



A Study on the Association between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Parenting Practices Adopted in Adulthood.

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and parenting practices adopted by individuals in adulthood. Additionally, the paper aims to review the existing literature on ACEs and their detrimental effects across various domains of an individual's life, throughout their lifespan. Parental ACEs were directly associated with their emotional availability towards their children. The study also revealed a direct link between parental ACEs and the discipline strategies employed by parents when their children displayed challenging behavior. Children living with caregivers who experience "high parenting stress" have a three-fold higher likelihood of experiencing four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by the time they reach 18 years of age. The well-being of emerging adults was found to be interconnected with their past experiences of adversity, the parenting practices they encountered, and the quality of their parent-adolescent relationship. These factors collectively influence the overall well-being and development of emerging adults. Urgent educational initiatives are needed to specifically target parents, particularly those with a history of trauma. These initiatives should focus on equipping parents with relevant knowledge, skills, and support to help them effectively navigate the challenges associated with their traumatic experiences and enhance their parenting abilities. Developing comprehensive psychosocial interventions and implementing policy measures are crucial steps in addressing the complex issues related to adverse childhood experiences, parenting practices, and the parent-adolescent relationship. Thus, these strategies can be utilized to reduce exposure of children to ACEs and improve psychological development of children and enhance well-being.

Introduction

Adverse childhood experiences are a variety of detrimental experiences in childhood which includes, but is not limited to, abuse, household dysfunction, or neglect (Felitti et al., 1998). Prevalence of ACEs in India.

The "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study" was conducted by Felitti et al. in 1998 to find out the negative impacts of experiencing these adverse events in childhood over a wide variety of health risk factors and disease conditions. The main aim of this paper is to review existing literature to determine the myriad ways in which these experiences impact individuals throughout their lifespan.

Impact of ACEs during adolescence:

Upon adjusting for age, gender, and race, it was found that adolescents who had experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) reported significantly higher likelihood (ranging from 3 to 15 times) of various negative health experiences (Meeker et al., 2021). Adolescents who reported higher scores on adverse childhood experiences (ACE) also reported poorer physical and emotional well-being compared to adolescents with fewer ACEs, even after considering important demographic and socio-economic factors. The influence of cumulative ACEs on adolescent health and emotional well-being was found to be mitigated by family functioning (Balistreri & Alvira-Hammond, 2016).

A greater number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) was found to be a significant predictor of poorer mental health and prosocial outcomes, in both childhood and adolescence (Bevilacqua et al., 2021). Among the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) assessed, parental discord and parental depression emerged as the ACEs with the most pronounced impact on internalizing problems. Children who were subjected to four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) exhibited increased likelihood of developing anxiety and depression, when compared to children who encountered fewer than four ACEs (Elmore & Crouch, 2020).

Impact of ACEs on young adults:

Young individuals who acknowledged experiencing childhood sexual abuse in the past or enduring a lack of essential necessities during their formative years displayed diminished abilities in both short-term and long-term memory tasks within the age range of 24 to 32 (Hawkins et al., 2021). A significant

correlation was also found between higher scores on conventional adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and decreased psychological well-being (Zhang, Mersky, & Topitzes, 2020).

Experiencing adverse experiences in childhood was strongly related to depressive symptoms, antisocial behaviour, and drug abuse (Schilling et al., 2007). A significant relationship was also discovered between adverse childhood experiences and substance use in young adults (Rogers et al., 2022; Park, Lee, & Han, 2021). Having experienced peer isolation or rejection, emotional neglect, and low socioeconomic status as a child were found to have an elevated risk of suicidal ideation during adulthood (Wang et al., 2019).

