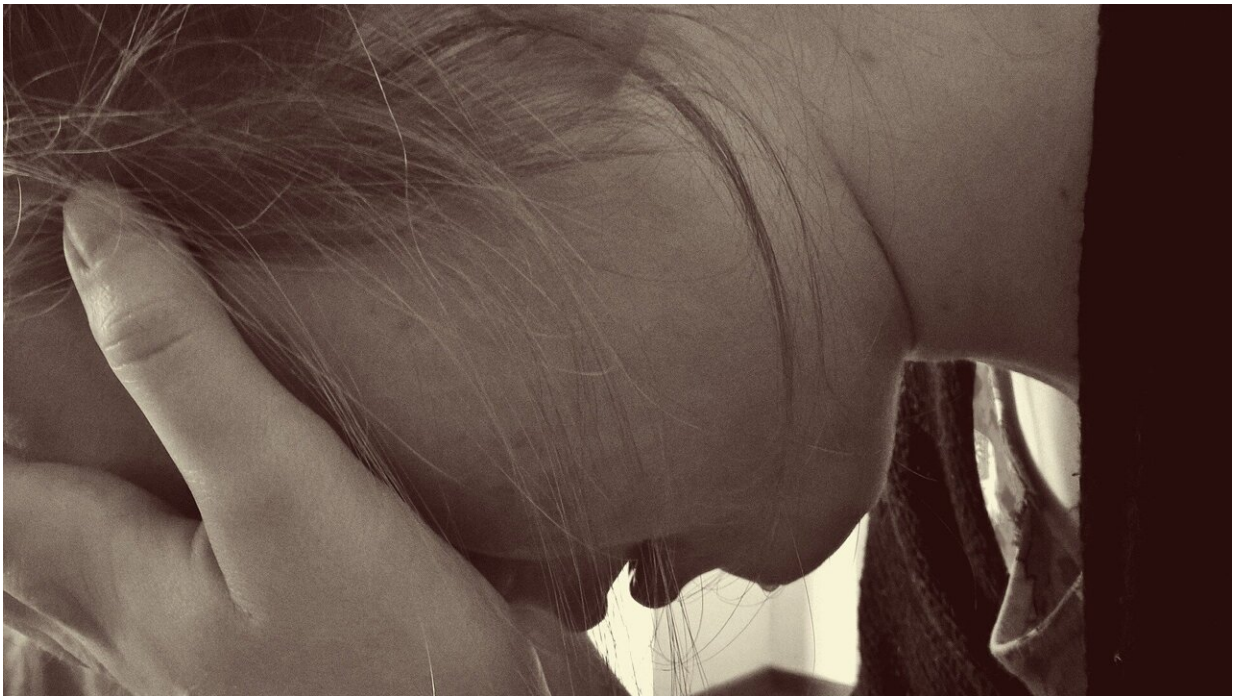


# Trauma during childhood triples the risk of suffering a serious mental disorder in adulthood, study finds

November 3 2022

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A study led by researchers at the Hospital del Mar Medical Research Institute links psychological trauma in childhood with an increased risk of developing some kind of mental disorder years later.

Suffering [psychological trauma](#) during childhood significantly increases the risk of developing a [mental disorder](#) in adulthood. Specifically, as much as three times, according to a recent study led by researchers at the Hospital del Mar Medical Research Institute, published in the journal *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*. The study analyses the fourteen reviews and meta-analyses published to date in specialized journals on this issue, and is the first to take into account the full range of existing mental disorders.

In total, the studies analyzed incorporate more than 93,000 cases, revealing a direct link between suffering psychological [trauma](#) at a pediatric age and the risk of developing a mental pathology later in life. "It is the strongest evidence to date that psychological trauma really is a risk factor for suffering a mental disorder later on," says Dr. Benedikt Amann, lead author of the study, a researcher in the Mental Health Research Group at the IMIM-Hospital del Mar and the CIBER on Mental Health (CIBERSAM).

The most common childhood traumas are emotional, physical and [sexual abuse](#), as well as emotional or physical neglect and bullying, although there are many others. Suffering one of these situations damages the brain, causing physical as well as psychological consequences in the form of various disorders. In the case of emotional abuse, the most frequent trauma is associated with the most prevalent disorder in the population, that of anxiety. But there is also a relationship between [childhood trauma](#) and other pathologies, such as psychosis, which is linked to all traumas, obsessive-compulsive disorder or bipolar disorder. The risk of suffering from [borderline personality disorder](#) increases up to fifteen times in the case of having experienced trauma during childhood.

Trauma in adulthood is also associated with a four-fold increase in the risk of a later mental disorder. The researchers point out, however, that

there is less evidence for this type of pathology.

## Study the history of the sufferer

Given these results, Bridget Hogg, a researcher at the IMIM-Hospital del Mar, psychologist and first author of the study, believes that patients need an approach that not only takes into account physical factors, but also their history. In this sense, "It is necessary to guide the patient through their life history, to really review what has happened to them. Currently, we question what isn't working, but not what has happened in their life, because this requires opening up potentially painful subjects, and it is avoided."

The study also highlights the fact that other traumas such as catastrophes, [violent deaths](#) or family abuse can affect people, generating structural and functional changes in the brain that open the door to future mental disorders.

In addition, for people with this type of pathology who have suffered previous traumas, the course of the disease is worse. For these reasons, Dr. Amann calls for action. "On the one hand, we must treat psychological trauma in our patients, but we also have to take action in the political and social spheres and invest more in prevention. For example, by educating families and setting up programs to prevent bullying, which is a very important risk factor in terms of suffering a mental disorder, both for those who receive it and for those who perpetrate it," he says.

**More information:** Bridget Hogg et al, Psychological trauma as a transdiagnostic risk factor for mental disorder: an umbrella meta-analysis, *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience* (2022). [DOI: 10.1007/s00406-022-01495-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00406-022-01495-5)

Provided by IMIM (Hospital del Mar Medical Research Institute)

Citation: Trauma during childhood triples the risk of suffering a serious mental disorder in adulthood, study finds (2022, November 3) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-11-trauma-childhood-triples-mental-disorder.html>

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