

Research connects early childhood with pain, depression in adulthood

February 27 2013, by Deann Gayman

(Medical Xpress)—It's common knowledge that a child who misses a meal can't concentrate in school. But what happens years down the road? Does that missed meal have any bearing on health in adulthood?

A new University of Nebraska-Lincoln study shows that missed meals in childhood can be linked to experiencing pain and depression in [adulthood](#). Depression and chronic pain are experienced by 44 percent of working-aged adults and the study shows a [correlation](#) between childhood conditions and pain and depression in adulthood.

The study by UNL [sociologist](#) Bridget Goosby examines how childhood socioeconomic disadvantages and [maternal depression](#) increase the risk of [major depression](#) and chronic pain in working-aged adults.

Goosby examined a survey of 4,339 adults from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication looking for a relationship between circumstances in childhood and physical and [mental health](#) in working-age adults. She specifically looked at data from adults 25 to 64 years old.

Goosby said she was surprised to find that experiencing [hunger](#) in childhood can lead to chronic pain and depression in adulthood.

"The most robust child socioeconomic condition was experiencing hunger," Goosby said. "Kids who missed meals have a much higher risk of experiencing pain and depression in adulthood."

Goosby said pain and depression are biologically linked in [medical literature](#) and childhood conditions are strongly correlated with the risk of experiencing depression.

"Childhood conditions that are strongly correlated with the risk of experiencing depression in adulthood, may in fact, also be similar to the childhood conditions that are correlated with chronic pain in adulthood," Goosby said.

The study also found that maternal depression had a correlation with adults having depression later in life.

"Mother's depression mattered across the board," Goosby said. "You're at a higher risk for depression and physical pain if your mother had major depression."

Goosby said she was interested in whether childhood disadvantage amplified the risk of experiencing chronic pain or depression in adulthood.

In the study, Goosby noted that those who grew up with parents with less than 12 years of education had a much higher risk of experiencing chronic pain compared to adults with more highly educated parents, a disparity that becomes evident after age 42 and grew larger over time.

"Adults with parents who have 12 or fewer years of education show substantially larger risks of experiencing chronic pain in adulthood compared to adults with more highly educated parents," Goosby said.

With this information, Goosby said she hopes policymakers will pay attention to creating more healthy family dynamics in society and that the study's results will give policymakers a reason to examine circumstances in early childhood more closely.

"They can use this information to say we have growing evidence that childhood circumstances affect adult health outcomes," she said.

"People's choices are constrained by their environments in which they live. We need to create healthy conditions for families."

The study, "Early Life Course Pathways of Adult Depression and Chronic Pain," is forthcoming in the *Journal of Health and Behavior*.

Provided by University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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