

Essay Topic Question

Children often experience sexual, physical, and emotional abuse all at once, and dealing with the lasting effects can be difficult. Is counselling alone enough to help a child who has gone through all of this? If not, what is one service you believe is missing that could help those dealing with the affects of abuse and proactively prevent future child abuse?

The Missing Component in Childhood Abuse Recovery

It is true that sexual, physical and emotional abuse often occur all at once. This is especially the case for Canadian children as the majority of victims are exploited by someone who is closely involved in their life.¹ For many children, these traumatic experiences can have lasting and deleterious affects on both mental and physical health. It is without question that support and recovery should be equally as important as prevention; furthermore, there remains a missing ingredient in this support and recovery process, one that I believe to be a difference maker. In this paper I will focus on how a specific set of lifestyle interventions can efficiently treat the lasting affects of all types of childhood abuse and trauma.

Family violence in particular can be difficult to treat in the case that the perpetrators are closely involved in the child's life. It may take time for a child or even adult to be settled into a safe environment, new home, or even for the suspected violence to be identified and addressed in the first place.² As a result, it is imperative for professionals to focus on innovative recovery developments that extend beyond our current paradigm. While organizations such as the *Child Development Institute*, *Canadian Red Cross*, and others like it offer outstanding social support and recovery programs, I would argue that this is not enough for healthy recovery. For children currently recovering, and for adults dealing with lifelong implications associated with childhood trauma, there is one factor I believe that can significantly improve a victims quality of life. This

¹ Section 3: Family violence against children and youth. 2015 *Stats Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11643/11643-3-eng.htm>

² Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Programs. 2019. <https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/violence-bullying-and-abuse-prevention/educators/child-abuse-and-neglect-prevention/child-abuse-and-neglect-prevention-programs>

factor is targeting body's *control and communication network (CCN)* through exercise, sleep, and nutrition.

Social support and recovery programs are beneficial for victims to regain the ability to love and trust, to induce confidence and feelings of social acceptance and connectivity, and ultimately to help a victim reconstruct a healthy outlook on life.³ But in terms of treating the psychiatric disorders that are often developed as a result of childhood sexual, emotional and physical abuse, these methods are largely ineffective. James Lake, a respected medical doctor formally trained in psychiatry at Stanford University, highlights how the current psychiatric treatments fail to tackle the complexity and compounding effects of various mental illness'.⁴ This is significant as Lake explains in his literature review that anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and many more psychiatric disease cumulatively comprise upwards of thirty-three percent of adult health complications⁵. Despite an increase in spending on mental illness treatment, there are many figures that suggest mental illness rates remain on the rise; perhaps the most alarming is that the second leading cause of death for males and females between fifteen and twenty-nine years old is suicide⁶. I believe that by remodelling how childhood trauma induced psychiatric illness is treated, and by combining these new treatments

³ Psychological Impacts of Surviving Childhood Trauma. *The Mighty*. 2018. <https://themighty.com/2018/08/childhood-trauma-symptoms/>

⁴Urgent Need for Improved Mental Health Care and a More Collaborative Model of Care. *PMC*. 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5593510/>.

⁵ Urgent Need for Improved Mental Health Care and a More Collaborative Model of Care. *PMC*. 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5593510/>.

⁶ Urgent Need for Improved Mental Health Care and a More Collaborative Model of Care. *PMC*. 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5593510/>.

with existing social support and recovery, it is possible to completely reshape not only how victims can recover, but also *how quickly*.

Many researchers refer to the control and communication network (CCN) as an additional body system yet to be recognized in traditional literature and educational material. This network is the term used to describe the flow of information throughout the body and how it can be altered significantly by how we live our lives. Even during sleep, the CCN works to receive, interpret and act on information through biological responses. Some research is beginning to suggest that lifestyle behaviour and psychological outlook may be heavily influenced by the state of the CCN. Through applications of dietary intervention, sleep hygiene, and physical exercise, the CCN can receive crystal clear information regarding hormone secretion, cellular regeneration and healing, and can ultimately mitigate any significant imbalances within the body; sequentially, this includes those that comprise major psychiatric disorders⁷. Anecdotal evidence, as well as animal studies suggest that by targeting these bodily mechanisms from a holistic approach, many symptoms of psychiatric disease can be mitigated and vanished entirely. While limited clinical trials are available on the topic, the sheer amount of anecdotal data cannot go unnoticed. Instead of providing ample evidence and crediting the various studies that inspire this thought pathway, I will instead state in a simple fashion the few interventions that will deliver the most benefits, and the mechanisms that explain them.

