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BOOK REVIEW

A review of

Lost lives: The pandemic violence against children

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Abstract

The book, *Lost Lives: The Pandemic Violence Against Children* by Einar A. Helander, makes use of international research evidence, historical and contemporary anecdotes, and policy statements in order to provide a summary of child abuse and neglect around the world. *Lost Lives* is presented in a systematic manner with well-organized chapter divisions. Information is disseminated in an easy-to-follow format, and is well-cited with concise summaries. The author provides useful comparisons between countries and addresses the multi-factorial nature of childhood maltreatment. The reviewers summarize the book's sections: (1) The evidence of the pandemic child abuse, (2) evidence of the pandemic child neglect and deprivation, (3) then and now [historical context], (4) causes and contributions to violent behaviour and its prevention, and (5) challenges. In conclusion, barring a few minor suggestions, this book is an excellent introduction to the challenging topic of childhood neglect and violence.

Keywords:

violence, children, child abuse

Introduction

“The global pollution by violence has destroyed many of our basic human values, resulting in a dangerous, unequal and chaotic world. To bring change[...] is the most important challenge of our times.”(p.231)

Lost Lives: The Pandemic Violence Against Children is authored by Einar Helander, M.D., Ph.D., a professor of International Health and Social Policies at the Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada (ISPA) in Lisbon, Portugal. In the past, he has worked at the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and the All-India Institute of Medical Science. Dr. Helander uses his extensive knowledge, clinical expertise and experience in the field of child maltreatment to enrich, evaluate and provide context to the evidence that he presents in his book that maltreatment, globally, is labelled as a pandemic.

Lost Lives aims to provide an account of global violence against children using historical accounts, research findings, statistical summaries and personal observations by the author. It highlights the causes and effects of child abuse and discusses preventive measures. The contents of this book might appeal to health care providers who work with a pediatric population, government policy-makers, and those with a keen interest in global health. The clear and direct language used by the author makes this book accessible to readers from various educational and professional backgrounds, especially those with a responsibility for reporting child maltreatment. This book is a significant addition to the field of pediatric and developmental research, since there is a lack of guidelines surrounding childhood abuse in terms of screening and assessment standards (Fang, Brown, Florence & Mercy, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2009). It provides readers with a summary and evaluation of local, global, historical and contemporary evidence regarding the nature, causes, presentations, effects, treatments and prevention of child maltreatment.

Summary

The book includes 18 chapters organized in five sections: (1) The Evidence of Pandemic Child Abuse, (2) Evidence of Pandemic Child Neglect and Deprivation, (3) Then and Now, (4) Causes

and Contributions to Violent Behaviour and Its Prevention, and (5) Challenges. The organization of this book is clear and logical. The systematic division of chapters allows the reader to easily access information on a specific area of child maltreatment. These divisions also enable the author to make cross-national and cross-temporal comparisons regarding the different types of child abuse and neglect.

Chapter 1 discusses childhood sexual, physical and emotional abuse. It also comments on the abuse faced by children in residential institutions, orphans, child labour and trafficking, as well as other socially disenfranchised pediatric populations. The long-term health and social consequences of childhood violence and child human rights abuse are also examined. Chapter 2 highlights the issue of child neglect and differentiates neglect from child abuse. Chapter 3 draws a comparison between forms of child maltreatment throughout history and in more recent times. The author concludes that, although attitudes and behaviour towards children have changed, childhood violence remains a ‘pandemic’ that will require interventions in the form of public education and government policies. The public health approach to child maltreatment has gained traction over the past decade in the United States, Canada and internationally (e.g., Jack, 2010; Walsh, Jones & Cross, 2003; WHO, 2007). Chapter 4 explores various factors that contribute to violent behavior including maternal stress during pregnancy, genetic factors, social factors and alcoholism. It also notes the prevalence, etiology, treatment and prognosis for different child behavior disorders. Chapter 5 presents insight on various neurobiological pathways that underlie moral sense and moral behaviour. The developmental implications of maltreatment on normative moral and motivational processes are areas deserving further attention. Interpersonal and collective violence towards children is discussed at multiple ecological levels - starting with the family and community and then proceeding towards national and international scales.

