

The Relationship Between Childhood Trauma and Crime and its Mechanism

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Abstract. In recent times, there has been a concerning upward trend in crime rates, with a noticeable decrease in the age of individuals involved in criminal activities. In response to this pressing issue, this research endeavors to delve into the root causes of criminal behavior. Specifically, our investigation centers on childhood traumatic events as potential catalysts for subsequent criminal conduct. The goal of this study is to scrutinize the causal link between childhood trauma and criminal behavior, drawing insights from the analysis of findings gathered from ten seasoned professionals. Furthermore, our research seeks to shed light on the intricate relationship between childhood trauma and criminal conduct. Individuals who have undergone childhood trauma may exhibit a propensity to mimic and internalize violent behaviors witnessed during their formative years, which may ultimately contribute to their involvement in criminal activities later in life. Additionally, it is imperative to recognize that childhood trauma can precipitate the development of psychological or mental disorders, potentially acting as a catalyst for criminal acts. A comprehensive comprehension of the intricate interplay between childhood trauma and criminal behavior, along with its underlying mechanisms, holds significant promise in equipping society with effective tools to address the alarming surge in crime rates.

Keywords: Childhood trauma, crime, social learning theory, disorder, violent tendency.

1. Introduction

In recent years, crime rate raised significantly and people who commit crimes are younger. Crime has led to a lot of negative effects. For example, social instability, panic among the masses due to high crime rate, put pressure and cause harm in families. Moreover, after the criminals are released from prison, they will also bring a burden to the society and employment problems. Therefore, people began to pay attention to topics such as how to effectively prevent crime. In order to solve this problem completely, researchers have tried to find out the causes of crime through research. According to some of the researches, the causes of crime are very diverse, but the most common one is "trauma". There are many types of traumas, but childhood trauma is the one that affects people more deeply. Childhood trauma, as the name suggests, is a traumatic experience in early childhood life that has a lasting negative impact on one's physical and mental health. These experiences may include physical or psychological violence, exclusion, abuse, family conflicts, accidents, etc. Researches has shown that greater than 60% of children and teenagers that by the age of 16 had exposed to traumatic events before, and among them, greater than 30% exposed to more than one traumatic event [1]. Human cognition during childhood is usually superficial, a complete psychological framework has not been established, and it is easy to be affected by outside objects that might affect one's cognitive function. Therefore, experiencing childhood trauma may have an impact on individual growth, psychological development and cognitive ability. Childhood trauma is therefore one of the factors that may lead to subsequent psychological problems. Most of these psychological factors are factors that affect cognitive moral ability, such as mental disorders. Studies results shown that childhood trauma has a high association with rates of psychiatric disorders and poor mental functions [2]. In addition to affecting cognitive abilities, exposure to childhood trauma can also predispose them to violence. Childhood trauma may increase risk in engaging in activities such as gun violence [3]. Does childhood trauma directly or indirectly lead to subsequent criminal

behavior? If so, how does childhood trauma affect people's thoughts and lead them to commit crime? This study evaluated various research reports to explore the association between childhood trauma and subsequent criminal behavior and the mechanisms behind it.

2. The Associations and Mechanism of Childhood Trauma and Crime

2.1. The Relationship and Mechanism

Since childhood trauma has been proven to cause people to become violent, there comes the question: does childhood trauma indirectly or directly lead individuals to commit subsequent crimes? The answer is yes. Lots of studies have found that childhood trauma can significantly predict an individual's criminal behavior, and individuals who have suffered childhood trauma are more likely to commit crimes, mostly violent crimes, in the future.

Rachel et al. investigate the correlation between childhood traumatic experiences and the risk factors associated with gun violence, both from the perspective of perpetrators and victims. To do this, the researchers interviewed 72 people who had been involved in gun violence in the hospital and recorded their risk factors for participating in gun violence, such as owning or carrying a gun, and their views on violence and guns. Through interviews, the researchers concluded that childhood trauma, like community violence, domestic violence, and increased participation in gun violence are related to many risk factors for violence, and people who have experienced childhood trauma are more likely to become perpetrators or victims of gun violence. Gun violence, as one of the most dangerous and common forms of violent crimes, may cause irreversible damage to a large area once it occurs. Therefore, study the inducements of gun crimes and achieve the purpose of preventing gun crimes becomes a significant issue. By establishing a relationship between gun crime and childhood trauma, it could lead to better prevention of such cases in the future [3].

