

# Maltreated children four times more likely to miss school

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A study of almost 300,000 Australian children over 12 years has revealed that those who have suffered "substantial maltreatment and neglect" are four times more likely to miss school for extended periods

than their counterparts.

Lead researcher Dr. Jason Armfield from the University of South Australia (UniSA) says almost 50 percent of children who have been abused or severely neglected had at least one school term of chronic truancy, compared to only about 10 percent of children with no involvement in the child protection system.

The children most at risk of chronic truancy—defined as 10 or more unexplained days absent in any term—are Aboriginal children and those whose mothers are younger, unemployed, who smoke, and are without a partner.

Dr. Armfield, a Senior Research Fellow in the Australian Centre for Precision Health at UniSA, says school absenteeism is substantially compounded for those children with seven or more "cumulative adversities."

The study is the largest of its kind ever undertaken internationally and has been published in the journal *Child Maltreatment*.

The researchers found that truancy was more common among children who had been severely neglected as opposed to being sexually, physically or emotionally abused.

"Severely neglected children often lack appropriate parental care and support. In terms of schooling, this can mean caregivers are not sufficiently concerned whether they attend school or not," says Dr. Armfield.

One bright note is that maltreated children who were identified by the Department for Child Protection before the age of five and placed into out-of-[home care](#) for three or more years had reduced absenteeism rates.

"This finding underlines the value of having a stable and supportive home environment, reinforcing that [early intervention](#) can be beneficial to children, reducing school absenteeism.

"Given the importance of children's schooling to their future, this study highlights the need to do better with these [vulnerable children](#) and families who have come to the attention of the child protection system," Dr. Armfield says.

"School absenteeism associated with [child protection](#) system involvement, maltreatment type, and time in out-of-home care" is published in *Child Maltreatment*.

**More information:** Jason M. Armfield et al. School Absenteeism Associated With Child Protection System Involvement, Maltreatment Type, and Time in Out-of-Home Care, *Child Maltreatment* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/1077559520907682](#)

Provided by University of South Australia

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