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THE INFLUENCE OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES ON CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR.

AUTHORED BY - HIYA VADGAMA

The burden of troubles childhood is one that many take into adulthood and negatively affects the fabric of crime. People involved in negative experiences in their childhood, go on to commit crimes in the future. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) like physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, living in a dysfunctional home, witnessing domestic violence, and overall trauma are not unfortunate experiences anymore. They are powerful and proper predictors of whether or not a person would end up in prison or any other centre involved with crime. These experiences can derail the trajectory of children's development and work corrosively on children's brains, psyche and relationships, framing for all subsequent negative development that can later manifest as criminal behaviour in adolescence and adulthood.. Such penetrative trauma does not just impact the life of an individual; it touches the dynamics of the entire community and is responsible for staggering demands on societal resources. Understanding the nuanced and often complicated relationship between childhood adversities and criminal behaviour is not simply an academic exercise; it is a needed, foundational step towards finding efficacious prevention and intervention strategies; to foster a more compassionate and equitable response to crime prevention; and ultimately, to promote healthier, more resilient communities.

The original ACE study (1995-1997) by Kaiser Permanente showed a strong link between ACEs and numerous health outcomes, including psychological and physical health problems and risky behaviors. The study primarily aimed to examine the long-lasting connection between childhood traumas and health and well-being later in life. About 17,000 adult members of Kaiser Permanente's health maintenance organization took part, completing confidential questionnaires about their childhood experiences and their current health status and behaviours. Various ACEs studied in detail are physical, emotional and sexual abuse, as well as emotional and physical neglect. Also included is exposure to household dysfunction i.e someone in the home being beaten up, someone in the home being mentally ill and someone in the home being jailed. The results of the study showed that the more ACEs a person has, the more likely they are to have various negative outcomes. These experiences have a powerful effect on the young,

developing brain that can change brain structure and wiring. The brain's structure can undergo alterations in many different regions, but the areas that most frequently change are those involved in stress and emotional-regulating responses i.e. amygdala, hippocampus and prefrontal cortex. An example of this is the dysfunction in the amygdala, the brain's fear center, and the prefrontal cortex, which controls executive functions like planning and impulse control, due to chronic stress caused by ACEs. This unhealthy brain development has effects on cognition and emotional regulation which then lead to a host of psychological and behavioural problems. Cognitive consequences might include things like memory, executive function and attention (impact on cognitive functions like memory etc.); behavioural consequences might include aggression, defiance, and hyperactivity (which often occur in the form of conduct disorder or oppositional defiant disorder) ACEs can also hinder emotional regulation leading to mood swings, irritability, anxiety, impulsivity, etc. People with high ACEs are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and autoimmune conditions as they get older. On top of that, those who have extremely high ACEs often engage in smoking, drinking too much alcohol or drug use which are often all linked with chronic disease, compounding the harm of the ACEs since unhealthy coping leads back to their issues. The experiences of children who have gone through so much adversity will affect their relationship long into adulthood. When combined with the other interactions and other experiences mentioned, the experiences of marginalization can lead to criminal behaviours. Not receiving the proper social support, these individuals tend to resort to deviant peers.

Many studies show a direct cause and effect relationship between ACEs and crime behaviour. When we compare the general population with the adults in the criminal justice system, we notice that the adults in the justice system have a significantly higher presence of ACEs. A lot of criminals have been through some traumatic experience when they were children. It's important to note that certain ACEs often correspond with specific crime types. Physical abuse is often associated with crime and violence, sexual abuse with sexual assault and other delinquent behaviour, and domestic violence household dysfunction with street gang participation and early offending. This implies that the type of ACE affects the kind of crime committed.

Here we will talk about the childhood of the serial killers like John Wayne Gacy and Pedro Lopez and how it can help us understand the complicated relationship better. John Wayne Gacy was a famous serial killer called The Killer Clown. He was a Chicago-based sex offender who

tortured, raped, and murdered 33 young men and boys from 1972 to 1978. Gacy had a hard childhood. His father was an alcoholic who severely criticized and emotionally abused him. Gacy had a severely critical father who emotionally abused him in addition to being a severe alcoholic. This abuse greatly affected the developing psyche, creating a sense of inferiority and resentment. At the age of 11, he suffered a head injury that resulted in a brain clot from which he was rendered unconscious for years. Later, he suffered from this clot and throughout his life, he started making heart-related problems. He always wanted to impress others and look like a good person. Later, he committed crimes using the same techniques. He was given the death sentence and was hanged on 10th May 1994. Pedro Lopez, known as "The Monster of the Andes," is charged with 110 murders in Ecuador and is also believed to be responsible for around 200 more deaths in the neighbouring countries of Peru and Colombia; most of his victims were young girls. Lopez was the seventh child among fourteen siblings, and his mother was a prostitute. He grew up in a chaotic and violent home environment characterized by instability and neglect. Lopez was kicked out by his mother at an early age after attempting to molest his sister. Living on the streets, he became a frequent victim of sexual abuse by men who exploited his vulnerability, claiming they were offering him help. These repeated traumas left him deeply scarred and distrustful. He eventually joined a street gang for protection. His life took a brief, potentially rehabilitative turn when he was adopted by an American immigrant couple. However, this opportunity was tragically cut short when he was sexually abused by his school teacher, leading him to flee back to his home country. Pedro Lopez was captured in 1980. After serving 14 years in prison, he was released in 1994 and declared insane by the authorities. He was placed in a psychiatric facility but was later declared "sane" and released in 1998. Since then, his whereabouts remain unknown.

