The long-term impact of the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children: A community study

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Abstract: The associations between giving a history of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in children and a range of mental health, interpersonal, and sexual problems in adult life were examined in a community sample of women. Abuse was defined to establish groups giving histories of unequivocal victimization. A history of any form of abuse was associated with increased rates of psychopathology, sexual difficulties, decreased self-esteem, and interpersonal problems. The similarities between the three forms of abuse in terms of their association with negative adult outcomes was more apparent than any differences, though there was a trend for sexual abuse to be particularly associated to sexual problems, emotional abuse to low self-esteem, and physical abuse to marital breakdown. Abuse of all types was more frequent in those from disturbed and disrupted family backgrounds. The background factors associated with reports of abuse were themselves often associated to the same range of negative adult outcomes as for abuse. Logistic regressions indicated that some, though not all, of the apparent associations between abuse and adult problems was accounted for by this matrix of childhood disadvantage from which abuse so often emerged.

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