ıtion affect a child's mental health and development?

Written by: No Isolation
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Social behaviour

Social behaviour includes how an individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviour influences, and is influenced by, other people. Creating social relationships is central to human well-being, and not just due to the pure joy of being with friends, or when learning social norms. It is argued that experiencing social behaviour, and engaging in social interaction, is vital during childhood development. However, many children, for various reasons, are not able to participate in, or experience, the social behaviour that is crucial for their well-being, mental health, and development.

Photo: Ashton Bingham

The absence of social relationships and behaviours have been shown to affect child development in various ways. For example, previous research has revealed that socially isolated children tend to have lower subsequent educational attainment, be part of a less advantaged social class in adulthood, and are more likely to be psychologically distressed in adulthood (Lacey, Kumari & Bartley, 2014). This text will olation.com/global/research/what-is-social-isolation/) is closely related to ealthy development of the brain.

Human stress response

If a person is not able to experience the necessary level of social contact and behaviour, they can experience social isolation. Social relationships are critical to the maintenance of health, and a lack of them often correlates with feelings of loneliness (Doane & Adam, 2010). Loneliness, in turn, has been linked to higher levels of stress.

Photo: Luca Campioni

The primary function of the human stress response is to protect the body from the environment. When a person is socially isolated, as it is a basic human need, the body will perceive the situation as a threat. During the time of the active stress response, the brain will release multiple stress hormones to protect the body from danger. The release of these hormones is needed for the person to react towards the current stress factor, and resist the possible harm. However, the body cannot release these stress hormones and protect the body from stressful situations for unlimited time. Having an active stress response over an extended period has been proven to increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, elevated blood pressure, infectious illness, cognitive deterioration, and mortality. These are physiological consequences of being prone to stress over time, and they are typically experienced in adulthood. High levels of stress are therefore regarded as a threat to a socially isolated child's health (http://www.noisolation.com/global/research/consequences-of-social-isolation-for-children-and-adolescents/), not only in their early years of life but also in adulthood.

Brain development

As argued, socially isolated children are at increased risk of health problems in adulthood. Furthermore, studies on social isolation have demonstrated that a lack of social relationships negatively impacts the development of the brain's structure. In extreme cases of social isolation, studies of young mice and monkeys have shown how the brain is strongly affected by a lack of social behaviour and relationships (Makinodan, Rosen, Ito & Corfas, 2012).

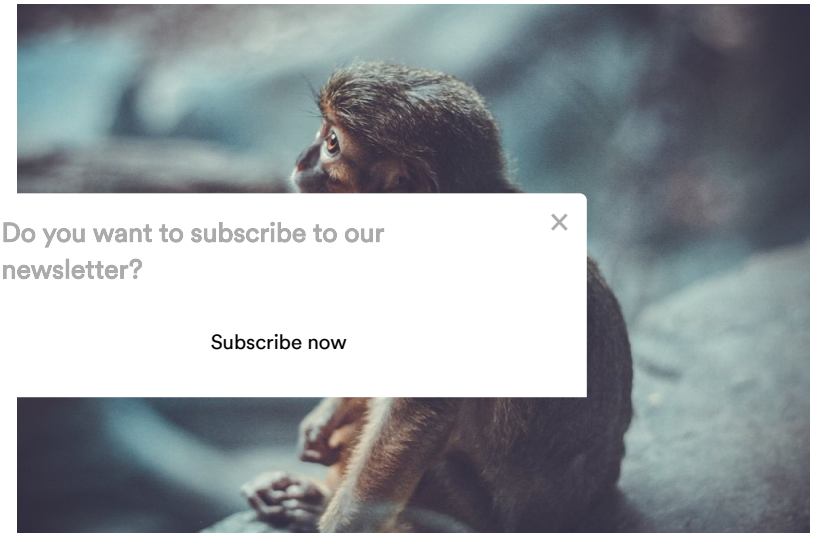

Photo: Elizaveta Korabelnikova

Early on in their development, the mice and monkeys were socially isolated for several weeks to further investigate the relationship between social isolation and physiological and cognitive functioning. The researchers found deficits in the communication chains in a type of cell called *oligodendrocytes*. In other words, these cells had impaired neuron-to-neuron (cell-to-cell) communication in the prefrontal cortex. The function of these cells is dependent on social interaction to develop the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is a part of the brain which is associated with a variety of cognitive functions, such as planning, higher-level thought, and social interaction. The researchers argue that if the development of these cells and areas of the brain are disrupted, children can also possibly develop deficits in these areas of the brain.

Social support

The studies described in this text demonstrate the importance of social interaction, and how social isolation damages not only the physiological functions of the body but also the development of the nervous system's support cells, which in turn affects the development of cognitive functioning. However, there are reasons to believe that the human need for social interaction is not only the risk factor but is also the "lifesaving factor." As previously mentioned, when the human stress response is activated, multiple stress hormones are activated. One of the hormones that are released has the function to force us into social contact. As the need for social connection is important to everyone, in a vulnerable situation, this contact is so important that our body forces us to socialise.

Photo: Jesse Orrico

Previous research has investigated how social support affects people who are prone to stress. By receiving social assistance, studies show that children can cope more easily with high levels of stress. Research has also shown that social support is strongly associated with feelings of mastery and the ability to deal with stressful situations, as well as strongly associated with increased quality of life

(Martin, Carlson & Buskist, 2009). Thus, by increasing the amount of social interaction, support, and contact they receive, children who experience social isolation avoid the potential harm of physiological illness, cognitive impairment, and feelings of loneliness.

Summary

factor for health if there is lack of it, but also how it can be a lifesaver to those damental need of human beings for social support, care, relationships, and

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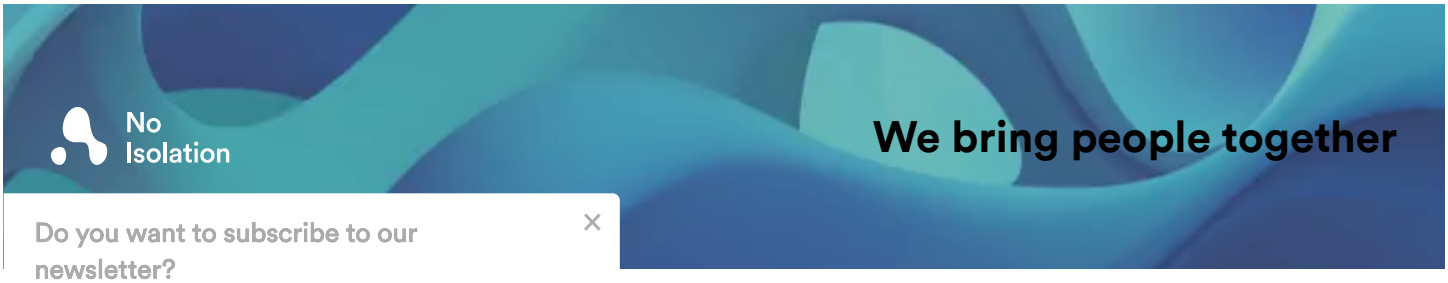

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