

How childhood stress can affect female fertility

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Can events you endured as a child really impact your ability to have children yourself? New research in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynecology* examines the mechanism by which adverse experiences in childhood impact female fertility.

In their paper 'Adverse [childhood](#) event experiences, fertility difficulties and [menstrual cycle](#) characteristics', Marni B. Jacobs et al. explore the hypothesis that negative experiences in childhood can result in menstrual cycle irregularities, which consequently impact fertility. They relate their hypothesis to life-history theory, which talks of balancing the preservation of one's health and the production of offspring that will survive to reproduce themselves, and theorise that "early life stressors may predispose an individual to adaptively suppress fertility when situations are less than optimal, leading to periods of fertility difficulties even following previous births."

The study examined data from 774 women of reproductive age, 195 of whom were pregnant. It analysed fertility difficulties, menstrual cycle irregularities and adverse childhood experiences, through a mixture of in-person interviews and take-home questionnaires.

Following their research, the team came to the conclusion that those women who had experienced negative events at a young age – such as "abuse, neglect, household dysfunction or parental substance abuse" – were more likely to have faced fertility difficulties and abnormal absences of menstruation lasting three months or more, and also took a

longer time to get pregnant. Their research also suggests that certain harmful [events](#) in childhood can potentially have a greater impact on fertility than others.

More information: "Adverse childhood event experiences, fertility difficulties and menstrual cycle characteristics." *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynecology* [DOI: 10.3109/0167482X.2015.1026892](#)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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