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Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Researchers recently examined outcomes for 659 young adults who had been placed in family foster care as children. One of the most remarkable things they discovered was that one in four (25.2%) of these foster care “alumni” had experienced posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) within the previous 12 months (Pecora et al., 2005). This rate of PTSD is nearly double that of US war veterans.

People who think of PTSD as something caused only by the trauma and terror of military combat will probably be shocked by this finding. However, if you work in child welfare, shock is probably not your reaction. You know all too well the effects abuse, neglect, and placement instability can have on children. And yet the implications of this finding for your work are huge.

As you will learn in this issue, PTSD significantly undermines a child’s well-being. Left untreated, it can put children at risk for school difficulties, attachment problems, additional psychological disorders, substance abuse, and physical illness. When the children grow up, PTSD can interfere with economic self-sufficiency. The trauma experienced by children can also profoundly affect child welfare workers.

Family support and child welfare workers and their agencies must be able to recognize the signs of PTSD and they must be prepared to respond in an appropriate and timely way when they come across it. The health and well-being of children – perhaps their very futures – depends on it.

Contents

[PTSD and Children in the Child Welfare System](#)

[How Children and Adolescents React to Trauma](#)

[Responding to a Child's Acute PTSD Reaction](#)

[Effective Treatment for PTSD](#)

[A Child Welfare Response to Traumatized Children](#)

[Strategies for Agencies and Workers](#)

[Preventing PTSD in Children](#)

[Traumatic Stress and Child Welfare Workers](#)

[Assessing Worker Distress](#)

[Ways Supervisors Can Help Workers Deal with Secondary Trauma](#)

[References for this Issue](#)

[Click here to read or print the entire issue as a pdf file](#)

Additional resources related to this topic:

- [Child Welfare Learning Resources Related to Traumatic Stress](#). The June 2005 issue (vol. 6, no. 3) of the newsletter *Training Matters*.
<<http://www.trainingmatters-nc.org>>
- [PTSD and Children in Foster Care](#), essay by the Child Welfare Institute's Tom Morton which includes the following important points: "child welfare agencies should consider placement as a possible precipitating trauma for PTSD in children and reconsider how caseworkers and foster parents view some emotional and behavioral issues of children in foster care. Equally importantly, PTSD is a possibility for parents following removal of a child."
<<http://www.gocwi.org/data/site250783/files/IdeasinActionApril2004.pdf>>