

Child Sexual Abuse: A Model of Chronic Trauma

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ALTHOUGH there is a general consensus among concerned professionals that exposure to community violence is likely to be stressful and may contribute significantly to immediate and long-term mental health problems, there is virtually no empirical research on either its acute or enduring effects. In the absence of data, investigators planning research in this area must look to other studies of the impact of chronic environmental trauma on children, including the effects of war and child maltreatment. Research on child abuse provides an important source of information on the effects of trauma on children because it draws on both prospective and retrospective studies crossing a variety of theoretical perspectives and disciplines. The existence of data on both the acute impact of abuse on children and its chronic effects and outcomes in adults informs the generation of developmentally based psychological and biological hypotheses. This paper utilizes data from research on the acute and chronic effects of sexual abuse to discuss three broad hypotheses that may be relevant to the study of the effects of community violence on children.