The researchers not only focused on the relationship between gun crime and childhood trauma, but also conducted more types of studies. A study by Lauren n. Miley et al. explored whether childhood trauma predicts criminal behavior in adulthood or increases the risk of future crimes. To come to a conclusion, researchers studied around 65,000 teenagers in Florida who had committed crimes, seeking to assess the subsequent behavior of youth who had been physically and or sexually abused or had witnessed drug use as a child, to see if victims of such trauma had an increased the chance for them to commit violent crimes, sexual abuses and the use of drug in the future. After the evaluation of the multivariate logistic regression model, the model showed that there was overlap between victims-offenders [4]. People who have experienced trauma such as physical abuse have a significantly boost the chances of committing criminal acts even after controlling for other risk crime factors, suggesting a strong link between childhood trauma and increased risk of crime.

Alexis has also done research on this topic. This research report seeks to explore the effect of abnormal childhood experiences and trauma could have on subsequent juvenile delinquency or recidivism, as well as the underlying mechanisms of cumulative trauma and recidivism. By selecting 16 studies in various fields, such as sociology, criminology, psychology, etc., and using quantitative meta-analytical techniques to conduct a meta-analysis [5]. The findings suggest that abnormal childhood traumatic experiences increase the chances of delinquency or reoffending in youth. By exploring the causes of juvenile delinquency, we can effectively make prevention and follow-up guidance to juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

Ross et al. examined how trauma is associated with violent behavior in early childhood. After confirming that childhood trauma has been viewed as a potential cause of youth violence and criminal behavior, the researchers analyzed local data from Worcester, Massachusetts, and concluded that childhood trauma before age 12 is a significant driver of subsequent violent criminal behavior. This analysis provides data-driven options for local communities to address the high levels of youth offenders and gang violence in their communities [6].

The percentage of juvenile offenders who have experienced trauma is increasing year by year, However, whether trauma leads to recidivism and juvenile delinquency was also of interest to

researchers Nina A. Vitopoulos et al. The researchers use a sample of juvenile offenders, and they examined the relationship between post-traumatic stress symptoms, a history of child abuse, and RNR risk factors for recidivism. The results showed that in this sample of offenders, the incidence of PTS symptoms and childhood trauma was significantly higher than in the overall population. Although female offenders have higher chances of experience childhood trauma, research shows that gender does not mediate between abuse and criminality - both male and female offenders who have experienced childhood trauma tend to show a higher risk of crime and violence. By analyzing the reports of past researchers, we can conclude that in general, childhood trauma has a significant relationship with crime and violence, and the incidence rate is proportional, and people who have suffered childhood trauma are more likely to commit crime and violence.

2.2. The Mechanism of Childhood Trauma and Criminal Behavior

How does it work that people who have suffered childhood trauma are more likely to commit crimes and violence in the future? There is no doubt that childhood trauma does not always directly cause people to commit crimes, but more often, childhood trauma leads to the production of a certain trait that leads to crime, in other words, childhood trauma in most cases indirectly causes people to commit crimes. In the following, we will explore the factors that childhood trauma can lead to laying the groundwork for crime.

First, violent childhood traumas - traumas involving harm to others, such as domestic violence, school violence, and cyberbullying - often lead to copycat behavior. The psychological activity of minors in the early childhood is extremely easy to be affected by foreign objects, and for children, they learn by imitating the behavior of people around them. This is why if a child lives in a violent environment, he is more likely to become a violent person. Imitation is human nature, imitation more will become a habit. American psychologist Albert Bandura developed social learning theory. This theory, proposed in 1952, focuses on the role of observational learning and self-regulation in triggering human behavior. Bandura suggests that human behavior is mainly acquired, and the acquired environment is still very important in shaping people, although genes and physiological factors may restrict some of them. There are two different processes for people to acquire behavior, one is to acquire behavior response pattern through experience, and the other is to acquire similar behavior by observing the behavior of the demonstrator. Bandura's emphasis on observational imitative learning is, of course, factually accurate. From the perspective of the establishment of this theory, what kind of environment children live in, what kind of people they come into contact with, and what kind of things people around them do will cause a great impact on shaping children's personality and behavior pattern. Going back to childhood trauma, experiencing violence, or living in a violent environment will naturally cause children to have violent tendencies, children will imitate and learn from people around them, even if this behavior is violent, because living in this environment for a long time, children will not be able to realize that violence is a wrong thing. The tendency to violence is also the biggest cause of crime, because the tendency to violence is essentially a change in attitude toward violence - from hating violence, rejecting violence, to seeing violence as normal, and even enjoying it [7].

