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Learned Helplessness and Domestic Violence

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Abstract

Domestic violence can affect anyone, regardless of gender, age, race, social status, or sexual orientation. A phenomenon known as learned helplessness may play a role in why victims of domestic violence remain in those unsafe environments. Learned helplessness (LH) is a psychological trait, which results from repeated exposure to uncontrollable and aversive events. LH contributes to submissiveness and reluctance to leave an abusive relationship. LH can develop from childhood experiences and circumstances, such as controlling, authoritarian, and demanding parents. LH can also develop during adulthood and whilst in abusive relationships, as the victims are often led to believe by the perpetrators that they deserve such treatment and are “lucky” to have someone who stays with them and puts up with their many flaws.

Key Points

- Learned helplessness (LH) can be easier to spot during childhood years, parents devalue the performance of their children and emphasize their failures.
- LH traits evolve as does the child and they translate from school to personal, financial, and ethical fields which then continue into adulthood.
- Bulldozer and helicopter parents are very similar as they are overly involved in their children's lives, thus often robbing them of valuable developmental experiences.
- Authoritarian, controlling, and demanding parents often set high expectations for their children and rarely praise their efforts, continuing to expect more from them.
- Victims of domestic violence often develop helpless traits.



Luenendonk, 2020

Conclusion

Learned helplessness is something that can develop at any age and affects a person's self-esteem and sense of self-worth. The belief that they do not deserve better, or that they will never find someone who loves their flawed selves will often influence the victim's decision to remain in abusive relationships. A child is likely develop this sense of helplessness as a result of certain parenting styles that are either be too demanding or too controlling, thus harming the child's growth. Learned helplessness is a very dangerous trait to possess when in an abusive relationship as victims are likely to feel a huge loss of control over their life, resulting in the decision not to seek help.



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