

MEDIA RELEASE

The high cost of childhood trauma: new report

27 July 2016: Childhood trauma can cause longer-term developmental and life outcomes, and increased risk for poorer psychological health and behavioural functioning among children and adults, according to a report released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The report, *Childhood trauma: Developmental pathways and implications for the classroom* by ACER Research Fellow Mollie Tobin, reveals that the long-term effects of trauma include increased risk for developing internalising disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety, as well as the earlier onset and longer duration of depression.

Trauma is also associated with an increased risk of co-occurring externalising disorders in children, such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, problem drug use, aggression, self-harm and suicide, the report reveals.

According to the report, the third in the ACER series, *Changing Minds: Discussion in neuroscience, psychology and education*, a strong body of research in health epidemiology and neurobiology has established a link between childhood traumatic experiences and a variety of health and behavioural outcomes in adulthood.

“Cumulative or increasing trauma exposure during childhood shows an increased risk for difficulties in adulthood, such as substance abuse, psychological disorders and physical complaints,” *Changing Minds* series editor and ACER Research Fellow Dr Kate Reid said.

The report highlights the important role of educators in supporting traumatised children, which may ameliorate the impact of trauma on children’s classroom experiences.

“One of the issues the report highlights is that, unfortunately, traumatised children may feel teachers do not understand their needs, and school supports may decline over time,” Dr Reid said.

“Nevertheless, it also explores the essential role of teachers and other mentors in helping traumatised children, through intense and regular positive social interactions, to re-establish normal functioning of body and brain stress-response systems.

“It is important for educators working with traumatised children to understand how development can be affected by childhood trauma and how to support resilience.”

The report, *Childhood trauma: Developmental pathways and implications for the classroom* by Mollie Tobin is the third in the ACER series, *Changing Minds: Discussion in neuroscience, psychology and education*. It is available at http://research.acer.edu.au/learning_processes/20

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