

# **The Classroom Performance and Behavior of Sexually Abused Females**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the relationship of child sexual abuse to classroom academic performance and behavior in a sample of 6—16 year-old girls. Half of the sample was sexually abused by a family member. The other half is a demographically similar nonabused comparison group. Measures of academic performance include school records, teacher's ratings of classroom behavior and performance, and parental reports of school performance. Possible mediators of the impact of sexual abuse on classroom performance and behavior—cognitive capability, perceived competence, and behavior problems—are also measured. Results can be summarized as follows. (a) A history of sexual abuse does predict academic performance: Abuse is directly negatively related to ratings of classroom social competence, competent learner, and overall academic performance and positively related to school avoidant behavior, but is not related to grades. (b) Sexual abuse is negatively related to cognitive ability and positively related to measures of behavior problems indicating depression, destructiveness, and dissociation. (c) Cognitive ability and perceived competence predict the more “academic” aspects of academic performance—grades, ratings as a competent learner, and overall academic performance. Behavior problems predict ratings as a competent learner, classroom social competence, school avoidant behavior, and overall academic performance.