

Impact of trauma on the next generation

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1. Exposure to war and violence not only has major consequences for society at large but also detrimental impact on people's individual lives. Besides the short- and long-term effects on those exposed, it has been argued that violence also may have intergenerational consequences .

So first, what are traumatic experiences?

- War, disaster, becoming a refugee, acute loss of a loved one
- Disruption and powerlessness
- Shattering of basic assumptions on life

2. When and who studied?

- Psychology, psychiatry, medicine, anthropology
- World War I and World War II
- The aftermath of the Vietnam war in the USA
- The origin of the concept of PTSD

3. What is their impact on the individual?

- Adaptational processes:
 - Searching for control
 - Nightmares, intrusions, anxiety, feeling alienated
 - Resilience
 - Prevalence of responses
- Disturbed processes
 - Depression, burn out and PTSD

4. Impact of war on the children of survivors and victims

- Holocaust survivors
- Three main characteristics in families of survivors (clinical studies)
 - a. Disturbed interaction between child and parent
 - b. Difficulty with emotions
 - c. Role of the war in the family

5. Dilemma's and developments in research

- a. The serious gap between controlled empirical studies versus clinical studies.

Integrative reviews reached the conclusion that, overall, Holocaust survivor offspring (HSO) does not present with quantitatively more signs of mental health problems than non-survivor offspring. Researchers in the field do acknowledge however, the existence of a group of offspring characterized by psychopathological symptoms (in)directly related to their parents' war experiences, their parents' war-related psychopathology, and/or the impact of growing up in a Holocaust survivor family.

- b. Is it really trauma: Transgenerational trauma versus developmental interference?

The term "transmission" of trauma has been used to describe these consequences, defined as thoughts, feelings, and behaviours generated from the survivors' experiences and transmitted to their offspring. While some definitions describe similar symptoms for survivors and their offspring, others describe a more indirect process, through which, intentionally or unintentionally, the experiences of the earlier generation influence (first and second generation) parenting attitude and behaviour.

- c. The essential role of parental mental health disturbances.

Parents with severe anxiety or depression may model patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving for their children. Low self-esteem, distrust towards fellow human beings, and a pessimistic outlook on the world in general and on the future may be the dominant message conveyed to their offspring.

- d. Attachment quality and parenting practices: psychological and physiological findings among war survivors and refugees

Attachment theory prescribes parenting that is responsive and attuned to the needs of the young child to grow up, thrive and explore the world. Parents who have to deal with unresolved problems from their past, for instance loss or maltreatment, may not be sufficiently capable to be attuned to the needs of the child, impacting the quality of the interactions of parents with their children. Parents may, for example, exhibit frightened, frightening, or unexpected behaviour when they associate stressful situations in their current life with traumatic experiences in the past). Parenting practices or dynamics in the parent-child relationship may underlie offspring mental health complaints. Besides parental numbing and detachment and other manifestations of parent's

posttraumatic responses, parents' caregiving style was, for example, characterized by a perceived inability to provide physical and emotional care and the perceived reversal of parent and child roles. Major themes that characterized the parent-child relationship quality of HSO: overprotection and fear of separation, lack of emotional resources (e.g., emotional neglect and unpredictable emotional reaction), and coercion of the child to please the parents and satisfy their needs (e.g., push to achieve and role reversal).

e. The search for identity