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The Behavioral and Biological Residue of Childhood Adversity

Dr. Gregory Miller

Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia

Thursday, September 8th, 2011

8:00am - 9:00am

Vancouver General Hospital, Paetzold HEC Auditorium, Jim Pattison Pavilion, with videolink to St. Paul's Hospital, Hurlburt Auditorium

Abstract: Children who are exposed to social and economic adversity in the early years of life show increased susceptibility to the chronic diseases of aging when they reach their 50's and 60's. These findings raise a difficult mechanistic question: How does early adversity "get under the skin" in a manner that is sufficiently persistent to affect vulnerability to diseases that arise many decades later? In this lecture I will discuss findings from our ongoing research, which suggest that early adversity is programmed into cells of the immune system at the level of the genome, resulting in a pro-inflammatory phenotype that probably contributes to the chronic diseases of aging. I also will discuss newer findings which identify the family context as a powerful moderator of these effects, such that high levels of maternal warmth in early life can offset the pro-inflammatory residue of childhood adversity.

Bio: Dr. Miller is co-director of the Psychobiological Determinants of Health Laboratory. After receiving a Ph.D. in clinical psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, he completed a clinical internship at Western Psychiatric Institute & Clinic, followed by a post-doctoral fellowship in health psychology at Carnegie Mellon University. Dr. Miller joined the faculty of Washington University in Saint Louis July 2000 and after three years there, accepted his current position at the University of British Columbia, where he is Professor of Psychology.

For more information please contact Elishah Velji at: Elishah.Velji@hli.ubc.ca or 604.806.8586



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