All child abuse causes brain damage
Thursday September 27, 2007
All child abuse causes brain damage

Dear Alice!

I have some comments on the recent reader’s mail issue, lesions in the brain caused by child abuse (sorry about my poor English).

The dualistic approach for healing has been shown to be harmful: Psychiatry trying to heal the psyche and the somatic medicine is trying to heal the body – isolated - leads to to misunderstanding of what it IS to be a human being. The incorrect treatment that follows leads to re-victimization as shown by the research of the the Norwegian professor of medicine Anna Luise Kirkengen (even though the doctors often evaluate their therapy to be a success!).

As numerous studies show, we are all very much programmed by the early care we receive and we even sometimes repeat it in a photographic manner even if we do not have any recollection of it. A study found that abused children that did not have the recollection of abuse replicated scenes from when they were abused through their play. The scenes matched exactly the video material recorded by the abusing babysitter (ref.: J. Herman 1992). And a compelling cross-fostering study from our cousin the rhesus monkey shows that while 60% of very early abused monke babies abuse their own children when they grow up, non - 0%! - of the non abused monkey babies abuse their offspring as adults (Maestripieri 2005). Even if we have no recollection of abuse or the opposite - empathic treatment - it will come out one way or the other, most often the same way as received. It is stored in our bodies, and our brains are part of our bodies (at least last time I checked).

Knowledge about connections are essential even if we don’t see the value of it right away, but of course lot of therapists follows a recipe so that they will have to block out disturbing new evidence. And a very important point is honesty to the patients. A patient has the right to know about himself, and to decide for himself what to do about the information (The brother of a former girlfriend of mine died of blood cancer, but did not know what was wrong with him until his last weeks. The doctors just didn’t think that the information would do him any good (sic!!!)). The main answer to WHY we must include lesions in the brain in the picture of child abuse is however: nothing is “just psychological”.

Since Douglas Bremner in 1995 scanned the brains people with PTSD, the evidence for lesions in the brain caused by child abuse and neglect has piled up (Bremner is one of reasons that traumatized people is taken more serious today than 20 years ago, and is currently working for the ACE study, as far as I know). A lot of areas in the brain seem to be affected, among them the area called hippocampus (where the hippocampus is the Seat of our memory and to decide our emotions). And a compelling cross-fostering study from our cousin the rhesus monkey shows that while 60% of very early abused monkey babies abuse their own children when they grow up, non - 0%! - of the non abused monkey babies abuse their offspring as adults (Maestripieri 2005). Even if we have no recollection of abuse or the opposite - empathic treatment - it will come out one way or the other, most often the same way as received. It is stored in our bodies, and our brains are part of our bodies (at least last time I checked).

Summary: Abuse/neglect causes lesions in the brain. As the abuse/neglect get worse the emotional impact get worse. There is no threshold for emotional impact, and since all emotions have physical correlations a threshold for physical damage is unlikely to exist. It has been shown that a result of both severe and “subtle” abuse is increased levels of cortisol. Prolonged increased levels of cortisol has demonstrated to produce lesions in
the brain.

Conclusion: There is little doubt that all unemphatic treatment of children have both immediate and lasting impacts. Abuse does just not go away. It causes lasting damage to the brain. Blocking out this information is totally irrational but understandable out of being av victim of child abuse ourselves.

Warmly, V. J., Norway

AM: Thank you very much for your clear letter and the important information it contains. Probably it was your courage to see your own parents that gave you the capacity to understand more than some scientists can who never came in touch with their feelings. They can write about irreversible damages in brain without having the knowledge of successful therapies. In fact, the big majority of the world population absolutely confirms their beliefs that the damage caused by child abuse can’t be cured - if they refuse to work on it in therapy. On the other hand, we can see in this mailbox that there are people who could overcome their fear and got rid of their symptoms by daring to see what their parents had done to them and to rebel against cruelty and injustices endured in their childhood.