

Does Childhood Sexual Abuse Set in Motion a Cycle of Violence Against Women? What We Know and What We Need to Learn

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This article reviews evidence for the deleterious effects of childhood sexual abuse on female development in both the acute and long-term phases. Taken in aggregate, there is evidence to suggest a persistent cycle of violence perpetrated against women that begins in childhood in the form of sexual abuse, reemerges later in adolescence and early adulthood in the form of physical assault or sexual revictimization, and ultimately places the next generation at considerable risk for victimization. The differential effect of the characteristics of sexual abuse and the wide variation in the onset and developmental course of symptoms are underscored. The need for adequate models elucidating mechanisms behind this continued cycle of violence is discussed.

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