

Report for the Faculty of Paediatric Neuropsychology Annual Symposium
2014 – ‘Brain Development and Early Adversity’

I would like to thank the Foundation for Professionals in Services to Adolescents for their generous grant which enabled me to travel to, and attend this conference. This one-day event took place at the Guildhall, Winchester, in January 2014.

The conference was aimed at professionals working with children and young people who have experienced early adversity. The following topics were covered by the keynote speakers;

- Recovery from Severe Deprivation: The role of relationships (Professor Charley Zeanah, Tulane University, New Orleans) – This presentation focussed on a study of Romanian children who were raised in institutional care or fostered. The data showed that secure attachment significantly mediates many effects of psychopathology, and those children placed earlier demonstrated significantly better outcomes at follow-ups. On a neuronal level, those children raised in the institutional settings were not receiving the input required to develop their brains – the absence of input being important to note (rather than traumatic input, i.e. physical abuse).

- A comprehensive program for maltreated Infants & Toddlers (Also delivered by Professor Charley Zeanah) – This talk highlighted the ‘New Orleans Intervention’ which is a comprehensive, multi-modal approach to children and young people at risk of/or removed from their parent’s care. This approach focusses simultaneously on the child, foster parents *and* biological parents.

- The Neurobiology and genetics of childhood maltreatment (Dr Eamon McCrory) – Research exploring how the experience of maltreatment shapes neurocognitive systems in individuals, thus elevating their risk of long-term mental health problems, as little is currently known about the functional impact of maltreatment on brain development. Genetic and epigenetic factors were explored – highlighting that the same genes can be expressed differently, and the possibility of some individuals having a genetic vulnerability to some mental health difficulties.

- Neglect & its neglect (Dr Graham Music) – Detailed neglect and the impact of neglect on young people, both in respect of their neurological development and emotional well-being. Advocated a ‘spectrum’ of neglect and encouraged practitioners to bear the impact of neglect on young people in mind, as often (as a result of the neglect) these young people often do not interact with the world or ‘send out signals of development’.

All of the presentations delivered by the keynote speakers were extremely interesting, and relevant to some of the children and young people I see, who will have experienced maltreatment in their lives. Once again I would like to thank the Foundation for Professionals in Services to Adolescents as without their support I would not have been able to attend the conference.

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