



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Developmental Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/dr



Differentiated associations between childhood maltreatment experiences and social understanding: A meta-analysis and systematic review

Nikki Luke^{a,*}, Robin Banerjee^b

^aRees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education, University of Oxford, Oxford OX2 6PY, United Kingdom

^bUniversity of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9QH, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 February 2012

Revised 16 September 2012

Available online 8 November 2012

Keywords:

Maltreatment

Physical abuse

Neglect

Social understanding

Emotion recognition

Theory of mind

Meta-analysis

Systematic review

ABSTRACT

The extreme parenting experiences encountered by children who are physically abused or neglected place them at increased risk for impaired socio-emotional development. There is growing evidence that maltreated children may apprehend interpersonal encounters in different ways from children without such traumatic histories. This systematic review examines the links between childhood physical abuse and neglect and various constituent skills of social understanding (including emotion recognition and understanding, perspective taking, false belief understanding, and attributional biases) in 51 empirical studies. The review incorporates a meta-analysis of 19 studies on emotion recognition and understanding in this population. This showed an overall negative effect of maltreatment, but moderation analyses revealed that significantly stronger effects were found for measures of emotion understanding rather than recognition, and for younger rather than older age groups. The broader review also reveals a complex and differentiated profile of social understanding among maltreated children. Directions for future research that addresses individual differences in children's experiences, both within and outside the maltreatment context, are discussed.

© 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that early experiences of physical abuse or neglect can have damaging consequences for children's social and emotional development. For example, child maltreatment has been

* Corresponding author. Address: Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education, University of Oxford Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY, United Kingdom.

E-mail address: nikki.luke@education.ox.ac.uk (N. Luke).

linked to peer rejection and social reputations for more negative and less positive behaviour (e.g., [Anthonysamy & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007](#)). Yet not enough has been done to distil and interpret the key messages from the body of empirical work linking parental maltreatment with children's cognitive, behavioural and affective responses to social situations. Of particular interest is the growing evidence that maltreated children may apprehend interpersonal encounters – and the emotions and other mental states associated with them – in different ways from children without such traumatic histories. Such data on maltreated children's 'social understanding' have the potential to shed light on the processes underlying key socio-emotional outcomes for this vulnerable group. For example, given that differences in social understanding are known to predict the positivity and negativity of peer interactions (e.g., [Banerjee, Watling, & Caputi, 2011](#); [Dunn & Cutting, 1999](#); [Hughes, 2011](#)), the problematic peer relationships of maltreated children could at least partly be rooted in difficulties with social understanding.

Indeed, a recent paper reporting on interviews with foster carers ([Luke & Banerjee, 2012](#)) suggests that this kind of mediational model is a highly plausible explanation of the kinds of complications that carers recognise in maltreated children's everyday experiences. But how robust is the evidence for a distinctive profile of social understanding in children who have experienced maltreatment? The present work synthesises and interrogates the existing literature concerning the social understanding of those who have experienced parental physical abuse and/or neglect (hereafter termed 'maltreated children').¹

Social understanding is conceptualised here as the ability to understand feelings, beliefs and desires and their role in social behaviour, an ability often termed 'theory of mind' ([Premack & Woodruff, 1978](#)), 'perspective taking' or 'mentalising' ([Carpendale & Lewis, 2006](#)). It includes what has been called 'emotion knowledge': the ability to recognise specific emotional expressions in others and to understand the type of situations that can give rise to particular emotions ([Sullivan, Bennett, Carpenter, & Lewis, 2008](#)). This kind of awareness and understanding of others' emotions may also be conceptualised as one important component of empathy. However, it has a distinctively cognitive dimension, in comparison with other aspects of empathy which are principally affective ("feeling what another person is feeling") or behavioural ("responding compassionately to another person's distress"; [Levenson & Ruef, 1992, p. 234](#)).

While research on some aspects of social understanding in a maltreated population has been discussed elsewhere (e.g., [Smetana & Kelly, 1989](#); [Wolfe, 1987](#)) as yet there has been no systematic review of the literature, and a review incorporating more recent research is needed. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to make sense of the mixed findings in the existing literature, particularly with regard to the influence of maltreatment on emotion recognition and emotion understanding. A meta-analysis of the data would go some way to illuminating our understanding of maltreated children's emotion skills. The purpose of the present review, which incorporates such a meta-analysis, is to evaluate the strength of evidence for the hypothesis that physically abused or neglected children underperform relative to their nonmaltreated peers in measures of social understanding.

In presenting this hypothesis we are keen to emphasise that the responsibility for any damaging effects is not assumed to lie simply in the physical acts of abuse or neglect themselves: as [Wolfe \(1987\)](#) points out, the developmental effects of maltreatment are tied up in the broader context of the child's relationship with his or her parents. Our hypothesis is based on the argument that social understanding consists of a set of skills which develop gradually within the context of social interactions ([Carpendale & Lewis, 2004](#)). If 'normal' development occurs in the presence of an average expectable environment including interactions with nurturing adults and a larger social group ([Cicchetti & Lynch, 1995](#)), then maltreating families represent an atypical environment in which the development of the skills necessary for social understanding may be impaired.

Traditional social learning approaches (e.g., [Bandura, 1973](#)) might suggest that this is because maltreated children imitate the kind of negative social behaviours modelled for them by more powerful others. However, research on child development has time and again underlined the active role played

¹ It should be noted that studies which focus solely on those who have experienced sexual abuse are outside the scope of this review. In comparison with physical abuse and neglect, sexual abuse involves a markedly different distribution of perpetrators (e.g., proportion of non-parental perpetrators) and can lead to a very distinct set of developmental sequelae ([Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995](#)).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/353470>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/353470>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)