



Childhood Emotional Neglect and its Impact on Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

Emotions and feelings are essential to our existence as well as to our conduct, behaviours, and social and personal lives. Stress in the early life experiences due to flawed Parenting causes the release of stress hormones which cross the blood brain barrier and influence the growth of brain especially the activity of amygdala, an emotional brain centre. Stress teaches the brain what is likely to happen to us later in life and makes us grow necessary neurocircuits to handle threats in later life. Early stress causes the overgrowth of the survival/stress response circuits, counterintuitively accelerating the growth of the survival circuits as an adaptation in response to unsafe world. These early traumatic experiences in kids thus may turn on stress response system in them causing a whole range of PTSD and CPTSD symptoms in their later life. Children with emotion regulation difficulties have hard time to develop emotional intelligence in later life which is central to human growth, progress and well-being.

Keywords: Childhood, Emotional, Neglect, Intelligence, Impact.

Introduction

As children, before our minds start constructing world for us, the world constructs our minds in the early years of our development. In contrast to adults, who have the ability to fight or flee in the event of danger, children have an insatiable drive to fit in or attach to their parents as a survival instinct. This is how the evolution has shaped us as human beings.

Emotions have a critical role in shaping our worldview and making a sense of who we are. In order for kids to properly process their emotions, parents need to give them a safe and secure space. Yet some parents frequently dismiss, disregard, or trivialise their children's emotions due to their own emotion regulation difficulties. Consequently, the kids tend to hide their true emotions and associate them with survival threat as a part of their emotional learning.

Kids of today on an average are growing lonelier and more depressed, more angry and unruly, more nervous and prone to worry, more impulsive and aggressive. The withholding or suppressing of feelings is therefore a coping strategy used by some kids to deal with being rejected or abandoned by their carers. This strategy is unconsciously carried over into adulthood, and the children who are now adults tend to hide their genuine feelings and act inauthentically and as people pleasers to win others' acceptance, love, and gratitude. While it might work in the short term, it drains a tremendous amount of emotional energy over time. The purpose of emotions is to guide our behavior to navigate the intricacies of life; if they are suppressed or misrepresented, we may become less aware of ourselves as well as the outside world. The blind spots in our awareness will cause more problems in our intimate relationships, especially the ones where people rely on one another, because the things that we have not acknowledged about ourselves, subconsciously come out through our actions in intimate relationship. And when our partner or any other loved one reflects to us how we have made them feel; if that is inconsistent with the idea that we have about ourselves, we will now find ourselves in a lot of trouble. Since what they are reflecting back to us is quite real, but it does not align with our sense of self.

Compared to those who are securely attached, persons with insecure attachments have a lot more blind spot. Insecure attachments are the ways in which we learned to distort our perspectives of the world, ourselves, and other people to fulfil survival needs. As per the Defensive Exclusion Principle, during our early years, we learned to suppress anything that was too emotionally distressing for us to acknowledge as real, including everything we learnt or saw about the outside world. These behaviours are associated with survival in the emotional brain and will not go away on their own until we consciously recognise the damage they cause. Emotion regulation impairments in kids are a primary risk factor for:

1. Mental health difficulties (anxiety, depression ADHD)
2. Low academic achievement
3. Increased risk of drug abuse /obesity
4. Increased aggression/violence
5. Risky sexual behavior etc.

Counselling services should be organized around family units to help parents learn how to create an early home environment that is conducive to their children learning emotion regulation skills. Although bad things can happen, we may get past them and have a positive view on life. If most of our experiences are bad, our emotional programming will also be mostly bad. This will show up as a lot of negative beliefs that will influence our behaviour for the rest of our lives. Some examples of these negative thoughts are: I am unworthy; I am afraid of being abandoned; I am not enough until people like me; and there is no use in trying hard because I will fail anyway. But if we recognise that these unfavourable narratives are not our own, we can dismantle these pessimistic belief systems. They were passed down to us from someone who experienced this kind of unhealthy emotional training when we were young. The cognitive distortion that occurs when the mind fabricates an impression that it resembles reality is what leads to the reinforcement of these unfavourable ideas.

