

The Family Room

By: Dr. Roy Don Whitehead

Abuse Affects the Physical Structure of the Brain

Maryann's father had been physically abusive to her and her sisters when they were children. (All characters were fictional.) She could also remember him hollering at and hitting her mother.

Now Maryann was married to a man who was abusing her. She could not seem to get away from him.

"I have left him four times," Maryann told her counselor, "but I always go back. He tells me he will change, and I believe him. After I am home for a week or two, the abuse starts all over again. What is wrong with me that I can't stay away from him?"

Part of Maryann's difficulty can be explained by the pattern in her life that was begun by her father. Having endured abuse as a child, she was accustomed to it. It was not pleasant, but at least it was familiar. By staying with her husband, she was following the pattern that her mother and father had set for her.

Recent medical research shows that there may be more to Maryann's problem than just a psychological pattern, however.

Dr. Robert Walker, of the University of Kentucky Center for Alcohol and Drug Research, reports that abuse has adverse effects on the human brain.

Survivors of trauma, such as war and abuse, may show a cell loss at the part of the brain known as the hippocampus.

The hippocampus is involved in learning, memory, mood and emotion.

Researchers have long known that trauma, such as abuse affected the chemistry of the brain, but now the evidence is in that trauma also affects the actual structure of the brain. The hardware of the brain is changed by abuse.

When Maryann asks "what is wrong with me?" she may be closer to the truth than she realizes. The abuse that she has endured throughout her life may have affected the capacity of her brain to function.

Her thinking ability may not be as sharp as she is as that of someone who was not a victim of abuse. This impaired reasoning ability affects her as she makes the decision about whether to go back to or stay away from her husband.

Those of us who work with victims of domestic violence sometimes become frustrated when they return to abusive situations. This recent research should give us pause about becoming too impatient with them.

What they have been through may have affected their reasoning ability.

Instead of frustration, patience is the watchword for those who work with victims of abuse.

It may take them longer than it would someone else to hold onto the conclusion that they need to stay out of an abusive relationship.

Patience on the part of counselors and advocates is not the only hope for those whose brains may have been affected by abuse.

A recent study at Yale University reports that continued use of antidepressant medication leads to new cell growth in the hippocampus.

Dr. Ronald Duman, M.D., professor of psychiatry and pharmacology at Yale puts it this way, "...in patients with depression or post-traumatic stress syndrome there is a decrease in volume of the hippocampus."

The results of our study demonstrate that antidepressant can reverse or block further loss of neurons in the hippocampus by increasing new cell growth." Results were seen after fourteen to twenty-eight days on the medication.

There is hope for all those affected by the trauma of abuse. Patience and understanding from domestic violence workers along with medication can help them recover from the negative effects.

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"WHAT IS WRITTEN"

"I was listening the other day on the car radio, and a woman makes a passing comment about an infant being baptized, she said the baby 'won't even know' what was going on." Now this should help us to see the error of this practice among some of the denominations.

So here is a baby that is being "baptized" but doesn't even "know" what is going on. So how could this be helping the baby to "baptize" her? We read, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16:16. Jesus said that one is to believe and be baptized. Not, be baptized and believe later on in life. Could a baby that "won't even know" what is going on be counted as a believer? We read, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 2:38. Peter said one was to repent and then to be baptized. What are little babies to repent of? Has anyone ever seen little babies repent? They don't even "know" anything about repentance. How would you go about explaining and teaching them repentance? (1st 2:47) No beloved, folks have erred in this practice.

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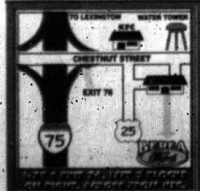
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