

Seniors abused during childhood face increased risk of sleep troubles

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Suffering from parental abuse as a child increases a person's chances of having poor sleep quality in old age, according to a research article in the current issue of the [Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological and Social Sciences](#) (Volume 66B, Number 3).

An analysis of data from 877 [adults age](#) 60 years and above found that early parental emotional abuse was associated with a higher number of [sleep](#) complaints in old age. It was specifically emotional abuse — rather than physical abuse or emotional neglect — that was tied to trouble in getting a good night's sleep.

"A negative early attachment continues to exert an influence on our well being decades later through an accumulation of stressful interpersonal experiences across our lives," said Cecilia Y. M. Poon, MA, the study's lead author. "The impact of abuse stays in the system. Emotional trauma may limit a person's ability to fend for themselves emotionally and successfully navigate the social world"

The data was taken from the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States. In 1995, approximately 3,500 adults responded to questions about their childhood. A decade later, they were asked follow-up questions about sleep, relationships, and emotional distress. Poon's study looked at the answers from those age 60 and above.

During the second round of interviews, the participants were asked how often within the previous 30 day they had trouble falling asleep, woke up

during the night and had difficulty going back to sleep, woke up too early in the morning and were unable to get back to sleep, and felt unrested during the day no matter how many hours of sleep they had. Emotional abuse was assessed by asking participants how often their mother and father insulted or swore at them, sulked or refused to talk to them, stomped out of the room, did or said something to spite them, threatened to hit them, or smashed or knocked something in anger.

The same survey found that [emotional abuse](#) during childhood also was associated with poorer relationships in adulthood. Poon speculated that this lack of support, associated with stress, likely influences sleep quality.

Provided by The Gerontological Society of America

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