Impact of ACEs on older adults:

In older adults, number of adverse childhood experiences were linked with lower levels of both income and education, while being related with higher levels of depressive symptoms and subjective cognitive concerns (Halpin et al., 2021). Depression was significantly related with repetitive experiencing of ACEs of all forms, upon accounting for age, sex, and race (Ege et al., 2015). Older adults who had experienced seven or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) were found to have approximately twice the odds of reporting lung disease, visual impairment, insomnia, memory decline, and self-rated poor health conditions, and three times more likely to report high blood pressure, when they were contrasted to those who had encountered 0-2 ACEs (Dorji, Dunne, & Deb, 2020).

Adverse childhood experiences and parenting practices

Experiencing adverse experiences in childhood can also impact how an individual parents their own children as an adult. One important explanation could be that experiencing adverse events in childhood might lead to the dysregulation or impairment of the fight, flight, or freeze responses to stress/threats in the individual (Lange, Callinan, & Smith, 2019). Several studies have indicated that early traumatic experiences can negatively impact various crucial biological functions, leading to long-term consequences, as these experiences can result in "cumulative damage over time" and introduce "adversities during sensitive developmental periods" (Shonkoff et al., 2009). Starting from the prenatal stage, research conducted on both animals and humans indicates that exposure of the fetus to maternal stress can impact the individual's responsiveness to stress later in life.

Thus, the biological elements of early childhood adversity highlight the significant role of toxic stress in disrupting the development of brain during this crucial period, thereby affecting the simultaneous "development of other organ systems and regulatory functions" (Shonkoff et al., 2012). This paper further revealed that stress causes the related biological processes to become dysregulated, which impedes the body's ability to return to a state of homeostatic balance. Thereby, a link might be found to exist between ACEs and parenting practices and that is studied in this paper, which includes reviewing of existing literature on these topics.

Aim

This primary aim of this paper is to review the association between adverse childhood experiences and parenting practices adopted by these individuals in adulthood. Another aim of this paper is to review the existing literature on adverse childhood experiences and their negative consequences over a variety of aspects in an individual's life.

Review of Literature

Lange, Callinan, & Smith, (2018) carried out a study to determine how early ACEs of parents impact their parenting stress and parenting practices in their adulthood. The study included a total of 81 women who were actively involved in parenting as part of the analytic sample for the research, from the New Haven Mental health Outreach for Mothers (MOMS) Partnership. The study findings indicate a positive association between a mother's early-life exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and her current level of parenting stress. Furthermore, the relationship between ACEs and parenting stress follows a dose-response pattern, meaning that higher numbers of ACEs experienced by the mother are associated with increased levels of parenting stress. Considering this relationship, it is crucial to develop comprehensive psychosocial interventions and policy measures to address these issues. Specifically, research focusing on potential parenting interventions for adults will be of great importance. Early intervention programs have demonstrated the potential to mitigate the negative effects of trauma, emphasizing the need to prioritize and invest in appropriate support services and resources at an early stage. In addition, there is a need to develop policies that promote trauma-informed environments, particularly within educational settings. The trauma-informed school movement advocates for policies that foster sensitivity and awareness regarding the potential impact of trauma. Creating policies that prioritize trauma-informed approaches can significantly contribute to the overall resilience and success of students who have been affected by adverse childhood experiences.

Herbell, & Bloom (2020) conducted a systematic review on how ACEs influence the parenting practices of mothers, in order to know how mothers with a history of ACEs parent their own children. There were six themes that emerged from the data including "breaking the cycle", "parent and child well-being", and "supporting mothers". Hypervigilance, which is a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), was observed in a group of mothers who had experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). In this metasynthesis, the most prevalent type of adverse childhood experience (ACE) identified was "child abuse," which encompassed various forms such as physical and emotional abuse, as well as neglect. The second most frequently reported ACE was witnessing intimate partner violence (IPV). While some mothers expressed their determination to be resilient and break the cycle of

