

Child maltreatment linked to mental and physical health disorders in later life

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(Medical Xpress)—Child physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect is linked to mental health disorders, drug use, suicide attempts, sexually transmitted infections and risky sexual behaviour in adulthood, according to a study by researchers at The University of Queensland (UQ).

The researchers, led by Dr Rosana Norman from UQ's School of [Population Health](#) and Queensland Children's Medical Research Institute, also found evidence that child maltreatment increased the risk of [chronic diseases](#) and life-style risk factors such as smoking in later life.

The authors, who also included researchers from the [World Health Organization](#), reviewed all published studies that included health outcomes for individuals who had been physically or emotionally abused or neglected in childhood.

Most of the 124 studies included in their analysis were from high income countries (Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand) but only 16 studies used a prospective design in which researchers followed abused or neglected children over time to identify later health outcomes.

They found that individuals who had been emotionally abused as children were about three times more likely to develop depression, while individuals who had been physically abused or neglected were one-and-a-half to two times more likely to develop depression than people who had not been abused or neglected.

Researchers also established a link between [anxiety disorders](#), drug abuse, and suicidal behaviour and childhood abuse.

They also found that children who had been maltreated had a higher risk of sexually transmitted infections and/or risky sexual behaviour as adults than people who had not experienced abuse.

Dr Norman said the evidence suggests a [causal relationship](#) between non-sexual child maltreatment and a range of mental disorders.

She said the study confirms that all forms of child maltreatment should be considered important risks to health with a sizeable impact on major contributors to the burden of disease in all parts of the world.

"The awareness of the serious long-term consequences of child maltreatment should encourage better identification of those at risk and the development of effective interventions to protect children from violence," she said.

More information:

www.plosmedicine.org/article/info

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