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Can childhood trauma impact the adult voice through the brain?

ABSTRACT

There is considerable evidence that childhood trauma can affect the whole brain. In a related perspective, studies on brain and voice suggest that it takes a whole brain to produce a voice. Indeed, phonation is highly interconnected with activity at all cerebral levels, from brainstem to cortex, and within all cerebral systems, including limbic, motor, sensorial and cognitive. The authors of this article inquire whether and to what extent it is possible that childhood trauma has an effect on the voice through its influence on the brain. We specifically propose that childhood abuse and neglect could potentially affect voice quality in the adult individual through its effects on brain function leading to measurable physiological sequelae. Findings from voice studies are reviewed to support this proposal.

KEYWORDS

childhood trauma
voice
brain
psychophysiology
abuse
self

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Any effect on vocal characteristics in the adult speaker portends substantial implications for social functioning. The voice transmits a vast repository of information on every utterance. Cues signalling attitude, mood, personality,