

# Young adult women abused as adolescents report higher levels of pain

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Young adult women with a documented history of being maltreated as

children report higher levels of pain than women not maltreated in childhood, according to a new study.

As adults, these [young women](#), who averaged nearly 25 years of age, reported high intensity of pain, a greater number of locations of pain, and a greater likelihood to have experienced pain in the week prior to being surveyed than adults not maltreated in childhood. Maltreatment included physical, emotional and [sexual abuse](#), as well as neglect and was substantiated by child welfare records.

"Child maltreatment and post-traumatic stress symptoms in adolescence work together to increase risk of pain in young adulthood," says Sarah Beal, Ph.D., a developmental psychologist at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and lead author of the study. "The link isn't simple and could be due to an increase in inflammation, maintaining a state of high-alert in activating stress responses, or a number of other psychological or behavioral mechanisms."

The study is published online in the journal *Pain*.

The researchers recruited 477 teen women between the ages of 14 and 17 and followed them annually up to age 19. Of these women, 57 percent had experienced maltreatment. Post-[traumatic stress](#) was assessed in adolescence. Five years later, study participants were recontacted, and 383 responded. The researchers then surveyed them about their pain experiences.

"By intervening to address stress symptoms and poor coping following maltreatment, we may be able to reduce the impact of [maltreatment](#) on young adult health sequelae—at least for pain," says Dr. Beal.

Provided by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center

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