

Iraqi Children and Long Term Adverse Childhood Experiences, Mini Systemic Review

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Mini Review

Volume 1 Issue 1

Received Date: February 02, 2017

Published Date: March 27, 2017

DOI: 10.23880/phoa-16000102

Abstract

Exposure to multiple risk factors during childhood is associated with higher rates of depression, alcoholism, illicit drug use, attempted suicide, obesity, diabetes, poor self esteem and many other chronic diseases. As Iraqi children exposed to widespread traumatic events for long period of time, so our aim is illustrating effect of adverse childhood experiences on health of Iraqi children.

Keywords: Adverse childhood experiences; Iraqi children; Violence

Introduction

The adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) literatures show that exposure to multiple risk factors during childhood is associated with higher rates of depression, tobacco use, alcoholism, illicit drug use, attempted suicide, obesity, diabetes, poor self esteem, feeling of isolation, ischemic heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cancer [1,2]. Some studies found that adverse childhood experiences in any category increased the risk of attempted suicide by [2-5] fold; the ACE score had strong, graded relationship to attempted suicide during childhood, adolescence and adulthood [3]. Childhood adversity has been linked to elevated rates of morbidity and mortality from a number of chronic diseases, immune dysregulation may be one potential pathway that explains this link [4].

The studies revealed that exposure to violence may lead to abnormal neurological changes that can cause malfunction of the limbic system of the brain especially in cases of long periods of exposure to trauma, particularly when the exposure occurred at childhood [5]. Such trauma usually causes adverse psychological effects that

may last for a very long time, may interfere with the capabilities during adulthood.

Iraqi Children and Adverse childhood Exposure

In Iraq, the conditions deteriorated for long period of time. Four decades of instability including sanctions, community violence, insecurity and economic stagnation have brought development in the country to its knees [6].

The Iraqi children and youth have been so greatly affected by these horrible conditions. They are facing very real dangers of disease, starvation, psychological trauma and death [7].

The literature revealed that Iraqi children who exposed to Al Ameriyah shelter bombing in 1991 continue to experience sadness and remain afraid of losing their family for years following the 1991 Gulf Wars [8].

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was found in 87% of the children and 60% of their caregivers living in

displacement camps five years after the 1988 “Al-Anfal” campaign [9].

A study that conducted in Mosul in 2004 revealed that Out of 3079 children (aged 1-15 years) assessed, 1152 have childhood mental disorders, giving a point prevalence of 37.4% [7].

Other study on a sample of 1858 male students, aged 13 to 19 years in Baghdad, revealed 24.7% of students had symptoms of PTSD [10].

At the end of 2015, Iraq had missed all, bar one, of its eight Millennium Development Goals including targets for increasing school enrolment, reducing child deaths before their fifth birth- day and improving access to safe drinking water [6].

In spite of this serious matter, large scale studies that clarify the suffering of Iraqi children are scarce [11].

There is urgent need for national studies to elaborate the effect of ongoing violence on mental and physical health of the Iraqi children in order to conduct scientific programs for minimizing the consequences of wars and conflicts on general population and especially for children.

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