Medical professionals, lipid scientists, gastroenterologists, and many other professionals have all come to realize that the human microbiome is in direct communication with the brain, and that psychiatric disease may in fact be autoimmune disorders that stem from the gut. Eating

⁷ A Holistic Approach to Treating Depression. *Web MD*. 2016. <https://www.webmd.com/depression/features/holistic-medicine#1>

quality whole foods that are consistent with human evolution, minimally processed and are nutrient dense can feed the human microbiota and alter a persons mood, hormone production and much more⁸. Similarly, sleep has begun to generate tremendous interest in the medical field. Many symptoms of clinical depression and other mental disorders can be explained by chronic sleep deprivation. Existing disorders are certainly exaggerated without adequate deep sleep. Despite this being widespread common knowledge, there is a hidden epidemic that is compromising sleep quality in the modern world: artificial light. High energy blue light from devices, as well as industrial and household lighting and access to internet and media twenty-four seven has enabled youth and adults to develop unhealthy nighttime routines that are ultimately cutting into the healing and clutter-clearing deep sleep that is much needed. Sleeping a consistent duration and during key times regularly, as well as equipping a room with pure darkness and enabling sufficient melatonin production before bed, an individual is able to correct their *circadian biology*. When this bodily system is in order, healing is regular, energy is abundant and mental state is optimized. This can be thought of as the creation of an internal environment that is primed for proper function. Healthy circadian biology has been correlated to increased microbiome diversity (which is a good thing), and decreased anxiety⁹. To complete the ultimately wellbeing intervention, exercise must be introduced. Anaerobic and Aerobic exercise have both been shown to reduce stress hormones and inflammation, as well as fully oxygenate tissues and deliver nutrients to otherwise dormant parts of the body. Aside from a regular dose of

⁸ Liang, S., Wu, X., Jin, F. Gut-Brain Psychology: Rethinking Psychology From the Microbiota–Gut–Brain Axis. *Front. Integr. Neurosci.* eHUB ahead of print (2018).

⁹ Schnorr, S.L., Bachner, H.A. Integrative Therapies in Anxiety Treatment with Special Emphasis on the Gut Microbiome. *PMC.* **89**(3), 397-492 (2016).

endorphins induced by exercise, individuals also often find a new hobby and community through local gyms, friends and family, or even through youtube and social support in the modern world.

Many epidemiology studies indicate that childhood trauma is related to risk of heart disease and other age related disease'. Provided that sleeping adequately, eating recognizable foods for the body, and exercising regularly can reduce this risk of disease, it is clear that individuals should be taught and guided towards making lifestyle interventions as apart of the recovery process. Targeting the CCN holistically presents a three step process for allowing every *part* of victims to have the best chance to heal. Sleep hygiene primes the internal environment, exercise stimulates the development of new tissue and positive hormonal change, and nutrition fuels new and improved cells, processes and balance within the body.

While there is certainly knowledge of how a healthy lifestyle can play major roles in treating disease and symptoms related to trauma and mental illness, they have yet to become common practice. I believe that treating trauma related psychiatric illness through education and guidance of healthy lifestyle intervention, success rates and quality of life can be dramatically increased. Similarly, suicide, depression and illness can be decreased. Provided the networks for support and recovery are in place and well structured, efforts should be made to integrate these principles of a healthy CCN into the programs. I believe the same to be true for education centres; elementary, secondary, post secondary and beyond. Perhaps a healthy future for abuse victims lies within the roots of physiology more than previously thought.

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