickings. Why should we be surprised when they rape or get involved in petty thieving or even become gangsters?

Disgraceful and dangerous actions of many world leaders of yesteryear and today are the warning signs. A friend of mine shared a video, conversation between Russell Brand and Gabor Mate, Damaged leaders rule the World. <https://youtu.be/C-mJnYmdVmQ>. It is a long video but points at any pain inflicted during pregnancy and childhood is responsible for the state of mind and the behaviour into adulthood, including various types of addiction. Has pain inflicted on the child stressed by parents and dear ones got something to do with this? Biographies and literature amply supports this.

Happy and content child is the answer to many ills in the society today. Aware and responsible parents may be the key to it.

References:

- [1] National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2005/2014). Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper 3. Updated Edition.
<http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>
- [2] Kirkwood, BK. Early childhood stress, adversity, growth and development: findings from the SPRING home visits cluster randomised controlled trial in rural India. May 2019.
- [3] Bruce S. McEwen. Effects of stress on the developing brain, Rockefeller University. Report on progress. DANA Foundation. March 2011.
- [4] Paul Adepoju. [**Africa's poorly kept science gender gap secrets**](#). Lancet Vol. 394, August 3, 2019.

Related Links - Old Items : Sex Ratio in India, March 17, 2019; Immunisation Sustainability, April 13, 2019; Family Planning, May 25, 2019; Preventing Teenage Pregnancy, June 1, 2019.

ACE – health consequences

Table 1. Health and social problems and the ACE score

Problems from the baseline data	Outcomes associated with the ACE score		
Prevalent diseases	Ischemic heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, skeletal fractures, sexually transmitted diseases, liver disease	Sexual and reproductive health	Early age at first intercourse, sexual dissatisfaction, teen pregnancy, unintended pregnancy, teen paternity, fetal death
Risk factors for common diseases/poor health	Smoking, alcohol abuse, promiscuity, obesity, illicit drug use, injection drug use, multiple somatic symptoms, poor self-rated health, high perceived risk of AIDS	General health and social problems	High perceived stress, impaired job performance, relationship problems, marriage to an alcoholic, risk of perpetrating or being a victim of domestic violence, premature mortality in family members
Mental health	Depressive disorders, anxiety, hallucinations, panic reactions, sleep disturbances, memory disturbances, poor anger control		

Anda et al / Am J Prev Med 2010;39(1):93–98