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Student's name  
Developmental Psychology  
Term Project #1  
March 5

## Brain Development in Abused and Neglected Children

Internet Source:

[http://apu.sfn.org/content/Publications/BrainBriefings/child\\_abuse.html](http://apu.sfn.org/content/Publications/BrainBriefings/child_abuse.html)

Summary:

Everybody knows the physical aspect of abused and neglected children, but in the past few years research has shown that this maltreatment may affect brain development. This article outlines some of the problems that maltreatment of children can cause to their developing brains. For one, evidence has shown that abused and neglected children have ended up with mental disorders such as learning problems, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It goes on to explain that although stress teaches our brain to handle certain situations, too much stress can harm the brain. Research has shown that the various stress molecules found in everybody are not working properly in maltreated children and adults. In fact, being overly stressed may also cause brain cells to die. This has been shown in rodents and may be true for humans. Maltreatment may also affect the anatomy of the brain. Tests have shown that brain areas are smaller in maltreated children than in children who don't have to worry about the abuse and neglect. These areas include the cerebral cortex and prefrontal cortex, which help with complex actions, the corpus callosum, which helps the two hemispheres of the brain to communicate, and the temporal lobes and the amygdale, which are thought to help with emotions and memory. Further research is being done on children

who have been maltreated and seem to be fine. They are trying to find whether any other key factors may play a role in the development of their brain such as genetic make-up or support from another adult. They are also testing ways to block or reverse abused-related biological alterations such as by using medication. Of course, the only way to help abused children is to prevent it from happening at all.

Comparison:

In chapter 3 of our text, Human Development: A Life-Span View, the brain is looked at and explained. It talks about how it changes and grows over time. Our text explains this better, but the article sums it up by saying “As children sprout in stature over the years, so do their brains. The cells and circuits build and refine.” (Brain Briefings, 2003) While our text did not talk about how abuse and neglect could cause the brain to have smaller areas, the text and the article did agree that this maltreatment can cause stress in people. I read in both that a little stress helps the body to respond to certain situations and that children learn that the world is not predictable, but too much stress can cause damage. Children “...appear more likely than healthy individuals to experience learning problems, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition marked by intense anxiety that sometimes erupts after a horrific experience, according to some studies.” (Brain Briefings, 3003) Furthermore, “Adults who were abused as children often experience emotional problems such as depression or anxiety, are more prone to think about or attempt suicide, and are more likely to abuse spouses and their own children.” (Human Development, 2003, p 274) Stress can affect a child even during pregnancy. I found in the text that when pregnant female animals experience constant stress, their offspring are usually smaller than average and are more apt to

experience other physical and behavioral problems. (Human Development, p. 65)

Fortunately, both the text and the article also have noticed that some children that experience abuse and neglect have not been affected by this problem. More research is being done to find out why and help prevent abuse. One reason both pieces of literature wonder about is if a person or other factors contribute to this. In the Internet article they want to know if genetic make-up, a teacher's support, or other factors may contribute to this outcome. By looking at a study of sexually abused children, our text wonders if the type of peers or the type of father-child relationship could help the outcome of maltreated children. (Human Development, p 274) They also have different ideas of how to help and prevent maltreatment. The text includes that investigators are testing ways to block or reverse abuse-related biological alterations with medication or other methods. The book looks at providing social support for parents and teaching effective parenting. "When parents know they can turn to other helpful adults for advice and reassurance, they better manage the stresses of child rearing that might otherwise lead to abuse. And families can be taught more effective ways of coping with situations that might otherwise trigger abuse." (Human Development, p 274)

Critique:

Although I wish that this article was a little more detailed, I found it to be interesting and agree with much of it. I've never personally experienced abuse and neglect, but it only makes sense that abused and neglected children grow to have mental disorders and smaller brain areas. They are afraid to do or say anything for fear of being abused and so they tend to keep to themselves. They learn not to have emotions and if they keep to themselves they don't have all the good memories of a healthy family and life. They don't have that secure

attachment and grow up feeling that they are not loved. This alone can cause depression.

And although the text doesn't really say anything about the anatomy of the brain, as I read up on this, I really do think that it does because the children aren't getting what they need in any areas emotionally, socially, cognitively, and physically. As I read more on this in other sites, it has become obvious that this is something that we need to clearly look at closer. It is heartbreaking to think that something like this could happen to a child.

The following links provide more information on this subject:

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/focus/earlybrain/earlybraina.cfm>

[http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/abuse\\_neglect.htm](http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/abuse_neglect.htm)

[http://www.mclean.harvard.edu/PublicAffairs/20001214\\_child\\_abuse.htm](http://www.mclean.harvard.edu/PublicAffairs/20001214_child_abuse.htm)



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