



## The role of trauma symptoms in the development of behavioral problems in maltreated preschoolers

Milot, T., Ethier, L. S., St-Laurent, D., & Provost, M. A. (2010). *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 34(4), 225-234.  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20303174>



Civilian-  
Focused  
Article



*This study evaluated the role of trauma symptoms (i.e., re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyper arousal) in the development of behavioral problems (i.e., internalizing and externalizing) in maltreated preschoolers within the preschool setting.*

### Key Findings:

- Boys showed more internalizing (i.e., anxiety, depression) and externalizing behavior problems (i.e., aggression) than girls, and younger children scored higher on measures of PTSD symptoms.
- Children of mothers with lower levels of education showed more internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Children of younger mothers showed more externalizing problems.
- Results revealed that trauma symptoms fully mediated the association between maltreatment and behavior problems. Specifically, children experiencing maltreatment only exhibited internalizing and externalizing behaviors when they had trauma symptoms.

### Implications for Programs:

- Interventions targeting maltreated children with behavior problems should use many different approaches to address the traumatic experience both the related stress and symptoms of trauma
- Therapeutic interventions should focus on the development of a secure relationship between the therapist and the traumatized child, in the case of maltreatment the parent-child relationship may be disrupted.
- Intervention strategies should also target the family and aim to improve the quality of the parent-child relationship

### Implications for Policies:

- Screening children for trauma symptoms could be integrated into case-management for child maltreatment cases, beginning as early as pre-school.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Given the small sample size among a homogenous population, these results should be replicated in a larger, more diverse sample (e.g., demographic variables such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, not only youth receiving sports physicals).
- Future longitudinal research including pre- and post-tests is needed to assess the developmental effects of maltreatment as children grow and mature.

Prepared by Military REACH Team.

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## Background Information

### Methodology:

- This study surveyed preschool teachers of children ( $N = 98$ ) from economically disadvantaged families living in Québec, Canada, to assess the role of trauma symptoms in the link between child maltreatment and behavioral problems (authors used structural equation modeling). Maltreated children were recruited from Child Protection Agencies.
- This study focused on civilian preschool children.

### Participants:

- 34 maltreated and 64 non-maltreated children with a mean age of 60 months (range: 46 to 72 months) participated.
- Participants were 100% French-speaking Caucasians living in Québec, Canada.

### Limitations:

- Conclusions based on a small, homogenous sample may not be appropriate for the larger population.
- Direction of effects cannot be established in this model.
- Outcome measures used, specifically the TSYCY (teacher report) has established psychometrics; however, clinical interviews may be a more sensitive measure of the evaluation of trauma in children.

## Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★☆☆
Research Methods					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
Limitations					Quality Rating:
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★★★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★☆☆
Implications					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★☆☆

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