Review of Literature

Childhood emotional neglect (CEN) refers to a failure to meet the basic emotional needs of a child, a lack of emotional responsiveness to a child's distress, ignoring a child's social and emotional developmental needs, and expecting children to deal with situations beyond their maturity or that are unsafe (Teicher & Samson, 2013). The pursuit of perfection becomes a way to seek external validation and compensate for the lack of emotional support (Streep, 2017). Bowlby (1958) has shown that secure attachments in childhood lay the foundation for healthy relationships in adulthood. CEN has been closely associated with psychological disorders, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, in

young adults and later in life (Grummitt *et al.*, 2022; Infurna *et al.*, 2016; Salokangaset *al.*, 2020). In addition, CEN can have long-term effects on social functioning and result in social anxiety, poor interpersonal interactions, and reduced relationship quality (Derin *et al.*, 2022; Haslam & Taylor, 2022; Müller *et al.*, 2019; Rees, 2008). Almost 1 in 5 adults globally may have been neglected as a child, and it most likely happened unintentionally (Stoltenborgh *et al.*, 2013). Meta-analyses have revealed that the global prevalence of childhood emotional neglect is around 18% (Stoltenborgh *et al.*, 2013; Stoltenborgh *et al.*, 2015).

Methods

We conducted a 2-year study of 500 school-age children and college students in their teens, recording their responses about their home environments, early childhood experiences, conduct, behaviour, and academic performance. Our goal was to determine whether there is any correlation between early childhood emotional neglect and parameters of emotional intelligence.

Results and Discussion

The study revealed that emotional neglect in childhood can seriously impair EI, and manifests itself in the following way:

1. Difficulty in Identifying Emotions: Children who experience emotional neglect often grow up without learning to recognize and label their own emotions accurately. They may struggle to understand what they are feeling or why they are feeling it, leading to confusion and emotional dysregulation in adulthood.

2. Limited Empathy: Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, is a crucial component of EI. When children do not receive emotional support or validation from caregivers, they may find it challenging to empathize with others later in life. This can result in difficulties forming meaningful relationships and understanding social cues.

3. Poor Emotional Regulation: Emotional neglect can lead to deficits in emotional regulation skills. Children who do not learn healthy coping mechanisms may resort to maladaptive strategies such as avoidance, suppression, or acting out. As adults, they may struggle with regulating their emotions in response to stressors or conflicts.

4. Impaired Social Skills: Emotional neglect can hinder the development of social skills necessary for building and maintaining relationships. Children may miss out on opportunities to learn effective communication, conflict resolution, and boundary-setting skills. Consequently, they may struggle with forming close connections and navigating social interactions as adults.

5. Low Self-Esteem and Self-Compassion: Without emotional validation and support, children may develop low self-esteem and lack self-compassion. They may internalize feelings of unworthiness or inadequacy, which can impact their ability to assert themselves, set healthy boundaries, and pursue their goals confidently.

6. Difficulty in Trusting Others: Emotional neglect can erode trust in relationships. Children who experience neglect may learn to rely solely on themselves for emotional support, leading to difficulties in trusting others and seeking help when needed. This can result in feelings of isolation and loneliness in adulthood.

7. Impact on Mental Health: The cumulative effects of childhood emotional neglect on EI can contribute to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and attachment disorders. Without intervention, these challenges may persist into adulthood and affect various areas of life, including work, relationships, and overall well-being.

Addressing the impact of childhood emotional neglect on emotional intelligence often requires therapy or counseling focused on building emotional awareness, regulation, and interpersonal skills. By addressing underlying emotional wounds and learning healthier coping

strategies, individuals can work towards enhancing their emotional intelligence and leading more fulfilling lives.

Although emotions and sentiments aid in our ability to forecast, particularly with regard to non-quantifiable aspects of life, they are not always trustworthy. Examples of emotional reasoning, or cognitive distortion, include: I am terrified, so I must be in danger; I am guilty, thus I must have done something bad. However, occasionally these are just uncontrollably floating feelings that surface in the mind because of an unconscious notion based on something that happened in the past. The ability to manage our unruly feelings, tuning in with accuracy with the feelings of those around us, keeping ourselves motivated and developing good work-related social skills including those essential for leadership and teamwork, constitutes Emotional Intelligence.

