

Psychology of aggression - mental disorders as the effect of exposure to childhood violence

Emil Benedik, Ph.D., Specialist of Clinical Psychology, Psychiatric Hospital, Begunje 55, 4725 Begunje na Gorenjskem, Slovenia

Problems related to violence against children, whether abuses or any other aggressive acts, have become the focus of professional attention in the recent years. Many reports indicate that various forms of abuse are much more frequent than had been assumed; on the other hand, research and clinical practice confirm the association between experiencing aggression in childhood and later mental disorders, which may remain many years after the traumatic experiences, and without any therapy, even the whole life.

In studying traumas, it is necessary to consider psychological, social and biological aspects, the nature of stressful events, as well as the characteristics of establishing or measuring the effects of stress. Traumatic experiences have an impact on mental and social functioning and are reflected in the form of various disorders. The most frequent among them are post-traumatic stress disorders, borderline syndrome or personality disorder, substance abuse disorders, nutritional disorders, sexual disorders, psychosomatic disorders, depression and a number of others. Considered from the psychosocial point of view, these disorders result in poorer quality of private and public life, disturbed interpersonal relations and diminished job performance. All these disorders can be understood as a pathological expression of aggression caused by traumatic events. The aforementioned disorders thus represent a method of coping and defence against destructive forces, since aggression does not bring only physical disruption and destruction of exterior objects and people, but also destruction of the victim's personality and mental life. Even more, the experience of violence triggers aggression which is not limited only to an individual and to given behaviour but uncontrollable and "unsatisfied" as it is, it tends to be transmitted to other persons, often to those who are closest. A victim thus turns into an aggressor. All victims of violence must therefore be enabled psychotherapeutic treatment.

Keywords: sexual abuse, physical abuse, aggression, transmission of aggression, experiences of violence in childhood, mental disorders as consequences of violence, personality disorders

UDC: 179.2