

How Childhood Stress affects us negatively as Adults

Opinion

Living with domestic violence, living in poverty or in a threatening neighbourhood, being made to work in uncomfortable or unsafe conditions or living with a family or orphanage where one experiences abuse or neglect are just some of the chronic stressors some people experienced as children.

We've seen how some of these children grow up and turn to alcohol, drugs or sex to escape reality. It's common knowledge that a bad childhood leaves emotional scars that remains with us through adulthood and affects how we think and act, but what do scientific findings say about this? A study published online in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences has turned its particular focus on poverty and its relationship to how the brain works as an adult in terms of dealing with negative emotions. Researchers found that study participants who were from lower family incomes at age 9 showed more activity in the regions of the brain associated with psychological disorders related to emotions such as depression, anxiety, impulsive aggression and substance abuse when they became adults. These people showed less activity in the region of the brain known for its role in dealing with negative emotions.

Dr. K. Luan Phan, psychiatry professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine and senior author of the study said that the negative effect of poverty may lead to "a cascade of increasing risk factors" for the kids to fall into physical

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and psychological troubles in adulthood. The most important take away from the findings, according to Dr. Phan, was how much chronic stress an individual goes through from childhood through adolescence, and this determined the extent to which poverty affected brain functioning when dealing with emotions, particularly negative ones.

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University adds to this by saying that a childhood filled with positive experiences lays the foundation for healthy adults who are of great benefit to society by contributing in a valuable and productive way.