adverse experiences, it was found that several of them faced challenges in implementing practical strategies for parenting differently, particularly in areas such as discipline and setting boundaries for their children. This difficulty in finding effective parenting approaches can result in unhealthy parenting practices, leading to increased parenting stress and caregiver strain. Consequently, these factors may elevate the risk of child abuse. During times of struggle, mothers often leaned on their trusted social network comprised of friends and family for support. However, several studies indicated that a significant number of mothers, particularly teen mothers, lacked a strong social network. Consequently, these mothers reported feelings of isolation, facing stigma, and experiencing higher levels of parenting-related stress. Thereby, there exists a pressing need for educational initiatives targeting parents, particularly those with a history of trauma. In particular, it is crucial to provide targeted interventions and education to communities with a high risk of child welfare involvement. These interventions should focus on informing parents about the wide range of services available to them, emphasizing that accessing these services does not necessarily result in the removal of children from their homes. By increasing awareness and understanding of available resources, parents can be better equipped to seek support and navigate the system effectively. Additionally, the development of accessible and confidential interventions that aim to build trust between families and social services was recommended. By ensuring this, parents may feel more comfortable seeking help and engaging with social services, fostering a positive and trusting relationship between them.

Rowell, & Neal-Barnett, 2022, carried out a systematic review to find out the associations that exist between parental ACEs, parents' emotional availability and discipline strategies, and children's psychopathology. Findings indicated that parental ACEs were associated directly with being emotionally available to their children. A direct relationship was also found between parental ACEs and discipline strategies that they use for children when they act out. It was suggested that parents who experience maltreatment in their childhood, tend to form poor attachment with their own parents and also with their children, which is characterized by their lack of emotional availability and use of punishing strategies to discipline their children. Also, parents adverse experiences of maltreatment in their childhood enhances their risk for experiencing depression and anxiety, which in turn can impact their parenting. In conclusion, parental ACEs influence their parenting practices and parent-child relationship also affecting the child's psychological development. Therefore, when children visit clinicians with behavioural or emotional difficulties, this paper highlights the importance of assessing parental ACEs, mental health history, and their parenting behaviour. This also allows administering trauma-focused interventions to parents to strengthen their relationship with their children, reduce harsh disciplinary and parenting practices, and reduce the risk of the child developing emotional and behavioural issues in the future.

Chaine, & Burke, (2021) carried out a study to explore whether a relation exists between adverse childhood experiences, the parent-adolescent relationship and parenting practices, and emerging adults' wellbeing. A survey involving 298 emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 25 was conducted. The participants were recruited from both a university and the wider community. Findings revealed that the well-being of emerging adults was found to be linked to their prior experiences of adversity, parenting practices, and the parent-adolescent relationship. Specifically, experiencing a higher number of different types of adversity was associated with increased emotional difficulties among emerging adults. It was also found that factors such as connectedness and supportive monitoring within the parent-adolescent relationship were associated with more positive development in emerging adults, irrespective of the level of adversity experienced. The quality of parenting experienced during adolescence serves as a crucial predictor of well-being during emerging adulthood. Regardless of the level of adversity faced, adolescents can benefit from supportive monitoring and a connected, non-hostile relationship with their parents. These factors can contribute to the development of positive skills and emotional well-being as they transition into emerging adulthood.

Crouch, E. et al. (2019) carried out a study to find out if a link exists between parenting stress and the exposure of a child to ACEs. Parenting stress, which encompasses negative emotions associated with the challenges and responsibilities of parenting, is a significant risk factor for child neglect and maltreatment. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the extent of parenting stress and its connections to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) will be instrumental in developing targeted interventions aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of children. It was found that there were approximately 4.4% of caregivers who reported experiencing "high parenting stress." Children residing with these caregivers were found to have a three-fold higher likelihood to undergo four or more ACEs by the time they reached 18 years of age. Implementing parenting interventions aimed at reducing parenting stress can potentially lead to a decrease in the level of childhood trauma experienced by a child. These interventions have the potential to alleviate one specific source of stress within a household, even if numerous other stressors are present.

