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"Do children who experience neglect differ significantly from children who experience other traumas relative to developmental delays?"

Background: Child Neglect, defined by Child Welfare (Department of Children & Family Services, 2024) is any inaction or action of a caregivers to meet their children's basic needs. Child neglect can significantly prevent children from achieving milestones crucial for their overall well-being by impacting socio-emotional development (Peterson, 2014). It can also lead to poor neurodevelopmental problems, including communication delays (Passmore, 2022). The current study aimed to examine whether children's experiences of neglect impacted their development within a sample of children who had been in the foster care system.

Methods: Using data from the LSUHSC Infant Team, 334 children in foster care were analyzed using the Pearson Chi-Square Test to test if neglected children had higher rates of developmental delay compared to others in the sample. Later, a subsample was analyzed using the One-Way ANOVA Test to explore the hypothesis that neglected children would score lower on a developmental screener, Deveraux's Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) compared to children exposed to other traumas.

Results: The first analysis showed no significant association between the type of trauma that a child experienced and the child presenting with developmental delays. Within the subsample, the One-Way ANOVA found a significant difference between the three groups. The Tukey post hoc test found that children who experienced Neglect had significantly lower DECA scores than children who were Physically Abused, with no statistical difference between any of the other pairings.

Discussion: The first analysis did not yield significant results perhaps because "developmental delays" was treated as a categorical (yes/no) variable. The three traumas analyzed (Neglect, Physical/Sexual Abuse, and Drugs in Utero) perhaps lead to different developmental rates that the analysis did not capture. The second analysis found that young neglected children had significantly lower DECA scores, highlighting neglect's severe impact on development. There was no significant difference in DECA scores between neglected children and those exposed to drugs in utero, perhaps due to home placement timing.

Implications: Prioritizing the prevention of neglect is imperative. Informing families about child development and the dangers of child neglect may aid in prevention. Providing support services for families who struggle with stress, addiction, and mental health issues will help these families access the resources and assistance to foster healthier environments and relationships with their children.

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