In addition, another way that childhood trauma can indirectly lead to criminal tendencies is through illness. The disease is not physical, but mental and spiritual. After experiencing childhood trauma, or even in a dark and unhappy period of long-term childhood experience, it is easy to make the child's mind cannot accept normal guidance, become distorted, the character becomes eccentric, or the trauma leaves a shadow, which leads to future mental illness. Once they become psychopaths, their behavior and thinking patterns cannot be guessed by normal thinking. It's impossible to tell what a psychopath actually thinks, because everyone has different symptoms that are related to their experiences, but most of these psychopaths have one thing in common: they become unstable, moody, and violent. These symptoms are factors that lead to crime. Many times, mentally ill patients can't even control themselves during the onset of illness, and there are things that hurt themselves and even hurt others. And there is evidence that childhood trauma can lead to later mental illness.

In a study conducted by Tuscher and Retz, they sought to assess the extent of mental health problems in offenders who had suffered childhood trauma. A total of 161 adolescent offenders from the Youth Detention Centre in Worms participated. The offenders filled out questionnaires about childhood trauma and mental issues, which revealed a significant proportion of mental health problems. For example, the prevalence of intermittent explosive mental disorder was found to be 35.9%. Based on the survey data, the researchers concluded that childhood trauma associates with the development of internalized and externalized mental disorders, and the results of this study point to a correlation between childhood trauma and juvenile delinquency, while identifying mental health problems as a possible precursor to future criminal behavior [8]. Thus, childhood trauma may influence future criminal behavior through mental health disorders.

Richards-lepouriel et al. studied the relationship between childhood trauma and impulsivity. impulsivity is the core characteristic of attention-deficit, one of the criteria for borderline personality disorder, also exists in bipolar disorder. Is arguably the central feature of many impulsive psychiatric disorders. By studying 744 patients with BD, BPD and ADHD who reported impulsivity and Childhood Trauma, although the relationship between BPD and ADHD and childhood trauma was not obvious, bipolar disorder is significantly associated with childhood trauma [9]. The relationship between bipolar disorder and criminal behavior needs to be elaborated.

William et al. investigate the correlation between cumulative trauma in childhood and adult mental functioning. Researchers assessed 1420 child and adolescent psychosis and trauma victims and had participants participate in adult follow-up at ages 19, 21, 25, and 30 to assess the transformation of adolescent victims' mental function into adulthood, completing the analysis in 2018. The results showed that at age 16, 30.9% of children were exposed to one traumatic event, 22.5% to two, and 14.8% to more than three, and those who had experienced trauma had a higher incidence of adult psychiatric disorders, suggesting a strong association between childhood traumatic experiences and development of mental function [10].

Through the combination of theories and research results, we can simply summarize several factors that childhood trauma can lead to crime. First, children will imitate the actions of others around them and are easily influenced by the environment, also known as social learning theory, so people who have suffered childhood trauma are more likely to commit crimes by imitating the abuser. The second is the subsequent mental impact brought by childhood trauma, which is very extensive, many of which will lead to the emergence of impulsive mental diseases, such mental diseases will affect people's judgment of right and wrong, indifference to violence, inability to control and other situations, are some of the most important characteristics leading to crime.

3. Conclusion

The study explored the complex relationship between childhood trauma and criminal behavior. After a meticulous analysis of ten studies and experiments conducted by experienced industry experts, our research unequivocally establishes a profound causal relationship between childhood trauma and criminal behavior. It ultimately suggests that people who have experienced childhood trauma are actually more inclined to engage in criminal or violent activity. In addition, this study strives to dissect the mechanisms involved and shed light on how childhood trauma acts as a catalyst for criminal behavior. Social learning theory suggests that people who are traumatized in childhood or grow up in violent environments are more likely to mimic and internalize these behaviors and subsequently exhibit violent behavior themselves. The second mechanism involves the development of psychological or mental disorders in those who have experienced childhood trauma. These disorders alter cognitive processes, affect perceptions of violence and crime, and ultimately force individuals to commit criminal acts. Given the rising crime rate in contemporary society, especially among young people, understanding the basis of criminal behavior is of Paramount importance. This insight could pave the way for the effective implementation of preventive measures and interventions to address this rapidly emerging problem.

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