**Book Review: The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity**

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The book, *“The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term effects of childhood Adversity”* authored by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris is not only a personal narrative but also a medical narrative that centers on the effects of Adverse Early Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on an individual’s physical health, development, and growth, and the general well-being of an individual. *The Deepest Well* essentially analyses five major components of the science behind the ACEs in a more conceptual manner. The five major parts entail the epistemology or the theory of knowledge of ACEs that greatly inspired her, the toxic stress neurobiology resulting from the experiences given that they have neurological consequences, the long- and short-term health consequences, toxic stress impacts, and finally, the intervention measures that practitioners and other health experts can use to address the issues including screening (Harris,2018). Essentially, the story of the young child Diego, who was sexually assaulted as narrated in the book exposes the effects of childhood trauma which are devastating events leading to toxic stress that result in lifelong illness. The types of toxic stress covered in the book entail emotional neglect, repeated stress abuse among other types of stress. The ACE study which was conducted between the years of 1995 -1975 greatly brought new insights helping Nadine to understand that Diego's symptoms could be traced to his early experiences.

Dr. Nadine Burke Harris is a renowned pediatrician and physician born in the year 1975 in Vancouver, one of the major cities in western Canada. Nadine also has Jamaican origin, given that she managed to live in the country of Jamaica before the family relocated to America when she was barely four years old. Nadine has both parents, with her father being a biochemist and her mother a nurse. Concerning her education, Nadine studied at the University of California where she graduated with a degree in integrative biology in 1996. She completed her pediatrics studies at the Stanford University School of Medicine. Harris began her physician career in 2008, where she worked at the California Pacific Medical Center specifically coming with programs to mitigate health disparities. In the year 2011she served as a committee member in the Project Advisory Committee precisely dealing with the issues of resilience. In the year 2010, she co-founded the Early Childhood Experience project, efforts that led to the creation of the Center for Youth Wellness. Under these projects, she embarked on preventing the chemical and neurodevelopmental outcomes of severe childhood experiences. From the year 2019 Harris has been serving as the general surgeon in California. Given her outstanding works and expertise, she has received awards including the Arnold P. Gold Foundation Humanism in Medicine Award (Harris,2018). Her struggles to unravel what was happening to her young clients in Clinical Health Center in Francisco became a force that changed her medical practice. Additionally, her reading of Dr. Vincent Felliti, “[Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9635069)”, shaped her practice as she managed to realize that the traumatic experiences encountered by the patients were a devastating impact on both the current and future health.

*The Deepest Well* exposes the important issue of childhood trauma that has great consequences and reveals the link between toxic stress and lifetime illnesses. Harriss came to understand and learn about the childhood trauma through encountering Diego, a seven-year-old boy. This was when she was practicing at the Bayview Child Health Center in San Francisco. Regarding the story, Diego had stopped growing though he also had other health complications including asthma and behavior issues. Through discussion, she came to realize the Diego had been sexually assaulted at the tender age of four years. This revelation made her realize that the patients especially kids that have the worst history of childhood adversity, manifested severe symptoms and signs. However, this points to the need for thorough research to establish the connection and link between the trauma that people encounter earlier in their lives and illness later in their lives. She said that “with every Diego that I saw, the gnawing in my stomach got worse” (Harris,2018). The story of the young boy changed her perception of treating patients and she began to strongly advocate for early screening for the adversities. Through this, she believed that the children would grow up and become healthy adults who will be very productive. She, therefore, sets the foundation upon which other health experts can use to advocate for more intervention in our society today.

*The Deepest Well* examines deeply the Adverse Child Experience, a study which was conducted between the years of 1995-1997 by the Center for Disease Control. The objective of the study was to investigate why certain diseases were not spread randomly in a population yet were just common diseases. This means that terminal illness risk factors were concentrated on only a given group of people. For instance, chronic illnesses were common in America than in any other place. The results of the study were that exposure to childhood adversities and traumatic experiences including emotional, mental abuse, emotional neglect may lead to the development of chronic illnesses such as severe lung complications, liver diseases, and the dreaded cancer disease. These chronic diseases however develop later in the life of the person (Harris,2018). Generally, the idea behind the adversity exposure takes a certain trend and unfolds progressively. Exposure to the traumatic experience usually interferes with neurodevelopment which goes ahead to destroy the emotional and social development of an individual. Additionally, it results in cognitive impairments. The outcome is the health risk behavior that ultimately leads to serious complications including disability and diseases. Moreover, the adoption of the behavior leads to social problems that lead to premature death. *The Deepest Well* outlines how the study outcome shaped the medical practice of Harris. Since the study exposed that there exists some biological link between the early traumatic experience and individual health at a later point in their lives, Harris understood that Diego's symptoms and signs could be traced and blamed to his early experiences. She, therefore, began screening for the ACEs as well as advocating for the adoption of screening in pediatric healthcare.

*The Deepest Well,* in addition to the facts and ideas already discussed, elaborates the connection and the relationship between the ACEs and toxic stress in addition to how toxic stress influences and changes our biology and health. Ideally, encountering many of the ACEs without support results in toxic stress. Toxic stress affects how the body fights diseases. The intense activation of the stress responses particularly for a longer period result in health damage (Harris,2018). Additionally, they interfere with the various systems in the body including the cardiovascular, metabolic regulatory systems as well as immune systems, thus interfering with the effective brain development of a child. The stress response systems are triggered by the Aces. Moreover, toxic stress has neurobiological, immunological as well as hormonal consequences that change and interferes with brain development. With this in consideration, toxic stress is usually linked to several health issues including brain development complications. The impaired brain development leads to a rise in the levels of anxiety in addition to mood and behavior impairments. Overall, toxic stress interferes with our general well-being and quality of life.

*The Deepest Well,* in addition to the revelation about toxic stress, highlights the different types of toxic stress that have devastating consequences on the life of individuals. Harris elaborates on the stress of abuse which takes the shape of physical, mental, and emotional abuse. These kinds of abuse cause trauma on the child and given the neurobiological aspect, result in poor brain development as well as behavioral problems (Harris,2018). The stress of neglect, particularly emotional neglect, is also another type of stress that leads to the development of chronic illness in addition to premature deaths among people. Moreover, the stress of parents who are battling mental health issues and substance abuse are concrete stress that adversely affects the development of the brain. This essentially develops over time and the individuals who experience the severe trauma have a greater chance of suffering from such terminal illnesses as cancer.

Harris in *The Deepest Well* puts forward a raft of amicable solutions that can be handy in managing both ACE as well as toxic stress. The various antidotes for managing toxic stress that Harris puts forward include having caregivers who are safe, nurturing, and stable. She argued that the stable caregivers would form the epigenetic force, that would shield the children against the adverse effects of trauma and toxic stress. Moreover, she argued that education, in the form of informing the children about trauma, would be crucial. This knowledge will not only help those who suffer from toxic stress, but also the who are not. The ACE screening will also help in elimination of toxic stress since it will help in early treatment. This information will help the health professionals to come up with policies and procedures for managing toxic stress and other childhood adversity issues. (Harris,2018). Overall, *The Deepest Well has* satisfactorily shown how the ACEs can negatively affect life sometimes in such an early stage before even a child can learn to articulate even a word properly. Given the risk of toxic stress and its consequences, the information can be applied in the juvenile law society.

Reference

Harris, N. B. (2018). *The deepest well: Healing the long-term effects of childhood adversity*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.