



Could Being a Victim of Child Abuse and Neglect Affect Adult Economic Health?

A Research Brief of

Currie, J. & Spatz Widom, C. (2010). Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect on adult economic well-being. *Child Maltreatment*, 15(2), 111-120.

February 2011

by

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Key Findings and Importance of the Study

Advocates for prevention are often asked to show a cost impact of child maltreatment. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) studies are often cited to show the long term health impact and costs of early abuse and maltreatment. This study is relevant for prevention advocates because it examines the impact on adult's economic well-being and therefore provides another point of research showing the long term impact of child abuse and neglect.

This study and other research shows higher rates of abuse and neglect in lower socioeconomic families as well as enduring economic consequences for individuals with histories of childhood abuse and neglect. Maltreatment may exacerbate differences in peak earning capacities by about \$5,000 per year. Given one million substantiated cases per year this is a huge cumulative impact on adult economic productivity. The authors acknowledge that their research only examines some of the social costs of maltreatment but that the findings support how empirically validated prevention programs can easily pay for themselves in cost savings to the community.

Methodology

The strength of this study is that rather than retrospective self-reports, the authors follow study subjects from childhood into middle adulthood. The researchers used documented cases, so it's likely these cases may have been more acute, resulting in civil or criminal findings, compared to cases not brought to the attention of the authorities. The researchers also used a closely matched control group of children without documented abuses histories.

The authors point out the limitations of the study and the challenges of generalizing cases from the late 1960's-70, Midwestern United States, and children from the lower socioeconomic status. The authors also acknowledge that many families with child abuse histories may also have other dysfunctions

Importance of the Findings

The strength of the study lies in the longitudinal examination of documented cases of child abuse and neglect. The authors point to their findings as another rationale for intervening early with children and families with child abuse and neglect histories.

Implications

This article and research provides another piece of evidence as to the long term costs of neglect, and physical and sexual abuse of children, and the long term economic impact on victims and thereby the larger economy.