Each chapter includes a list of relevant definitions, as well as extensive compilations of tables and summaries of pertinent research. The author also includes international data on each topic, offering comparisons of published evidence specific to

individual countries. Every chapter concludes with a concise summary of its contents, along with suggestions for interventions and avenues for future research.

Commendable Features

Lost Lives provides readers with definitions and guidelines developed by the WHO in addition to alternative definitions derived from local perspectives. This is beneficial when comparing and analyzing research from a variety of sources. The author also discusses the impact of the definitions used on the results and outcomes, and provides a critique on the appropriateness of definitions adopted by different organizations. The author includes data from a large collection of qualitative as well as quantitative sources. These sources are appropriately cited within the body of the text, making it very easy for readers to locate the original articles. Data presented in each chapter are divided into evidence related to developing countries and developed countries, while also providing global estimates of child abuse and neglect. The author recognizes and explains common cultural norms and practices that could potentially influence the type of abuse predominantly observed in different countries. Similarly, the inclusion of photographs, summary charts and medical imaging, when necessary, adds visual appeal and clarity to the topics of discussion. Another commendable feature of this book is that the author critically appraises the evidence presented. For example, the book takes into account the influence of confounding factors and external variables when considering if a change in the reported prevalence of child abuse is factual. Lost Lives presents an overview of the social determinants of child development, including poverty, access to equitable health care, education, nutrition, emotional and parental support, safe living conditions and opportunities for self-actualization. The book explores psychobiological pathways and causal mechanisms in order to explain observable patterns in human behaviour, thereby amalgamating biological and social schools of thought.

Opportunities for Enhancement

This book provides a good overview of global child maltreatment. There are few suggestions that could further enhance the quality and applicability

of Lost Lives. (1) While the author's personal views and anecdotes provide an interesting perspective on issues discussed in the book, the extensive inclusion of personal opinions may have occasionally detracted readers from forming their own views on the topics at hand. (2) The author provides complete comparisons between countries around the world when presenting topical data. It may also be useful to consider making comparisons at a more national and local level within countries. This would have allowed for a demonstration of the effects of socioeconomic status on the prevalence of abuse, when geography, culture and law are kept constant. (3) The book can be further enhanced by providing clinical guidelines or recommendations for health care workers who deal with a pediatric population. Such recommendations can aid health care workers with easily translating the knowledge gained from this book into their clinical practice.

A Note on Resilience

Lost Lives defines resilient people as "highly committed to what they do, have a strong need to control the events around them, and a willingness to accept challenges" (p. 107), which serve as protective factors against the negative effects of child abuse. Other factors cited by the book that may contribute to resilience include social support from others, optimism, humour and positive illusion, all of which have been corroborated in recent literature (Afifi & MacMillan, 2011; Hermann et al., 2011). However, the author draws attention to the possibility of trauma, even within a resilient child as it is important to note that resilience does not equate to invulnerability. Additional work on resilience underscores the critical role of resources, both internal to and external (e.g., community, extended family, job opportunities) for resilience (e.g., Ungar, 2005).

Key Recommendations and Conclusion

The book concludes with a few key recommendations for readers. The author urges health care providers to diagnose health disorders linked with violent behaviors early in life. He also recommends that schools should focus on teaching emotional skills, parenting and empathy in addition to the traditional curriculum. This is consistent with the

empirical literature showing the association between social and emotional learning (SEL) and better academic outcomes (e.g., Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004). Helander believes that primary prevention and early intervention, along with frequent reporting, are key for the cessation of violence against children. This proposal has been endorsed by recent literature (Wekerle, 2013).

Overall, *Lost Lives: The Pandemic Violence Against Children* by Einar A. Helander provides a good summary and evaluation of local, global, historical and contemporary evidence on child maltreatment. The book extensively discusses both socioeconomic and psychobiological contributors to child maltreatment. The author includes data from a large collection of qualitative and quantitative sources and presents it in a clear manner. *Lost Lives* also critically appraises the sources used, and presents social as well as cultural context when necessary. Using a more neutral tone when summarizing evidence may have helped readers form their own views on the content presented. Although the author makes clear his view that maltreatment is an infraction to children and a key human rights violation, he does well in transforming his passion to action. In conclusion, the book provides an analysis of relevant research data on child maltreatment and appeals to readers from all backgrounds, specifically those involved with pediatric populations and global health.

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