The Case for Healing

Healing Generations Institute

Supplementary Report on the Preliminary Landscape Analysis on Statewide Usage of Healing Circles in Schools and Among School-aged Children Sponsored by

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Several recent studies, along with the ACE'S (Adverse Childhood Experiences) study, highlight and illustrate how violent trauma, abuse, and maltreatment of adults and children can not only affect them negatively in the present, but more significantly-be passed down through generations within family units. All of them utilize the relatively new science of Epigenetics, which literally means *"on, upon, at, near, over, on top of, toward, against, among"* Genetics-in practical usage it signals *"the study of how environmental factors and behaviors can change gene expression without altering the underlying DNA sequence."* In short*, "it explores how genes can be turned "on" or "off" without modifying the genetic code itself."* (Stephen, Micheal, D. Lucas, Kaleido Potter, Johnson Oyeniyi, 2023)

Whereas Genetic changes may take generations upon generations to take effect, Epigenetic changes can occur in the present and within a short-term time frame-yet be passed down through subsequent generations parallel to other changes. *"The key aspect is that these changes are reversible and do not change the sequence of DNA, but they can change how your body reads a DNA sequence."* For our purposes, it helps explain how traumatic events, whether due to war, state and street violence, domestic abuse, and or stress can create a cascade of cellular and DNA changes that make one more susceptible and vulnerable to a host of illnesses-including PTSD, depression and other mental illnesses, as well as possibly autoimmune and lifestyle illnesses such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and others. (Degruy 2017, Tutashinda 2012).

The first study entails a genomic study of pregnant Rwandan women exposed to genocidal violence during their civil war in 1994. They were compared to pregnant Rwandan women living abroad who had not experienced traumatic violence. They found that the women and their offspring exposed to violence had chemical modifications to their DNA that implicated they had an increased risk of developing PTSD and other mental disorders. (Uddin, Wildman 2022) (Rivera, et al 2024).

The next is a study of Syrian grandmothers and mothers who were pregnant during their tumultuous civil war during the Assad regime. They were compared to a group of families who had immigrated to Jordan before the war in 1980. They found that not only were children of pregnant mothers having at least 14 modifications that demonstrated

"stress-induced epigenetic changes", their grandchildren did as well. Furthermore, researchers reported that people exposed to violence while in their mother's' wombs showed evidence of accelerated epigenetic aging that may be associated with susceptibility to age-related diseases. (Hamilton 2025) This is the first study that looks at the generational transmission of stress resulting in increased susceptibility to present-day illnesses and future ones as well. These studies and others all confirm what social scientists, health care providers, and public health officials have speculated for decades-that violent trauma and events can cause and underlie a host of psycho-social problems and illnesses previously labeled as "psycho-somatic" or entirely in one's mind or make believe.

These studies augment the ACE's study which found that children who experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences *"compared to those who had experienced none, had a 4 to 12 -fold increase in smoking, poor self-rated health, 50 or more sexual intercourse partners, and sexually transmitted disease; and a 1.4 to 1.6-fold increase in physical inactivity and obesity."* It additionally showed an increase in adult diseases such as heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, skeletal fractures, and liver disease. (Fellini et.al 1998)

What is promising, however, is that most, if not all the deleterious effects can be reversed with proper and consistent interventions-not only in children, but adults as well. The human nervous system shows a remarkable degree of neuroplasticity. Healing circles, one on one and group psychotherapy, holistic lifestyle changes, in addition to community support and cultural activities (La Cultura Cura) have been shown to be effective supports to wellness and healing. (Lipton 2016, Carrillo, Saucedo, Tello, et al 2017)

References

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