

Poverty: The Risk to Children's Mental Health

Authors : Steven Walker

Abstract : This paper assesses recent data on the prevalence of poverty among children and young people diagnosed with mental health problems. The paper will demonstrate that the current hierarchy of risk factors for developing mental health problems needs adjusting to place poverty among the highest risk factors. Globally poverty is calculated to keep rising especially among less developed countries, and the post-Covid 19 economic recession in developed countries is set to rise. The experience of young people enduring Pandemic isolation is already being quantified and is expected to increase referrals for specialist intervention. Searches on several medical/psychological/social databases using keywords: poverty, children, mental illness were undertaken between 2018 and 2021. Worldwide, 700 million people still live in extreme poverty, half of whom are children. Children are physically and mentally disproportionately affected. Children who grow up impoverished lack the basic necessities they need to survive and thrive. 150 million children have been plunged into multidimensional poverty due to COVID-19. The poorest children are twice as likely to die in childhood than their wealthier peers. For those growing up in humanitarian crises such as Ukraine, the risks of deprivation and exclusion are magnified. In the world's richest countries, one in seven children still live in poverty. Currently, one in four children in the European Union are at risk of falling into poverty. In Europe the impact of Brexit on the UK economy is predicted to reduce GDP by 5% in 2021 with a corresponding rise in poverty. According to the global charity Oxfam wealth inequality impacts levels of child abuse and affects women and girls worse and is a contributory factor in the risk of developing childhood mental illness. In the UK 2000 Foodbanks have opened since 2010, handing out 2 million food parcels annually, where there are currently 4 million children officially living in poverty. This research demonstrates that there is a strong association between families' socio-economic circumstances and the chances that their children will experience mental illness. Evidence of this association is found repeatedly across developed countries. The paper will conclude by arguing that psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, social workers and CAMHS specialists need to place more importance on this critical socio-economic variable when assessing referred children and also advocate for political priorities in governments to reduce poverty and lower the risk of childhood mental illness.

Keywords : poverty, resilience, risk factor, socio economic, susceptibility

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