

Childhood Trauma and Health Issues

Excerpt reprinted from the Anchorage Native News with permission from Southcentral Foundation's Public Relations and Dr. Mark Erickson

OHM's attention was caught by an article appearing in the May 2009 edition of the Anchorage Native News* that raises the question of whether or not experiencing childhood abuse can be as harmful to your body as a smoking habit. Doctors have been telling the public for decades about the harmful effects of smoking, poor diet and lack of exercise, and the risk they pose for developing heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other health problems. Likewise, we know childhood abuse and neglect create mental health problems. But in the last decade, researchers are discovering just how widely the impact of childhood trauma is, not only to mental, emotional and spiritual health, but also to physical health.

The Research

Dr. Mark Erickson, of the South Central Foundation, has been looking into just this kind of research, namely the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control. Over 17,000 adults were surveyed in one of the most important studies of the long-term health risks of childhood maltreatment. In this study, participants reported on 10 types of traumatic stress they experienced during childhood, known as ACEs, including emotional abuse, sexual abuse and violence against their mother.

Every type of adverse experience was found to have a measurable impact on long-term health. For heart disease alone, nine of the 10 kinds of stressful childhood experiences increased the risk of developing heart disease decades later in life. Remarkably, the risk of developing heart disease

Risk Factors for Heart Disease*

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|-----------------------------|-----|
| History of Smoking | 1.2 |
| Parental Substance Abuse | 1.3 |
| Childhood Emotional Neglect | 1.3 |
| Parental Domestic Violence | 1.4 |
| Childhood Sexual Abuse | 1.4 |
| Childhood Physical Neglect | 1.4 |
| Childhood Physical Abuse | 1.5 |
| Physical Inactivity | 1.6 |
| Childhood Emotional Abuse | 1.7 |
| Crime in Home | 1.7 |
| Hypertension | 1.9 |
| Severe Obesity | 2.7 |
| Complex Childhood Abuse | 3.6 |

*From the Municipality of Anchorage brochure "Child Abuse and Your Health"

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reducing child abuse and neglect. The Family Wellness Warriors Initiative (FWWI) is one SCF program, created by Native people, to address the needs of adult survivors of domestic violence, child sexual abuse and child neglect to reduce the cycle of abuse in the Native Community. *(It is important to note that FWWI uses the OHM Grace Group model, and have had many of their leaders trained at SALTS. The Grace Group model has been adapted for the context and community that FWWI serves.)*

Over the last several years, and through extensive evaluation measures, it has been proven that FWWI's training builds protective factors and resiliency skills to increase a person's ability to deal effectively with the issues of domestic violence, abuse and neglect. FWWI has been in existence for nine years with the goal of "ending domestic violence, child abuse and neglect in this generation."



FWWI's training and education helps adults, who may have been traumatized as children, tell their stories and come to terms with their past. Ongoing assessment of the FWWI model is showing it helps create healthier families. Healthier families, in turn, have a much lower likelihood for continuing cycles of childhood abuse, neglect and domestic violence. A question FWWI is keenly interested in, which has not had a major

study, is whether interventions such as FWWI can reverse the risk for health problems in adults created by childhood experiences.

Besides being a key corporate objective, and specific programs being in place for the prevention, SCF has integrated the concepts of FWWI throughout all its 65 programs. Employees, as well as customers, are encouraged to take advantage of the programs, and each employee will be going through "Core Concepts," equipping all employees with the basic FWWI tools. By studying the connections between emotional, physical, mental and spiritual wellness, SCF is confident that Alaska's Native Community will progress with major improvements in total wellness,

health and quality of life, particularly for the younger generation.

Our Conclusion

OHM is excited to have had a part and to play a continuing role in offering

training that is impacting the health and wellness of the Alaskan Native Community.

* From Anchorage Native News, May 2009, p. 8-9.

To obtain the summarized results or the ACE study, please visit www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ACE/outcomes.htm. For more information about FWWI, please call (907) 729-5440 or visit www.fwwi.org.