

Theoretical Models of Understanding the Outcome of Adverse Childhood Experience

Summary

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as abuse or exposure to family violence have been empirically proven to be associated with poor individual health and poorer quality of life throughout the lifespan. This systematic literature review and meta-analysis searched five electronic databases reporting the association between adverse childhood experiences and long-term health outcomes. Articles were selected that included individuals with at least four experienced ACEs as well as sufficient data for meta-analysis (at least four populations). Included studies focused on adults aged 18–65 years with a sample size of at least 100 subjects. Studies based on high-risk or clinical populations were excluded. The understanding of the etiology of ACE is the result of relatively recent systematic research, mostly on child abuse and neglect, therefore the knowledge so far has not been consolidated into a unique and generally accepted theoretical model. What has yet to emerge is an integrative model that will encompass all of the short-term neurobiological and behavioral responses to the stress of childhood abuse and/or family dysfunction that disrupt developmental systems.

Key Words: *ecological-transactional models; neurosciences; cumulative risk; life course perspective*