
CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND ADULT BEHAVIOR AMONG YOUTHS IN PLOVDIV, BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: The study aimed to investigate how childhood trauma affects adult behavior among youths in Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Statement of the Problem: The study aims to investigate the relationship between childhood trauma and adult behavior among youths in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. The problem centers on understanding the prevalence and nature of childhood trauma experienced by these youths, exploring its long-term behavioral consequences, and identifying potential factors that influence resilience. The study seeks to shed light on the impact of childhood trauma on adult behaviors, offering insights to develop targeted interventions and policies to support trauma survivors and promote healthier outcomes.

Findings: The study revealed a concerning prevalence of childhood trauma among youths in Plovdiv, with many participants reporting experiences of physical abuse, emotional neglect, and exposure to domestic violence. Participants who experienced childhood trauma demonstrated difficulties in emotional regulation, exhibited insecure attachment styles, and had higher rates of anxiety, depression, and anger-related issues in adulthood. The study also highlighted the intergenerational impact of childhood trauma, as adults with unresolved trauma displayed impaired parenting behaviors, perpetuating the cycle of trauma to the next generation.

Conclusion: The study findings emphasize the critical importance of addressing childhood trauma among youths in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, due to its pervasive impact on adult behavior. The high prevalence of trauma experiences, coupled with adverse long-term consequences such as emotional dysregulation, insecure attachments, and impaired parenting, underscores the urgency for targeted interventions and policy measures. By prioritizing early intervention, access to mental health services, trauma-informed approaches, and community awareness, Plovdiv can pave the way for better outcomes and empower trauma survivors to lead healthier and more fulfilling lives as adults.

Recommendations: Implementing and enhancing accessible mental health services specifically tailored for trauma survivors in Plovdiv is essential. Collaborative efforts between schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations can create a comprehensive support system to address childhood trauma effectively. Providing trauma-informed training for professionals who work with children, such as teachers, healthcare providers, and social workers, is crucial. This training will equip them with the knowledge and skills to create safe and supportive environments that promote healing and resilience for trauma survivors. Raising awareness about childhood trauma and its consequences is vital to reduce stigma and encourage early identification and intervention. Preventive measures should focus on creating safe and nurturing environments for children, implementing parenting support programs, and providing resources to at-risk families to mitigate the risk of childhood trauma.

Keywords: *Childhood Trauma, Adult Behavior, Youths, Bulgaria*

INTRODUCTION

Childhood trauma refers to adverse experiences and distressing events that occur during a person's early years, leaving lasting emotional and psychological scars (Goddard, 2021). The effects of childhood trauma can be far-reaching and profound, shaping an individual's behavior and mental well-being throughout their adult life. Childhood trauma is a significant concern in Plovdiv, with a notable number of youths experiencing adverse events such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, or witnessing violence within the family or community. Individuals who experienced childhood trauma may struggle with emotional regulation in adulthood, exhibiting difficulties in managing anger, anxiety, and depression. Children who experienced trauma may develop insecure attachment styles, affecting their ability to form healthy relationships in

adulthood. Perkins and Sarris (2021) reported that childhood trauma is associated with a higher risk of substance abuse and addiction later in life, as individuals may turn to drugs or alcohol to cope with their emotional pain.

The prevalence of mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety, is higher among adults who have endured childhood trauma (Avery, Morris, Galvin, Misso, Savaglio & Skouteris, 2021). Childhood trauma can hinder educational attainment and job opportunities, leading to lower academic performance and limited career prospects. Adults who experienced childhood trauma may encounter challenges in establishing and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, leading to social isolation. Individuals who experienced childhood trauma may be at a higher risk of revictimization, as they may be more vulnerable to abusive relationships or exploitation. Survivors of childhood trauma may develop maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as self-harm or engaging in risky behaviors, as a way to cope with their emotional pain (Kerig, 2019).

Adults who have unresolved childhood trauma may struggle with parenting, perpetuating the cycle of trauma to the next generation (Fenerci & Allen, 2018). Early intervention and therapeutic support can mitigate the long-term effects of childhood trauma, improving the prospects for healthier adult behaviors. Increasing awareness about childhood trauma and its consequences can help reduce stigma and improve support systems for affected youths. Preventing childhood trauma involves promoting safe environments, nurturing relationships, and offering accessible mental health services to at-risk families (Bartlett & Smith, 2019). Policymakers should prioritize the implementation of trauma-informed approaches in educational, healthcare, and social service systems to better address the needs of trauma survivors.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Childhood trauma is a significant public health concern with profound implications for an individual's psychological, emotional, and behavioral development. Among youths in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, the prevalence of childhood trauma remains a pressing issue, raising concerns about its potential impact on their adult behavior. This study aims to investigate the relationship between childhood trauma and adult behavior among youths in Plovdiv, shedding light on the long-term consequences and potential areas for intervention. The study wants to ascertain the prevalence and nature of childhood trauma experienced by youths in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Identifying the types of

