

# **Increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and type two diabetes later in life for child abuse survivors**

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People who have experienced maltreatment during childhood are significantly more likely to develop conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure and type two diabetes in adulthood, a new UK study has found.

Childhood maltreatment, which includes any form of physical, sexual or [emotional abuse](#) or neglect experienced by those under the age of 18, is a prevalent global public health issue thought to affect one in four children in the UK and one in three globally.

This study, led by the Universities of Birmingham and Warwick, reviewed anonymized data from 241,971 patients using [medical records](#) from GP surgeries between 1995 and 2018. 80,657 patients were identified to have a history of [childhood maltreatment](#) compared with a control group of 161,314 unexposed patients. The study is the first to use UK primary care data to explore the relationship between childhood maltreatment and cardio-metabolic [disease](#).

Results of the study, published today in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*, showed that those with a history of childhood maltreatment were 71% more likely to develop cardiovascular disease, and 42% percent more likely to develop high blood pressure as well as the risk of developing type 2 diabetes doubled. Patients were also at a 75% increased risk of dying of any other cause during the study period.

Although the research could not ascertain why this relationship exists, previous research suggests that exposure to childhood maltreatment can influence the alteration of the immune, metabolic, neuroendocrine, and the autonomic nervous system. Additionally, this group may experience

greater exposure to other risk factors which may be associated with cardio-metabolic disease.

Lead author Dr. Joht Chandan of the University of Birmingham's Institute of Applied Health Research and Warwick Medical School at the University of Warwick said "Considering the high prevalence of childhood maltreatment globally, these findings suggest a substantial, but preventable burden of cardio-metabolic disease.

"The findings are particularly notable within the United Kingdom, where conditions such as [heart disease](#), [high blood pressure](#) and type 2 diabetes pose an increasing burden on the health service. Considering that an estimated one in four children within the UK are affected by maltreatment, our findings could suggest that a significant proportion of the cardio-metabolic disease cases may be attributable to maltreatment. Therefore, there is a clear public health message that requires a population- based approach to not only prevent childhood maltreatment but also the negative consequences as a result of it."

This latest study adds to a growing body of research published by the team at the two Universities examining the physical and psychological effects of domestic abuse and [childhood](#) maltreatment. Earlier this year, the team published research that found that women who have experienced domestic abuse are 40 percent more likely to die from any cause compared to the general population while a study in 2019 found that abused or neglected children are four times more likely to develop serious mental illness.

**More information:** Joht Singh Chandan et al. Increased Cardiometabolic and Mortality Risk Following Childhood Maltreatment in the United Kingdom, *Journal of the American Heart Association* (2020). [DOI: 10.1161/JAHA.119.015855](https://doi.org/10.1161/JAHA.119.015855)

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