All of us need some cognitive/intellectual abilities to get into job at first place, but being better at them does not make us a leader or star performer. It is the emotional intelligence competencies that help us achieve excellence in our jobs and make us leaders and star performers.

While having more cognitive or intellectual skills is necessary for many jobs, it does not automatically make one a leader or standout employee. Emotional intelligence talents enable us to excel in our work and establish us as leaders and top performers. In addition to teachers, scientists, and engineers, managers and executives who lack emotional intelligence also struggle to cope with pressure and are more prone to mood swings and furious outbursts. When faced with setbacks and criticism, they take a defensive stance, disguising or shifting responsibility. They are becoming more and more conceited and eager to advance at the expense of others. Their lack of empathy and sensitivity makes them prone to intimidating subordinates and colleagues. While some people may come across as charming, their charm is only deceptive. It is very difficult to maintain relationships and run organisations when there are people with such toxic and twisted personality traits. They are unable to control or regulate their turbulent emotions and erratic

feelings in addition to having shallow feelings and emotions. Their emotions are so shallow that they are unable to have meaningful conversations at all, and their insecurities will just continue to swell. They are unable to feel the depth of emotions and feelings that is necessary for emotional intelligence. They constantly fluctuate in mood because to their shallow emotional state, and they are in great need of other people's acceptance, validation, approval, and adoration. To support their false, deluded sense of being bigger, better, and superior, as well as to preserve their supply lines for their grandiosity and excessive, obsessive self-love, they may engage in a variety of harsh behaviours. In order to hide their incompetence and insecurity by placing the blame elsewhere, they also don't think twice to minimise, devalue, disparage, underrate, and trivialise others. So emotional intelligence is crucial to human growth, progress and well-being and we must consciously work upon ourselves to enhance our emotional intelligence competencies.

Conclusion

Since emotional learning is tied to an individual's survival, it is crucial for emotional learning that children are exposed to the full range of positive and negative experiences. However, as the youngster is not yet able to discern or properly manage the emotional impulse, this learning should take place under the supervision of emotionally stable caregivers/parents. The typical responsibility of a parent is to provide for their child's necessities and direct their growth. Parents must provide a safe and secure environment for their children to effectively process their emotions. As adults we no longer need to attach to someone in order to survive, we may consciously delve into our inner world through introspection and reflection to understand patterns, connections, and meanings in the thoughts, feelings, and actions we take in life. To get over the turmoil and distortion brought on by being inauthentic and people-pleasers, we can also go to a psychological expert seeking guidance for individual transformation into

authentic beings which we all have the potential to become. For any authentic relationship we need to be seen by our loved ones with all our strengths and weaknesses and our view of the world to develop deep connections. The more distorted our image about ourselves is, the more upset we are going to be when looking in the mirror of intimacy. Secure people have very open and accurate conversations with the care givers and other people since very young age. They have a very clear mirroring and are much aware of their strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities. They do not have that strong sense of themselves which is significantly detached from reality. We need to acknowledge the blind spots and heighten our awareness by consciously working on them. We can also look to a psychological expert for counseling services. Emotional intelligence can be raised by engaging in mindfulness and meditation practices. Self awareness, or simply being aware of one's thoughts, sensations, and emotions in the present, is the essence of meditation. According to studies, practicing mindfulness and meditation on a daily basis can improve our working memory and attention by strengthening the neuroplasticity of our brain's attention circuitry. It appears to lessen the amygdala's susceptibility to stimulation, which aids in the regulation of our erratic and upsetting emotions. When in this mental state, a person is always conscious of their sentiments and emotions, able to express them in a way that is acceptable for the situation and articulate them.

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	Website: www.ijarbs.com
	Subject: Psychophysiology
Quick Response Code	
DOI: 10.22192/ijarbs.2024.11.04.011	

How to cite this article:

Bal Krishan, Brinder Kumar, Rahul Kait. (2024). Childhood Emotional Neglect and its Impact on Emotional Intelligence. *Int. J. Adv. Res. Biol. Sci.* 11(4): 87-92.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22192/ijarbs.2024.11.04.011>