Conn, A. M., et al., (2018) conducted a study to evaluate the viewpoints of parents regarding the screening of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in pediatric primary care settings. The aim was to gain insight into how parents perceive the influence of their own ACEs on their parenting and to identify opportunities for providing pediatric anticipatory guidance. This research found out that parents expressed significant support for screening ACEs, recognizing it as a crucial link to accessing essential services. They emphasized the importance of employing a trauma-sensitive and person-centered approach within pediatric practices. Additionally, parents demonstrated a comprehension of the intergenerational effects of ACEs and expressed a strong desire to interrupt the cycle of adversity. Lastly, parents viewed their child's pediatrician as a potential catalyst for change, capable of offering assistance in helping them achieve their parenting objectives. Therefore, parents express a desire to openly discuss their own adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and seek assistance from pediatricians. It is thereby important for pediatricians to be equipped with the knowledge and tools required to effectively address and support parents in managing the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on their children's well-being.

Narayan, Lieberman, & Masten (2021) conducted a study to find out if parents' own childhood experiences, whether adverse or positive, can influence the transmission of ACEs across generations. This review maintained the view that acquiring a holistic understanding of parents' experiences in childhood is imperative in order to guide the prevention of ACEs in their children effectively. The presence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in parents, along with depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and other circumstantial stressors, can serve as a significant mediating factor connecting parents' prior experiences of ACEs and their children's risk for ACEs. The ACEs and traumatic stress experienced by parents can impact their reliability as sources

of information regarding their children's ACEs and positive childhood experiences. It was again indicated that positive childhood experiences can serve as a reservoir of adaptive capacity in adult parents, enabling them to exhibit resilience in the face of their own childhood adversity. This resilience, in turn, acts as a protective factor, shielding their children from exposure to ACEs. Thus, the early experiences of parents must be viewed as a crucial source of information to help protect children from ACEs and also help the family become more resilient.

Moe, V. et al (2018) carried out a research study with the objective of contributing new insights by thoroughly investigating the link between maternal attachment style and subsequent parenting stress. Additionally, the study also explored the influence of several additional risk factors, including the mother's own adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the temperamental characteristics of the infants. Both attachment-related avoidance and attachment-related anxiety were found to be significantly associated with parenting stress at 12 months. Attachment style mediated the relationship between maternal ACEs and parenting stress, indicating that attachment style explains, at least in part, the association between maternal adverse childhood experiences and later parenting stress. The study highlights the significance of comprehending the multiple factors contributing to parenting stress. This understanding can inform intervention strategies aimed at providing support to mothers and their partners during the challenging transition to parenthood. By addressing these multifactorial antecedents, interventions can be tailored to meet the specific needs of individuals and promote a smoother parenting journey. The study underscores the significance of early intervention by highlighting the importance of addressing prospective mothers' attachment relationships with their partners during pregnancy. It emphasizes the impact of maternal adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on parenting stress, emphasizing the need to provide support for mothers with a history of challenging relational experiences and insecure attachment styles before childbirth. Promoting positive and sensitive parenting through attachment-based interventions after childbirth, with a focus on understanding infant temperament and behavioral individuality, can help mothers better interpret infant signals and behavior, leading to a reduction in parenting stress.

Reisz, Aviles, & Adkins, (2023) conducted a research study to investigate the relation between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) of foster parents, adult attachment, and parenting stress. The study involved 55 foster parents from central Texas, United States, who were recruited from a larger randomized controlled trial (RCT) study, and they finished three questionnaires: the "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) questionnaire", the "Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire", and the "Parenting Stress Inventory". The study found that foster parents who reported a higher number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) were more likely to exhibit higher levels of attachment avoidance and greater levels of parenting stress. Also, foster parents who reported experiencing childhood emotional abuse showed higher levels of attachment anxiety. Moreover, those who reported higher levels of attachment anxiety demonstrated elevated levels of both parental distress and defensive responding. Additionally, foster parents who reported a history of childhood sexual abuse exhibited higher levels of parental distress. Therefore, providing adequate support is of utmost importance to assist foster parents in managing parenting stress and ensuring optimal care for their foster children. By offering the necessary resources and assistance, foster parents can better navigate the challenges they face and provide a nurturing environment for the well-being and development of their foster children.

