

Childhood harms can lead to lung cancer

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Adverse events in childhood have been linked to an increase in the likelihood of developing lung cancer in later life. Researchers writing in the open access journal *BMC Public Health* describe how the link is partly explained by raised rates of cigarette smoking in victims of childhood trauma, but note that other factors may also be to blame.

David Brown and Robert Anda, from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), Atlanta, USA, worked with a team of researchers to study the effects of abuse (emotional, physical, sexual), witnessing domestic violence, parental separation, or growing up in a household where people were mentally ill, substance abusers, or sent to prison. He said, "Adverse childhood experiences were associated with an increased risk of [lung cancer](#), particularly [premature death](#) from lung cancer. Although smoking behaviours, including early smoking initiation and heavy smoking, account for the greater part of this risk, other mechanisms or pathophysiologic pathways may be involved".

Adverse event information was collected from 17,337 people between 1995 and 1997. Brown and his colleagues followed up on the medical records of these same people to study lung cancer rates in 2005. According to Brown, "Compared to those who claimed no [childhood trauma](#), people who experienced six or more traumas were about three times more likely to have lung cancer, identified either through hospitalization records or mortality records. Of the people who developed, or died of, lung cancer, those with six or more adverse events in childhood were roughly 13 years younger at presentation than those with none. People who had experienced more adverse events in

childhood showed more smoking behaviors".

The central message of this study is that our children can be faced with a terrible burden of stressors. These stressors are associated with harmful behaviours, such as smoking, that may lead the development of diseases like lung cancer and perhaps death at younger ages. Reducing the burden of adverse childhood experiences should therefore be considered in health and social programs as a means of primary prevention of lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases.

More information: Adverse childhood experiences are associated with the risk of lung cancer: a prospective cohort study, David W Brown, Robert F Anda, Vincent J Felitti, Valerie J Edwards, Ann Marie Malarcher, Janet B Croft and Wayne H Giles, *BMC Public Health* (in press), www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpublichealth/

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