Study: Childhood Abuse Linked to Persistent Hard-to-Treat Depression

August 16, 2011

Adults mistreated as children are twice as likely to suffer recurrent, treatment-resistant depression. That's a big downer! But the new finding might lead scientists toward new treatments for this common mental disorder and provide support for funneling more resources into early childhood interventions, according to a recent study published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* and reported by Reuters Health.

For the study, British researchers examined the association of childhood maltreatment—including neglect, psychological and physical or sexual abuse—with recurrent and persistent depression. To do this, scientists analyzed 26 studies, which collectively surveyed more than 23,000 people.

Findings showed that childhood maltreatment significantly increased the likelihood of adult depression. What's more, people who suffered childhood abuse often suffered from chronic depression less likely to be helped with drug or psychological treatments. (Depression cases unrelated to child abuse were on average more easily treated.)

The link between depression and child abuse has broad international implications—about 1 in 10 children worldwide are exposed to maltreatment, according to current figures, and depression is a major cause of death and disability globally.

"Prevention and early intervention measures to target childhood maltreatment could prove vital in helping prevent [a] major global health problem," said Andrea Danese, MD, PhD, of London's Institute of Psychiatry at King's College, the lead study author.

But this new research could help improve depression treatment as well. "Knowing that individuals with a history of maltreatment won't respond as well to treatment may also be valuable for clinicians in determining patients' prognosis," Danese added.

Now that researchers have confirmed the link between child abuse and depression, scientists say it's vital to explore the biological areas in children that are particularly sensitive to stress, such as the brain and the immune system. Through medical testing changes in these biologically vulnerable areas have been previously linked with childhood maltreatment.

Researchers hope that a closer look at these areas will provide the foundation for improved depression treatments and early interventions.

Did you know depression is the third leading cause of death among African-American men? Click here to read more.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/Depression-Child-AbuseLinked-20994-5516