

Child Abuse in New Zealand

Is there a relationship between childhood physical abuse and criminal behaviour in adolescence and adulthood?

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Introduction

New Zealand is currently the fifth worst country in the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and 25th out of 35 for the health and safety of Children (Van Miert, 2015). Literature shows that adults who were abused as children are at a greater risk of developing problems later in life, one of these being involvement in criminal activity (Cutler-Naroba, 2006).



Evidence

In the 2015 financial year Child Youth and Family (CYF's) reported 150,905 care and protection notifications which was an increase of 4248 on the previous year (Child Youth and Family, 2015). The Department of Corrections statistics show that the prison population in New Zealand is steadily rising-from 8,244 in 2009 to 8,641 in 2014 (Department of Corrections, 2015). Given the extent of child abuse and the high rates of incarceration in New Zealand, it is of no surprise that there is cause for concern for the long term damaging consequences. There is strong evidence that shows a causal link between child abuse and later forms of antisocial behaviour (Jung, Herrenkohl, Lee, Klika & Skinner, 2015). Abused children were 2 times more likely to have been arrested as an adult (English, Widom and Bradford, 2002). However, there are a multitude of risk factors for offenders in their history, these contributing factors seem to be accumulative and interact with one another, which produce outcomes of criminal behaviour. It is clear that numerous risk factors increase the likelihood of adverse outcomes (Preski & Shelton, 2001).

Recommendations

- Nurses advocating for ongoing and improved investment to enhance access and value of home visiting programmes already in place. Research has shown that nurse led home visiting programmes improve outcomes for vulnerable and at risk children (Van Miert, 2015).
- Improve education and training for nurses regarding identifying and acting on suspected child abuse. Training and education are key factors in decreasing child abuse.
- Nurses working with children need to have skills to know what to look for, have the knowledge to know what to do, and the confidence to take appropriate action (Piltz and Wachtel, 2009).

Conclusion

No single factor can account for the development of criminal behaviour, however the importance of child maltreatment as a risk factor for delinquency has shown to be a significant recurring theme (Widom, Schuck & White, 2006). New Zealand has many vulnerable children, what is wanted more than anything is for them to have a safe, stable and strong future.

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Rationale

The worrying statistics regarding child abuse and the high rates of incarceration in New Zealand are the reasons behind why I chose to research the link between childhood physical abuse and later criminal activity. To form my question, I utilised the PECOT model, which “is an acronym that describes the elements of a well-formed question, which is often the essence of a clinical topic” (Schneider, Whitehead, LoBiondo-Wood, & Haber, 2013, p.63). I started with the question “is physical abuse in childhood linked to criminal activity in adulthood. By using the PECOT model I was able to reform my question into “is there a relationship between childhood physical abuse and criminal behaviour in adolescence and adulthood?”

By visualizing information, patterns are able to be seen and one is able to gain new insight. Visualizations help in structuring information, by placing information in context and making it more memorable. This also utilizes the fact that visual processing involves almost 50% of the brain (Ellstrom, n.d.). I believe using a poster is an effective way of transferring knowledge. This is why I choose to present my literature review in poster form. I felt it was important to inform and promote awareness of the current and topical issues within Aotearoa. Using a poster is an effective way to inform health professionals and the wider community of current issues which were clearly identified in an evidence based literature review, and then present the evidence in a user friendly manner. A poster will hopefully reach a wider audience, and can be presented in a variety of different areas.

PECOT category	Information related to question	Explanation
Population	Adults who have experienced physical abuse as children,	To ascertain the relationship Between childhood physical abuse and later forms of criminal activity.
Exposure	Adults and adolescents demonstrating criminal behaviour.	I will be looking for articles that have researched associations between child abuse and later criminal activity. Using controlled studies with children that were not physically abused.
Comparison/control	Children who were not physically abused, compared to children that were.	Lower rate of criminal activity in later life in children who had not been physically abused.
Outcome	Causal link substantiated or refuted.	Wanting to ascertain if abuse in childhood increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour in adolescents and adulthood.
Time	N/A	N/A

(Schneider, Whitehead, LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2013, p.63)

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