The childhood experiences of serial killers John Wayne Gacy and Pedro Lopez show how childhood trauma connects to later violence. John Wayne Gacy and Pedro Lopez both experienced severe trauma early in life, which deeply affected their brains and contributed to their later outrageous behaviour. Most importantly, we should make clear that not everyone who experiences childhood trauma will become a criminal. Having aces does not guarantee an individual will become a criminal but prevents normal development and impairs emotional regulation, leading to a hopeless disconnection.

Different crime theories suggest that numerous psychological biological and socio-factors influence criminal behaviour. Some of the main reasons are:

- 1. Heredity and Brain Activity:** The brain releases neurochemicals that trigger various bodily activities and hormones. The mood-altering substances in our brain regulate a variety of bodily activities and hormone. We observe that neurochemical serotonin (many may have heard about it) is linked to less aggression and impulsivity. Serotonin is a substance that has a huge impact on how a person feels. Higher levels of the neurochemical dopamine, which is another key one, have been linked to greater levels of aggression and risk-taking behaviour. This is the case with dopamine; it affects blood pressure; and heart rate, perhaps leading to arousal and reactivity. Research has indicated that those who commit crimes (especially violent crimes) tend to possess lower levels of serotonin but higher levels of dopamine than the general public. Still, heredity and crime can be a complex relationship. Criminal behaviour does not result from a single gene or biological factor. Rather, it typically a complex interplay of biological psychological environmental and social factor. One or more genes may give someone a higher chance to commit crime, but whether an individual actually commits crime often depends on the childhood experiences, social influences, and economic situation.
- 2. Parental relations:** Hervey M. Cleckley believed that the cycle of violence refers to an individual who was born violent and raised in a violent home. A cycle of violence is when a person who is violent or abusive himself has a child, this child often follows the same pattern. Children who are abused or neglected are significantly more likely to commit crimes than children who were not. Being sexually abused as a child can sometimes make a victim sexually aggressive at the time of adulthood. Not all victims will become abusers. Still, sexual abuse adds trauma and psychological damage that would make it likely the victim eventually becomes abuse. On the contrary, those people who enjoy healthy and strong parental relations have a much lower risk of criminal behaviour. Parental affection, effective discipline, and a supportive home climate enhance pro-social behaviour, emotional coping, and a strong conscience.
- 3. Peer pressure:** Peer pressure can impact the choices you make during your lifetime. People you hang out with influence your thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour. Many of the criminal choices people make are as a result of negative influence from their peers. When youth experience exclusion or inability to conform to societal expectations in school and/or leisure activities or lack access to basic necessities due to overwhelming poverty, they often seek approval from antisocial peer groups. These peer groups can encourage anti-social behaviour and risk-taking while providing opportunities for

crime. The wish to fit in and fear of being left out can make vulnerable people take part in acts they would not do otherwise.

4. **Drugs and alcohol:** Drugs and alcohol contribute greatly to criminal choices associated with violent crime and other crimes evidence. Addicts commit offences to support their habit, such as theft, robbery, or drug dealing. Also, these substances impair judgment, reduce inhibitions, and increase aggression, create a greater likelihood of doing something impulsive and violent. When someone dies after being attacked by a stranger, it is called stranger violence. Data show that a major share of violent offences – murder, sexual assault, and aggravated assault – has the offender under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Abuse of drugs and alcohol making things worse, can lead to violent criminals.

Childhood trauma shapes mental health. But how does it influence the personality traits of a person. We know that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are linked to psychiatric problems, but their impact on non-clinical personality traits is less clear. How do these experiences influence personality-related traits? This may be due to a heavy focus on mental health in research on ACEs and the scattergun distribution of relevant studies across diverse fields, producing muddled data and inconsistent findings. We need to know more about how ACEs form personality and how those personalities may, in turn, be involved in crime. Knowing the details of this process can help create stronger intervention options for children as well as adult offenders. This means we can't just think about mental health but also about a person's personality, their friends and family, and where they live.

To sum up, adverse childhood experiences are a serious public health issue with significant consequences. Experiences in childhood that are adverse (ACEs) have a strong connection to criminal behaviour. To support this claim, it is important to understand the biological, psychological and social factors behind it. By tackling the root causes of ACEs and assisting people who experienced trauma as kids, we can help prevent criminal behaviour and create fairer communities. This includes using programs that help prevent crime before it happens like social services, CPR for your mind, recreational drugs addiction help, and setting up local clubs that would help children be happy and socials. To help troubled children and their families break the cycle of violence, a collaborative and thorough response is required.

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