MORE EVIDENCE THAT CHILDHOOD TRAUMA CAN LEAD TO PSYCHOSIS

A review of 125 research studies in the last ten years strongly supports the hypothesis that early trauma in childhood (including abuse and neglect) can effect brain development in ways that increase the probability of developing psychosis later in life.

Anomalies in the brains of people diagnosed with mental health problems such as ‘schizophrenia’ have traditionally been used to support the notion that such problems are biologically based brain disorders that have little to do with life events.

However, the review, to be published in the February edition of Neuropsychiatry, a bimonthly peer-reviewed journal from Future Medicine, reinforces the ‘traumagenic neurodevelopmental’ model of psychosis, which suggests that those differences can be caused by adverse life events, especially those occurring in early childhood. For example, the maladaptive stress regulation mechanisms in the brain that are related to over-sensitivity to stressors are also found in the brains of traumatised young children.

The review, conducted by researchers from the UK, Denmark, Norway and the USA, concludes: “People experiencing psychosis should be offered evidence based psychological therapies designed to address the social causes of their difficulties. The fact that the psychological sequelae to childhood abuse, neglect and loss have biological concomitants does not imply that the biological changes are indicative of a brain disease that has little or no basis in life history and that requires exclusively or predominantly medication. Neither does it imply that the brain changes are irreversible. Indeed, recent studies suggest that psychotherapy can enhance the ability of the HPA axis to respond to stress, in both children and adults …The primary prevention implications are profound. Protection and nurturance of the developing brain in young children would seem to be of paramount importance.”

Professor John Read (Liverpool Psychosis Research Group, University of Liverpool, UK):

“We hope that this vast body of literature will encourage more mental health staff to take more of an interest in the lives of the people they are trying to help, rather than viewing hearing voices and having unusual beliefs as mere symptoms of an ‘illness’ that need to be suppressed with medication.”

The full article is available free at www.futuremedicine.com/toc/npy/4/1


To find out more about the journal Neuropsychiatry and for complimentary access to selected articles, please visit www.futuremedicine.com/loi/npy.

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Neuropsychiatry presents findings, analysis and commentary on understanding disease processes, together with diagnosis and treatment. The journal provides clinicians with concise guidance on the multidisciplinary approach necessary to treat complex mental disorders. Neuropsychiatry provides a key resource for all physicians and healthcare practitioners who are striving to provide the best possible care for their patients.

Topics covered include:
- Articles addressing the broad range of neuropsychiatric disorders, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, ADHD and anxiety disorders
- Mechanisms of neuropsychiatric disorders
- Genetic and environmental influences on pathogenesis
- Use of biomarkers in diagnosis and prognosis
- Therapeutic options and emerging approaches
- Management of disease in specific patient groups
- Medical treatment guidelines
- Adverse events and drug safety
- Pharmacoeconomics, outcomes research and quality of life studies

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