

Childhood abuse leads to poor adult health

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The psychological scars of childhood abuse can last well into adulthood. New research from Concordia University shows the harm can have longterm negative physical effects, as well as emotional ones.

Scientists hypothesize that stress in early childhood causes physiological changes that affect a victim's response to stress, which puts the individual at an increased risk of disease later in life. Jean-Philippe Gouin, who holds a Canada Research Chair in [Chronic Stress](#) and Health in Concordia's Department of Psychology, tested this link and found that early-life abuse results in physiological changes that may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease later on.

Along with colleagues from Ohio State University and the University of Missouri, Gouin looked at the body's [biological response](#) to naturally occurring stress. "We wanted to investigate whether abuse during childhood could have a lasting impact on the [physiological response](#) to stress in daily life," Gouin says. "Past research has evaluated the impact of early abuse on stress-response among young adults. We wanted to extend these findings to older adults."

The researchers spoke to 130 adults with a mean age of 65 about recent [stressful events](#) and their [childhood abuse](#) history. Participants completed an interview which assessed the occurrence of stressors in the preceding 24 hours. Some stressors included "having an argument with a partner" and "being stuck in traffic, resulting in being late for an important appointment." Blood samples were then taken from the participants to measure their levels of three biological markers.

The results of this study, which were recently published in the [Annals of Behavioral Medicine](#), found that there were marked differences between two groups in one of the three [biological markers](#). In abuse victims who reported multiple stressors in the preceding 24 hours, levels of interleukin-6 (IL-6), a protein that stimulates an immune response, were more than twice those of the participants who reported multiple daily stressors but no abuse history.

The findings from this study indicate that the impact of early-life abuse extend well into older age. "While the production of inflammatory markers such as IL-6 is essential to fight acute infection, its over-production has been associated with the development of age-related diseases, such as cardiovascular disease," says Gouin. "An exaggerated IL-6 response to daily stressors may create a physiological state that, over several years, increases the risk of developing cardiovascular disease."

Provided by Concordia University

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