Negriff, S. (2020) conducted a study to assess individual adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) items and assess their respective contributions to predicting mental health outcomes during adolescence, along with examining the relative impact of the household dysfunction scale compared to the childhood maltreatment scale in predicting these outcomes. Adolescents who acknowledged witnessing intimate partner violence (IPV) reported a greater number of symptoms related to depression, anxiety, and trauma. The presence of sexual abuse and physical abuse in an individual's life has been identified as significant factors associated with the development of symptoms related to depression, trauma, and externalizing behaviour. Similarly, neglect has been found to be closely linked to symptoms of depression, trauma, and anxiety. Moreover, it has been observed that both emotional abuse and emotional neglect have a pervasive impact on various aspects of mental health, encompassing the experiences of depression, trauma, anxiety, and externalizing behaviour. Thus, the study emphasized that maltreatment events should be given greater consideration than household dysfunction when addressing mental health concerns, highlighting their increased relevance in treatment.

Discussion

The primary aim of the study was to find out if a relationship can be found to exist between ACEs that a parent has experienced in their childhood and parenting practices that they use in their adulthood. For this purpose, a review of existing literature was carried out to include ten studies on this topic. Findings revealed that parental ACEs were directly related with their emotional availability towards their children, along with a direct relationship between parental ACEs and the discipline strategies employed by parents when their children exhibit challenging behaviour (Rowell, & Neal-Barnett, 2021). Parents who have experienced maltreatment during their own childhood are at an increased risk of developing depression and anxiety, which can subsequently have an impact on their parenting abilities and practices. Parental ACEs thereby influence the parent-child relationship also affecting the child's psychological development. Children residing with caregivers who reported experiencing "high parenting stress", were found to have a three-fold higher likelihood to experience four or more ACEs by the time they reached 18 years of age (Crouch et al., 2019). Thereby, a comprehensive understanding of parents' experiences in childhood is essential for effective prevention of ACEs in their children (Narayan, Lieberman, & Masten, 2021).

Also, a positive and dose-response relationship was found between a mother's early-life exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and her current level of parenting stress (Lange, Callinan, & Smith, 2018). Mothers with a history of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) were observed to exhibit hypervigilance, a symptom commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Herbell, & Bloom, 2020). While some mothers expressed a strong determination to be resilient and break the cycle of adverse experiences, the study revealed that many of them encountered difficulties in implementing practical strategies for parenting differently, specifically in areas such as discipline and setting boundaries for their children. Several studies indicated that a significant number of mothers, particularly teen mothers, lacked a strong social network, consequently leading them to experiencing higher levels of parenting-related stress. Both attachment-related avoidance and attachment-related anxiety were found to be significantly

associated with parenting stress at 12 months after the birth of the child (Moe et al., 2018). Furthermore, the study revealed that attachment style mediated the relationship between maternal adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and parenting stress.

In the case of children who are referred for clinical assistance when they exhibit behavioural or emotional difficulties, these findings underscore the significance of evaluating parental adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), mental health history, and parenting behaviour. Such assessments can provide crucial insights into the potential underlying factors contributing to the child's difficulties and help inform appropriate interventions and support strategies. In the case that the parent has experienced ACEs, trauma-focused interventions can be administered to them to strengthen their relationship with their children, reduce harsh disciplinary and parenting practices, and reduce the risk of the child developing emotional and behavioural issues in the future.

Foster parents who reported a higher number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) were more likely to exhibit higher levels of attachment avoidance and greater levels of parenting stress (Reisz, Aviles, & Adkins, 2023). Also, foster parents who reported experiencing childhood emotional abuse showed higher levels of attachment anxiety, which was associated with elevated levels of both parental distress and defensive responding. Additionally, foster parents who reported a history of childhood sexual abuse exhibited higher levels of parental distress. Providing essential resources and assistance can support foster parents in effectively navigating the challenges they encounter and create a nurturing environment for the well-being and development of their foster children.

