

An Introduction to Psychological Trauma

Introduction

Spoted UK commissioned Project 507 to develop trauma-informed resources for their network, especially those working with children and young people who have experienced trauma. We have tried to make the resources concise and accessible in multiple formats (and looking pretty - we know this is subjective). Thank you to the network members who filled in our surveys and attended our focus groups to help design these pages. We would love to have your feedback as we are always trying to learn and improve. We hope you find them helpful!

Trigger Warning

Please be mindful that some of the topics covered in these resources can create or trigger uncomfortable feelings.

Definitions

Adverse childhood experiences are traumatic events (such as different types of abuse) or chronic stressors (such as family problems) that are not within the child's control¹⁺². We chose not to focus on adverse childhood experiences (ACES) in this resource, though we acknowledge this is a commonly shared framework. Every child is different, and one event can be perceived in multiple ways. When a child experiences adversity, this individual perception can be internalised and can shape the child's response to that experience. It can 'get under the skin', changing them in ways that can remain in the body³.

There is no standard definition of "adolescent." Although often captured as an age range, chronological age is just one way of defining adolescence. Adolescence can be specified from the onset of puberty, though it can also be determined by physical, social factors and stages of cognitive development⁴⁺⁵. For these resources, we refer to adolescence in terms of cognitive development.

Methods

In the UK, a community study by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) found that nearly 1 in 5 children (18.6%) experience some form of abuse or neglect, which can, in some cases, be described as complex traumas. The prevalence of experiences defined as complex trauma can vary depending on how complex trauma is defined and measured⁶.

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Methods

Methods developed in the minority world provide the frameworks to measure the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) across the majority world⁷. The terms global minority and global majority in this resource refer to the idea that 'white people' are a numerical minority on a global scale but are a cultural majority in terms of power and influence⁸. Research and interventions relevant for one community in England may not apply to another community in another part of the country or other parts of the world. In a multicultural society, it is essential to recognise that individual differences matter. Culturally competent and relevant approaches to understanding trauma are necessary for our work with children and young people. There is still much work to be done to draw on global insights on trauma through different cultural lenses.

References

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