traumatic experiences, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence, will provide insights into the magnitude of the issue and its potential impact on their future behavior. The study also explores the long-term behavioral consequences of childhood trauma among youths in Plovdiv as they transition into adulthood. Understanding how childhood trauma influences emotional regulation, attachment styles, substance abuse tendencies, mental health disorders, academic and career success, and interpersonal relationships is essential to developing targeted interventions.

While childhood trauma can have detrimental effects on adult behavior, it is equally important to identify factors that contribute to resilience among youths in Plovdiv. Investigating protective factors, such as strong social support, access to mental health services, and coping mechanisms, can inform strategies to mitigate the impact of trauma and promote healthier adult behaviors. The final aspect of the problem centers on identifying effective interventions and policy measures to address childhood trauma and its potential impact on adult behavior in Plovdiv. Evaluating the accessibility and adequacy of mental health services, trauma-informed approaches in educational and community settings, and the implementation of preventive measures can provide valuable recommendations to enhance support systems and promote better long-term outcomes for youths affected by trauma.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ganpo-Nkwenkwa, Wakeman, Pierson, Vella and Wilson (2023) conducted study to determine the long-term consequences of childhood trauma on the adult victim. This study interview served as a survey, and ten persons took part. The interviews took the form of a survey, and data collection focused on the participants' recollections of traumatic events from their youth and their subsequent lives. People in the group ranged in age from 22 to 50. Seven people were interviewed in-person, and three were questioned over the phone. Anxiety-inducing and potentially harmful or fatal events encountered by children are examples of childhood trauma. Trauma may be caused by a wide variety of events, some of which are often referred to as aversive childhood experiences (ACEs). Adults who have experienced childhood trauma are more prone to adopt a victim mentality. People's words, choices, occupations, chances, and relationships are all affected by how they see themselves, making this philosophy potentially harmful. Those who believe the world is conspiring against them may be paralyzed by worry and never realize their full potential. Research

demonstrates that any kind of childhood trauma leaves a lasting, harmful effect on a child's brain, increasing his risk of developing mental illness later in life. It has been demonstrated time and time again by researchers that certain traumatic situations are associated with higher symptom production, distress, and posttraumatic sequelae than others. For example, because of its impact on psycho-relational health and child development, interpersonal trauma in childhood, particularly cumulative trauma, is the kind of traumatic experience most closely connected with subsequent issues.

Tan, Phua, Tan, Gan, Ho, Ong and See (2021) performed study to see whether those who overcame childhood trauma also had problems with denial, isolation, and substance misuse. This study seeks to determine whether or not posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, sleep disruption, and poor self-esteem are all the result of traumatic experiences in childhood. The last aim is to look for links between resilience and socioeconomic status. In making this decision, the authors recognize that many circumstances, particularly the nature of the abuse experienced, might influence the extent and nature of the after effects. Convenience and snowball sampling were used in the recruitment of study subjects. People found employment in fields including social services, counselling, psychotherapy, psychology, and community services. Semi-structured interviews with nine people were conducted: seven women and two men. There were a total of nine interviews performed, six over the phone and three in person. Members related tales from their work with customers. Each participant was given a pseudonym for anonymity purposes. Rather of withdrawing within themselves, those who overcame childhood trauma tend to engage in unhealthy coping mechanisms including alcohol and drug abuse, denial of the detrimental influence their adversities have on their wellness (particularly if perpetrated by their parents), and the creation of a false self-image. Those who experience trauma at a young age may develop a fragile sense of self-worth, leading to despair and anxiety. Traumatic experiences in childhood did not seem to lead to sleep problems later in life. There was no moderating effect of socioeconomic status on the diversity of traumatic events among study participants. But it became clear that financial constraints had a major effect on access to services of emotional support. Resilience may be boosted, bad behavior can be stopped in its tracks, and mental health issues can be alleviated with the right kind of intervention, therapy, and social support. Low self-esteem, despair, and anxiety are common among survivors of childhood trauma. Some people try to shield themselves from the negative effects of trauma by denying its existence, while others create a fake identity or

turn to substance abuse. In addition to adequate and individualized therapy, early interventions may alleviate trauma symptoms.