It was also found that parents expressed strong support for screening adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as they recognized its importance in accessing essential services (Conn et al., 2018). Furthermore, parents demonstrated an understanding of the intergenerational effects of ACEs and expressed a strong desire to break the cycle of adversity. They viewed their child's pediatrician as a potential catalyst for change and sought their assistance in achieving their parenting goals. In contrast, Parents' ACEs and traumatic stress can impact their reliability as sources of information on their children's ACEs and positive childhood experiences (Narayan, Lieberman, & Masten, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial for pediatricians to possess the necessary knowledge and tools to effectively address and support parents in managing the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on their children's well-being (Conn et al., 2018).

A significant connection between the well-being of emerging adults and their past experiences of adversity, parenting practices, and the nature of the relationship with their parents during adolescence (Chainey, & Burke, 2021). Furthermore, the study discovered that factors such as connectedness and supportive monitoring within the parent-adolescent relationship were linked to positive development in emerging adults, regardless of the level of adversity they had experienced. The quality of parenting experienced during adolescence serves as a crucial predictor of well-being during emerging adulthood. Positive childhood experiences can act as a reservoir of adaptive capacity for adult parents, fostering resilience in the face of their own childhood adversity, which serves as a protective factor, shielding their children from experiencing ACEs (Narayan, Lieberman, & Masten, 2021).

Conclusion

Parental adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) were directly associated with their emotional availability towards their children. Additionally, there was a direct relationship between parental ACEs and the discipline strategies employed by parents when their children exhibited challenging behaviour. Children who live with caregivers experiencing "high parenting stress" have a three-fold increased likelihood of experiencing four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by the time they reach 18 years of age. This paper emphasizes the importance of understanding the various factors that contribute to parenting stress. The well-being of emerging adults was found to be interconnected with their prior experiences of adversity, parenting practices, and the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship. Developing comprehensive psychosocial interventions and implementing policy measures are crucial steps in addressing the complex issues related to adverse childhood experiences, parenting practices, and the parent-adolescent relationship. Implementing parenting interventions targeted at reducing parenting stress has the potential to decrease the level of childhood trauma experienced by a child. By addressing and mitigating this specific source of stress within a household, even in the presence of multiple other stressors, these interventions can contribute to promoting a healthier and more nurturing environment for children.

There is an urgent need for educational initiatives that specifically target parents, especially those with a history of trauma. These initiatives should aim to provide relevant knowledge, skills, and support to help these parents navigate the challenges associated with their traumatic experiences and enhance their parenting abilities. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of providing support for mothers who have experienced challenging relational experiences and insecure attachment styles prior to childbirth. Attachment-based interventions that promote positive and sensitive parenting after childbirth, have the potential to enhance mothers' ability to interpret and respond to their infants' signals and behaviour, thereby reducing parenting stress. It is important for clinicians to assess for ACEs in parents and provide trauma-focused interventions to help parents process their past and begin to develop parenting strategies that are best for their children's holistic development. As children visit their pediatricians on a regular basis, it is thereby imperative for pediatricians to be equipped with the knowledge and tools required to effectively assess, address, and support parents in managing the effects of ACEs on their children's well-being.

The presence of connectedness and supportive monitoring within the parent-adolescent relationship was found to be associated with more positive development in emerging adults, regardless of the level of adversity they had experienced. This highlights the significant role of parenting quality during adolescence as a predictor of well-being in emerging adulthood. Therefore, parents who have experienced ACEs must be provided adequate education, resources, and support to provide nurturing environments for children, even in difficult circumstances. This will ultimately reduce the exposure of ACEs in children and also help children develop in a positive manner even in the presence of adversity, thereby mitigating the inter-generational transmission of ACEs.

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