

# The short and long term consequences of child neglect and sexual abuse

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Short and Long-Term Consequences of Child Neglect and Sexual Abuse Child neglect and sexual abuse ranges from minor to serious, can take a number of forms and its effects short term, long term or both. Neglect is a much more prevalent than physical or sexual abuse. Failing to take action with regards to the best interest of the child occurs more often than taking actions to harm a child. All types of abuse and neglect adversely affect the most vulnerable of society which, in turn, affects all of society in both the short and long term.

Child neglect can involve not furnishing medical care, food and proper clothing in addition to failing to provide an education, safe living conditions and lack of supervision.

The victims of child neglect do not cultivate typical psychological bonds as infants which retards their developmental skills. Young children who have been neglected are far behind other children when they begin school in terms of learning aptitudes and social interaction abilities in addition to displaying obvious behavioral issues. (Gaudin, 1993). Kindergarten Teachers describe neglected children as very detached, dependent, distracted, are not imaginative and have trouble understanding school lessons. They are also described as “ lacking persistence, initiative and confidence to work on their own.” (Howing, 1990).

Children who are victims of sexual abuse are at risk for an assortment of long and short term psychological issues. The results of sexual abuse generally occur in two phases: The first reaction to victimization involves symptoms of posttraumatic stress (PTSD), a noticeable lack of psychological progress, exaggerated emotions and mental disorientations. If the abuse

continues, the child's coping abilities either dramatically decrease or increase during victimization. The child learns to suppress pain more effectively or become increasingly sensitized to pain. Long-term consequences depend on the severity and duration of the abuse. " Although some initial reactions of victims to their abuse may abate with time, other reactions, along with abuse-specific coping behaviors, appear to generalize and elaborate over the long term." (Briere, Elliott, 1994).

Adults who were victims of sexual, emotional or physical abuse as children display signs of PTSD at an 80 percent rate, experience recurrent nightmares and other sleep abnormalities, are frequently withdrawn socially and have trouble concentrating.

Long term effects also include having a distorted view of reality and a heightened, disproportionate level of fear in otherwise normal situations and locations. Because the victim had been made to feel powerless as an impressionable child, they carry that feeling into adulthood by overrating adverse situations. They also tend to have self esteem issues, underestimating their value to themselves and society. Feeling of helplessness also occurs unnaturally in everyday situations. What would be a speed-bump, a minor irritation in life of someone who experienced a healthy childhood is often perceived as a major obstacle. Another long term effect is termed " avoidance." Victims learn to avoid emotional and physical pain by mentally removing themselves from the situation. " Adult survivors often describe how they were able to numb body parts at will, or how they would ' watch' the abuse from above their body." (Kendall-Tackett, 2001) Serious avoidance related issues include sexual compulsions, eating disorders,

substance abuse, and self-injury.

The short and long term consequences of child neglect and sexual abuse vary depending on the severity and length of abuse. The consequences may be minor or acute; fade away soon after the event(s) or last a person's entire life affecting their behavior and psychological health. Child abuse and neglect affect not only the person but the long term ramifications likely will impact their future relationships. It's a serious societal problem that ultimately affects all of society.

#### References

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