

Journal of Pediatric Psychology Advance Access originally published online on June 8, 2006

Journal of Pediatric Psychology 2007 32(3):309-318; doi:10.1093/jpepsy/jsl005

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Parental Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms as a Moderator of Child's Acute Biological Response and Subsequent Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Pediatric Injury Patients

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▶ Abstract

Objective To examine how parental responses following pediatric injury may influence their child's posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS). **Methods** Heart rate (HR) from 82 pediatric injury patients was measured during emergency medical services (EMSs) transport and following hospital admission. Twelve-hour urinary cortisol levels were assessed upon admission. Child PTSS and parental PTSS and general distress were assessed 6 weeks and 6 months after trauma.

Results Six-week parental PTSS predicted 6-month child PTSS even after controlling for demographics and general parent distress ($\Delta R^2 = .08, p = .03$). Parental PTSS moderated the relationship between (a) child cortisol levels and 6-

month child PTSS ($\Delta R^2 = .08, p = .03$) and between (b) hospital HR and 6-month child PTSS ($\Delta R^2 = .09, p = .03$).


Conclusion The present findings suggest that parental response to trauma may interact with child acute physiological responses to predict persistent child PTSS.

Key words: acute predictors; children; parents; posttraumatic stress disorder.

Received September 28, 2005; revision received February 8, 2006; revision received April 3, 2006; accepted April 3, 2006

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