

Higher rate of hospital admissions for children living with adults with mental health conditions or alcohol dependency

May 23 2018, by Julia Short

Children who live with an adult with a mental health condition or alcohol dependency are significantly more likely to have an unplanned hospital admission, especially for injury and maltreatment, suggests a study by the National Centre for Population Health & Wellbeing Research (NCPHWR)

The study, which is the first of its kind to look at the whole population of Wales, found that hospital admissions for injuries increased by 14% for a child who lived with an adult with a mental [health](#) condition and increased by 13% for those living with a parent with an alcohol related problem.

For [emergency admissions](#) related to child maltreatment, increases were 55% for children living with an adult with a mental health problem and 44% for those living with an adult with an alcohol related problem.

The team looked at de-identified hospital [admission](#) and GP records for 253717 children living in Wales, for the first 14 years of life.

Previous studies showed that exposure to adverse childhood experiences is associated in adulthood with substance misuse, mental ill-health, obesity, heart disease, cancer, unemployment, and involvement in violence. However, little was known about the effects of exposure to adverse childhood experiences such as mental health [conditions](#) and

[alcohol misuse](#) in the family on a child's physical health.

Prof Shantini Paranjothy, Deputy Director of NCPHWR, Cardiff University, who led the research, said: "Mental disorders are common in families; with our research showing that children in one in three households are living with an adult with a mental health condition.

"Our study shows that children living in families affected by [mental health conditions](#) and alcohol misuse are more likely to have emergency admissions during childhood. This highlights the importance of providing support for these families. In addition, continued efforts should be made to address socio-economic inequalities – which our study shows are a major contributing factor to emergency hospital admissions for children."

Key findings:

1 in 3 households with infants has an adult who has or is experiencing a mental health condition.

Children living with an adult who had an mental health condition had:

- 14% increased risk of emergency admissions for injuries—including accidents, self-harm and assault
- 55% increased risk of emergency admissions for victimisation—where there is concern for the welfare of the child
- 17% increased risk of an unplanned admission for any cause

Children living with an adult who had an alcohol related problem had:

- 13% increased risk of emergency admissions for injuries
- 44% increased risk of emergency admissions for victimisation

The risk of admissions in children increases if a parent has a combination of a mental health condition and alcohol misuse.

In addition, the team also found that greater social deprivation, children born to young mothers and mothers who smoked during pregnancy also had an increased risk of A&E admissions.

Professor Mark Bellis, Director of Policy, Research and International Development at Public Health said: "Experiencing maltreatment and injury in childhood can set individuals on a health-harming life course and increase a child's own risks of developing alcohol and mental health problems as they grow up. Research like this plays a critical part in understanding how we can break this harmful cycle. This study is one part of an important collaboration between universities, Public Health and government in Wales aimed at ensuring families get the support they need and children grow up without suffering adverse childhood experiences."

Professor Ronan Lyons, Director of NCPHWR, Swansea University, added: "Research into the causes of adverse childhood experiences is a key area of work for NCPHWR. Importantly, the work carried out by Shantini and the team provides evidence that can contribute to the debate on reducing the harmful effects on [children](#) who are exposed to a parent with a mental health condition and [alcohol](#) misuse."

Provided by Cardiff University

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