McKay, Cannon, Chambers, Conroy, Coughlan, Dodd and Clarke (2021) performed study to examine the link between exposure to trauma in infancy or early childhood and subsequent physical and mental health problems that may persist into adulthood. Trauma in early life, particularly severe trauma, may alter neurobiological processes and have far-reaching effects on human development and functioning. These morphological alterations in the brain underpin all of our mental and bodily processes. Childhood trauma has been shown to cause mental, emotional, and physiological problems that may last into adulthood. The neurological, physiological, and mental effects of trauma exposure are discussed in this study. The researcher discussed the importance of recognizing protective factors, analyzing resiliency, and identifying empirically based treatment modalities to help alleviate the symptoms of trauma survivors, as well as the long-term consequences of trauma exposure, such as substance abuse, incarceration, and co-occurring psychiatric problems.

Aiosa (2019) conducted study on how childhood traumatic experiences affect elements of adult personality and mental health. Given the stigma that persists around mental illness, this remark brings up a number of salient points. Many persons with mental illnesses go untreated or reject care because of these stereotypes. Most people have a limited understanding of mental health issues and their impact on people of all ages. Changes in personality and mental health are experienced by many people as a consequence of childhood trauma. This may occur when a youngster experiences the loss of a stable home environment, goes through a divorce, is separated from family members during an emergency, or grows up in a household where there is no adult presence. The study was expanded by interviewing eight persons who had suffered a wide range of childhood traumas. Both a psychologist and a kindergarten teacher were interviewed for the second series of interviews; neither had personal experience with childhood trauma, but both regularly saw its effects on others. What was noted is that PTSD comes largely from the accounts of those who have served their country. Recent studies have investigated additional risk factors for the onset of PTSD after traumatic experiences in childhood. Therefore, further study is required to determine whether there is a difference in PTSD onset. The study would look at the relationship between childhood trauma and suicide risk and adult mental illness among service members and veterans who suffered trauma as children.

Lacey and Minnis (2020) performed study examine the effects of abuse and trauma on children often focus on the role of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Previous research on ACEs has demonstrated a correlation between large numbers of ACEs and both more problematic adult behaviors and less supportive romantic relationships throughout the adolescent and young adult years. However, there is a gap in the data about the protective role that strong romantic support and other features of good relationships may have in mitigating the impact of ACEs on subsequent problem behaviors. In order to investigate the moderating influence of perceived support and observed instrumental and emotional support on subsequent participation in problem behaviors, the current research draws on data from an ongoing longitudinal study on social interactions and associated factors. Support did operate as a buffer, as hypothesized, but the findings also showed that it might encourage more of the same problematic behavior.

Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards and Marks (2019) conducted research to compare the effects of childhood trauma on adult family health. Recent studies have confirmed the negative effects of ACEs and PCEs on adult mental and physical health. However, the effects of ACEs and PCEs on family well-being are little understood. Traditions and habits passed down through the generations are crucial to a family's growth and well-being. Therefore, a person's upbringing may have lasting effects on the health of their offspring. Quota-sampling was used to recruit 1030 people for a survey conducted in Qualtrics; their demographics were then compared to those of the adult population in the United States. Individuals filled out a survey that asked about their demographic information and their social and emotional health processes, healthy living choices as a family, health resources, and external social supports. Structural equation modelling was used to analyze the data. Family social and emotional health processes and family health resources were adversely linked with ACEs after adjusting for marriage, education, gender, race, and age; PCEs were favorably associated with all four domains of family health regardless of ACEs. The health of an individual's family as an adult is influenced by their upbringing in the anticipated way. Positive childhood experiences may provide the groundwork for improved family health in adulthood, even in the face of early hardship.

Howell, Miller-Graff, Martinez-Torteya, Napier and Carney (2021) conducted study on the effects of trauma on one's body, brain, and behavior, along with its causes and classifications. Adversity in early life has profound consequences on children's long- and short-term results. Educators and other school workers will learn about trauma and its impacts via the supplied research and training.

In addition, they will have a toolkit of tactics and treatments at their disposal, which may be utilized with any kid, but particularly with those who have experienced trauma. Following the conclusion of a six-part professional development course with trainer's notes and trauma history screening instruments, participants will be asked to take an assessment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed a concerning prevalence of childhood trauma among youths in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. A significant proportion of participants reported experiencing various forms of trauma during their early years, including physical abuse, emotional neglect, and exposure to domestic violence. These traumatic events had a lasting impact on their psychological well-being and emotional development, underscoring the need for comprehensive interventions. There is a strong correlation between childhood trauma and adverse adult behavior. Participants who experienced childhood trauma demonstrated difficulties in emotional regulation, with higher rates of anxiety, depression, and anger-related issues. Additionally, they displayed insecure attachment styles and struggled to establish and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. The prevalence of substance abuse and addiction was also notably higher among individuals with a history of childhood trauma, indicating maladaptive coping mechanisms.

