

# Child sexual abuse: A risk factor for pregnancy

March 25 2010

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A new study carried out by Prof. Rachel Lev-Wiesel and Dr. Tzachi Ben Zion has found that women who were victims of sexual abuse in childhood reported higher levels of depression and symptoms of post-trauma during pregnancy.

Sexual abuse in childhood increases the chances of high-risk pregnancy, shows a new study conducted by Prof. Rachel Lev-Wiesel, Head of the Graduate School of Creative Arts Therapies at the University of Haifa, Lee Yampolsky and Dr. Tzachi Ben Zion, Deputy Director of Soroka Hospital. "Even when a woman willingly and happily commences a pregnancy, it seems that the body relates the sexual act that created the pregnancy with the abuse trauma, evoking [negative feelings](#) which can then be expressed in physical and gynecological problems," Prof. Lev-Wiesel explains.

The current study examined the possibility of [sexual abuse](#) experienced in childhood triggering retraumatization during wanted pregnancy. A group of 1,830 pregnant women participating in the study were divided into high- and low-risk groups, which were further divided into three subgroups: those who were victims of child sexual abuse, those who experienced other types of trauma in childhood, and those who had experienced no notable trauma. Compared with women who had not endured any notable trauma before, those who had been sexually abused in childhood, the study shows, suffered higher levels of depression and more post-traumatic symptoms.

According to Prof. Lev-Wiesel, the main post-traumatic symptoms that these women reported were detachment and avoidance. The study also found that the more severe the child sexual abuse, the stronger the correlation between the PTS symptoms and poor [physical health](#) during [pregnancy](#). "Gynecological problems might be the body's manifestation of the child sexual abuse trauma," Prof. Lev-Wiesel explains.

"The current study's findings have important practical implications for health care providers, practitioners and obstetrical gynecologists. There is a need to recognize and address the psychological state of pregnant child sexual abuse survivors," Prof. Lev-Wiesel says. "It is also important to remember that since the screening process itself may serve as a trigger to retraumatization, a specially trained team should provide a safe environment and psychological assistance."

Provided by University of Haifa

Citation: Child sexual abuse: A risk factor for pregnancy (2010, March 25) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-03-child-sexual-abuse-factor-pregnancy.html>

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