The Costs of Childhood Trauma: Supporting trauma survivors makes good economic sense

Child Sexual Assault Conference - Macquarie University

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Childhood trauma is: highly prevalent all communities; substantial public health issue

Number of Australian adults affected by unresolved complex trauma (vs. single incident trauma)

• 3.7 million (sexual, emotional, physical abuse only)
• 5 million (childhood trauma more broadly)

Perceptions are changing: A major psychiatric textbook (1976) -> incest 1 per million -> Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse -> estimates 65,000 Australians will seek redress
Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study: Felitti, Anda et al 1998

Most comprehensive study to show a relationship between stressful overwhelming experiences in childhood & compromised mental and physical health in adulthood

Categories:
- Severe physical/emotional abuse; severe physical/emotional neglect (4)
- Contact sexual abuse (1)
- Parent mentally ill, imprisoned, substance abuser, mother subject to DV (4)
- One parent household (1)

ACE score add up number of categories exposed to, out of 10
Coping mechanisms to ameliorate overwhelming stress -> risk factors for disease, injury, disability.

Reappraisal of symptoms and problematic behaviours as attempted coping mechanisms is a major theme of trauma-informed practice.

“Initially protective (and often creative) strategies to deal with childhood adversity lose their protective function over time and threaten emotional AND physical health in adulthood”

(Felitti, Anda et al, 1998)
Clear linear relationships also between ACE score:

- Substance abuse
- Smoking
- Overeating
- Lack of exercise/poor nutrition
- Self-harm
- Gambling
- Suicidality
- Risk taking behaviours

*Males with ACE score of 6 or more are 46 times more likely than those with a score of 0 to be IV drug users*
When you have an ACE score of 4

- 2 x as likely to smoke
- 4 x as likely to have emphysema or chronic bronchitis
- 7 x more likely to be alcoholic
- 6 x more likely to have sex before age of 15
- 2 x more likely to have heart disease
- 2 x as likely to have cancer
- 46 x as likely to be depressed
- 12 x as likely to commit suicide
From ACE study: 44% with no ACE - at least 1 risk factor; 72% with an ACE adopted risk factor -> 28% risk factor because of abuse = 1.04 million

Data: RC interim report; ASCA case study report – 4,000; ACE study

Annual budget cost =

\[
\left( \frac{\text{Population of adults facing negative outcomes because of childhood trauma and abuse}}{\text{(a)}} \right) \times \left( \frac{\text{Cost of negative life outcomes associated with childhood trauma and abuse}}{\text{(b)}} \right)
\]
Three criteria to select categories

- information on particular cost item
- sound financial information
- costs stable over time

Conservative estimate/affected person cost, each of selected key impact areas:

- **Alcohol abuse**: $4,983 per person, annually
- **Mental illness**: $7,686 per person, annually
- **Obesity**: $6,042 per person, annually
- **Suicide/attempted suicide**: $5,281 per person, annually
The ACE Score and the Prevalence of Severe Obesity

(BMI $\geq 35$)

Robert Anda MD, MS Ace Study
The ACE Score and the Prevalence of Attempted Suicide

Robert Anda MD, MS ACE Study

Percent attempted (%)

ACE Score

0 1 2 3 >=4
The ACE Score and a Lifetime History of Depression

Robert Anda MD, MS, ACE Study

![Graph showing the percent depressed by ACE score for women and men.](image-url)
ACE scores and Adult Alcoholism

% Alcoholic

ACE Score

0 1 2 3 4+

0 2 4 6 8

ACE Score

% Alcoholic

0 2 4 6 8
Budget position Australian Governments combined could be improved by

- minimum of $6.8 billion annually if impacts of child abuse (sexual, emotional and physical)

- minimum of $9.1 billion annually if impacts of childhood trauma

on Australian adults were addressed

*Different plausible assumptions, annual budgetary cost unresolved childhood trauma as high as $24 billion.*
Cost of not appropriately addressing needs of adult survivors

Combined effect of:

- higher Government expenditure
- foregone tax revenue

*By conservative estimate, if adult survivors of childhood trauma experienced same life outcomes as non-traumatised adults, collective budget deficits would be improved, at minimum by entire Government outlay on tertiary education.*
• Government is focussed on restoring budget position through revenue measures and expenditure cuts

• Long-term prognosis is continuing strain with ageing population

• Main driver of deteriorating finances - forecast health expenditures. As percentage of GDP, health expenditure forecast to rise from 3.9% current year to 7.1%, 2049-50 – almost double
With active, timely and comprehensive intervention - appropriate support, services and treatment:

- adult survivors can participate more fully and productively in the Australian community

- society can avoid huge budgetary, health, criminal justice and social costs, reduced tax revenue associated with childhood trauma and abuse
Beyond the tip of the iceberg
1. Active investment in specialist services

To spearhead policy and practice responses for coordinated comprehensive model of care including

- enhanced access to assistance and treatment through effective help lines and online services.

- early active comprehensive intervention including appropriate support, counselling, resources and services.
2. More and better trained treating practitioners – allied health: counsellors/therapists

Focussing on identifying and addressing trauma underlying multiple presentations

`[M]any survivors have been re-traumatized by [health professionals] who had inadequate understanding & skills to treat complex trauma-related problems...’ (van der Hart et al, 2006:224)
3. A convenient and failsafe pathway to treatment – No wrong door

Frontline practitioners - General Practitioners and nurse practitioners see people impacted by childhood trauma daily.

Opportunity to facilitate process for person to start receiving right support, either directly or through targeted referral including specialist counselling, ideally from an accredited practitioner.
4. System, service and institutional improvements - Trauma-informed practice

Broad-based implementation of trauma-informed practice responses will help minimise the impact of trauma and re-traumatisation of people who have experienced childhood trauma including abuse.
ASCA services

• Professional support line 1300 657 380
  Operates 9am-5pm Monday - Sunday EST

• Education and training workshops

• Resources
  Factsheets, guidelines, newsletters, website
  www.asca.org.au

• Advocacy and health promotion
Thank you for coming

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