Amidst the challenges posed by childhood trauma, the study identified several factors that contributed to resilience among youths in Plovdiv. Participants who had access to a strong support system, including supportive families and friends, were better equipped to cope with the traumatic experiences and exhibited more adaptive adult behaviors. Moreover, those who had access to mental health services and therapeutic interventions demonstrated higher levels of resilience and emotional well-being. The study noted that concerning pattern of impaired parenting among adults who experienced childhood trauma. Participants who had unresolved trauma from their past were more likely to display less nurturing and supportive behaviors towards their own children, perpetuating the cycle of trauma across generations. This highlights the intergenerational impact of childhood trauma and the urgency to address it effectively.

The findings underscore the importance of implementing trauma-informed approaches within educational, healthcare, and social service systems in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Early intervention and targeted support for youths who have experienced trauma are crucial to preventing the escalation of adverse behavioral consequences into adulthood. Additionally, there is a pressing need to

enhance the accessibility and quality of mental health services to ensure that trauma survivors receive appropriate support. The study also highlighted the significance of community awareness and preventive measures to address childhood trauma in Plovdiv. Raising awareness about the prevalence and consequences of childhood trauma can help reduce stigma, encourage early reporting, and promote a supportive environment for affected youths. Preventive measures should focus on creating safe environments for children, fostering nurturing relationships, and equipping parents and caregivers with parenting skills that promote resilience and emotional well-being.

CONCLUSION

The study on childhood trauma and its impact on adult behavior among youths in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, has revealed crucial insights into a pressing public health issue. Childhood trauma is prevalent among the youths in this region, with a significant number experiencing adverse events such as physical abuse, emotional neglect, and witnessing violence. The long-term consequences of childhood trauma are far-reaching, affecting emotional regulation, attachment styles, substance abuse tendencies, mental health, academic and career success, interpersonal relationships, and parenting behavior. There is urgent need for targeted interventions and policy measures to address childhood trauma effectively. Early intervention and access to mental health services are paramount to support trauma survivors and prevent the escalation of adverse behavioral consequences into adulthood. Implementing trauma-informed approaches within educational, healthcare, and social service systems can create a safe and nurturing environment for those affected, promoting resilience and emotional well-being.

Moreover, the study concluded that the intergenerational impact of childhood trauma, with adults who have unresolved trauma being more likely to exhibit impaired parenting behaviors, perpetuating the cycle of trauma to the next generation. This stresses the importance of breaking this cycle through community awareness and preventive measures. Raising awareness about childhood trauma can reduce stigma, encourage early reporting, and create a supportive environment for affected youths, while preventive measures can focus on creating safe environments and fostering nurturing relationships. Addressing childhood trauma and its effects on adult behavior among youths in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, is a multifaceted endeavor that requires a comprehensive approach. By prioritizing early intervention, accessible mental health services, trauma-informed approaches, and preventive measures, Plovdiv can pave the way for a brighter

future for its youths. By breaking the cycle of trauma and providing support, the community can empower these young individuals to overcome their past adversities and lead healthier, more fulfilling lives as adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is imperative to enhance the availability and accessibility of mental health services in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, particularly for youths who have experienced childhood trauma. Implementing trauma-informed counseling and therapy programs can provide tailored support to trauma survivors, promoting emotional healing and helping them develop adaptive coping mechanisms. Collaborative efforts between schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations can facilitate a comprehensive network of mental health support for youths, ensuring timely intervention and long-term emotional well-being. Training professionals who work with children, such as teachers, healthcare providers, and social workers, in trauma-informed practices is essential. By fostering an understanding of the impact of childhood trauma on behavior and development, these professionals can create safe and supportive environments that facilitate healing and resilience. Trauma-informed care emphasizes empathy, sensitivity, and validation, helping to avoid retraumatization and promoting positive outcomes for trauma survivors.

Raising awareness about childhood trauma and its effects on adult behavior is vital in reducing stigma and encouraging early identification and intervention. Community-wide campaigns and educational initiatives can equip parents, caregivers, and the general public with knowledge about the signs of trauma and the importance of seeking help. Preventive measures should focus on creating safe and nurturing environments for children, implementing parenting support programs, and providing resources to at-risk families to mitigate the risk of childhood trauma.

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