



Introduction

What is Trauma ?

Traumaisa psychological and emotional response to deeply distressing or threatening experiences that overwhelm a person's ability to cope. (NICE, 2023) According to Perry and Szalavitz (2017), it frequently happens to children and young people as a result of abuse, neglect, aggression, or separation from carers. Such experiences disrupt brain development, attachment, and emotional regulation (van der Kolk, 2015).

Statistic (UK/Wales)

Acute - one-time incident (e.g. accident, attack)

Repeated exposure that is chronic (e.g., continuous abuse)

Complex: several chronic traumatic events (NCTSN, 2022).

Before the age of 18, 34% of kids go through at least one traumatic experience (Hughes et al., 2017).

According to Bellis et al. (2019), 14% of people in Wales report having had four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). According to Bellis et al. (2019), those who have experienced four or more ACEs are 3.5 times more likely to self-harm and 4 times more likely to experience mental health issues.

Promoting Recovery and Building Resilience

Secure, trustworthy, and dependable relationships are essential for trauma recovery (Bryson and Perry, 2020). Supportive adults who provide routine, empathy, and validation can help children regain their confidence. According to research, children who feel cared for, connected, and capable develop resilience (Hart, Gagnon, and Aumann, 2022).

Type of Trauma

Acute Trauma results from a single, sudden, and overwhelming event. Examples: accident, sudden loss, single incident of violence

Chronic Trauma develops through long-term exposure to repeated stress or harm. Examples: ongoing domestic violence, persistent bullying, long-term neglect.

Complex Trauma Occurs when a child experiences multiple, repeated interpersonal traumas over time.

Examples: growing up in an unsafe or chaotic home, ongoing abuse, and lack of a stable caregiver.

Developmental Trauma is linked to disrupted attachment and a lack of emotional safety during critical developmental stages.

Examples include inconsistent caregiving, emotional neglect, and an unstable family environment.

Relational Trauma arises when harm is caused by people the child depends on for safety and trust.

Examples: parental rejection, manipulation, and emotional abuse.

School Trauma is related to distressing or harmful experiences in the school environment.

Examples include bullying, discrimination, and repeated academic failure. **Medical**

Trauma Caused by frightening, painful, or overwhelming medical experiences. Examples: hospitalisation, invasive procedures, chronic illness.

Secondary Trauma (Vicarious Trauma) is experienced by young carers or children exposed to another person's trauma.

Examples: witnessing parental suffering, caring for a parent with mental illness. (NCTSN, 2023)

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON THE DEVELOPING BRAIN

The developing brain may be overloaded by trauma, which can have long-term consequences. Overactivity of the amygdala results in increased fear and ongoing attentiveness. Less efficient hippocampal function could result in fractured memories and learning challenges. Concentration, judgement, and emotional control are all impacted when the prefrontal cortex becomes underactive. Long-term activation of the stress system (HPA axis) makes the child hypervigilant, which affects behaviour, relationships, sleep, and increases susceptibility to mental health issues (Teicher and Samson, 2016).

The connection between behaviour and experience.

Traumatised children frequently exhibit behaviours associated with worry, dread, or mistrust. Instead of being "bad behaviour," behaviour becomes a means of expressing unfulfilled emotional needs (Bath and Seita, 2018).

Typical responses consist of trauma :

Aggression or hypervigilance is associated with fight-or-flight survival responses.

Emotional numbness or withdrawal associated with shame or fear.

Concentration issues brought on by stress-related alterations in the brain (Perry, 2017).

Behavioural issues connected to trauma, according to UK studies (DfE, 2023). Professionals can react with empathy and stability rather than punishment when they are aware of this connection.

Conclusion

Supporting children's healthy development requires an understanding of trauma.

Professionals can offer the safety, understanding, and stability needed for rehabilitation when they acknowledge that behaviour is frequently a reaction to stress, fear, or unfulfilled needs. Children who receive trauma-informed care are better able to re-establish trust, develop resilience, and have better long-term results (Bath & Seita, 2018).

Trauma-Informed Practice: Implications for Care

Trauma-Informed Practice: Implications for Care Recognising prior trauma, preventing re-traumatisation, and including strategies that support safety, trust, autonomy, choice, teamwork, and cultural sensitivity in all services are all components of trauma-informed practice (GOV, 2022). Teams in England's children's social care system say trauma-informed treatment is beneficial for fostering connections and fostering trust, but they frequently lack a cohesive strategy and a thorough assessment of results. (EIF, 2022) In order to make services more responsive, the Trauma-Informed Wales framework in Wales outlines stages and practice levels and underlines that behaviours should be viewed as communication (GOV, 2022).

Reference list

- Bath, H. and Seita, J. (2018) *The three pillars of trauma-informed care: Healing the hearts and minds of children in foster care*. Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg Press.
- Bellis, M.A. et al. (2019) *Adverse Childhood Experiences and their impact on health-harming behaviours in the Welsh adult population: The Welsh ACE Study*. Cardiff: Public Health Wales NHS Trust.
- Bryson, B. and Perry, B.D. (2020) *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook*. New York: Basic Books.
- Department for Education (DfE) (2023) *Children looked after in England including adoptions, year ending 31 March 2023*. London: DfE.
- Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) (2022) *Trauma-informed care: Understanding the use of trauma-informed approaches within children's social care*. London: EIF.
- Gov.uk / Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (OHID) (2022) *Working definition of trauma-informed practice*. London: UK Government.
- Hart, A., Gagnon, E. and Aumann, K. (2022) 'How Relationships Build Resilience in Children and Young People', *Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience*, 9(1), pp. 15-27.
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) (2022) *Types of Trauma in Children and Adolescents*. National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) (2023) *Effects of Trauma on the Developing Brain*. National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
- Perry, B.D. and Szalavitz, M. (2017) *The boy who was raised as a dog: What traumatised children can teach us about loss, love, and healing*. New York: Basic Books.
- Teicher, M.H. and Samson, J.A. (2016) 'Annual Research Review: Enduring neurobiological effects of childhood abuse and neglect', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 57(3), pp. 241-266.