

Predicting Children's Early Responses to Trauma:
Preliminary Findings From a Brief Longitudinal Evaluation of Acute PTSD Symptoms

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Abstract

Little is known about children's early reactions to traumatic events. The present study explored risk factors associated with acute PTSD symptoms in children presenting to hospital after single-incident trauma. Children ($N = 30$) and parents were assessed 2 weeks (Time 1; T1) and 8 weeks (Time 2; T2) post-trauma. PTSD symptoms, perceived threat of death, trauma-related unhelpful cognitions, subjective fear during trauma, heart rate, and parental anxiety were measured at both time points. Cognitive factors uniquely explained approximately 25% and 13% of the variance in T1 and T2 trauma symptoms, respectively. The relationships between both T1 perceived threat to life and T1 PTSD symptoms, and T1 and T2 PTSD symptoms, were partially mediated by unhelpful cognitions. Elevated heart rate at T1 was significantly associated with T2 PTSD symptoms. The results demonstrate the importance of cognitive factors within a psychobiological conceptualisation of acute trauma reactions in children.