

Parental divorce in childhood is linked to raised inflammation in adulthood

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People who experience parental divorce during childhood have higher levels of an inflammatory marker in the blood which is known to predict future health, according to new research from UCL.

The study, published in *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, found that children who experienced the breakdown in their parents' relationship before the age of 16, regardless of whether their parents were married or not, had 16% higher levels of C-reactive protein at age 44. C-reactive protein is a marker of inflammation measured in blood samples.

Long-term raised C-reactive protein is a known risk factor for diseases such as [coronary heart disease](#) and type II diabetes. This study is based on data from 7,462 people in the 1958 National Child Development Study, an on-going longitudinal study which has followed a large group of people since their birth in 1958.

The authors also looked at why this relationship might exist. They found that the relationship between [parental divorce](#) and later inflammation was mainly explained by adolescent material disadvantage and [educational attainment](#), although the specific mechanisms remain unclear. In particular, those who experienced parental separation before the age of 16 were more likely to be materially disadvantaged in adolescence and had lower educational qualifications by adulthood, compared to children who grew up with both parents.

Dr Rebecca Lacey, Research Associate in the UCL Department of

Epidemiology and Public Health and lead author of the study, said: "Our study suggests that it is not parental divorce or separation per se which increases the risk of later inflammation but that it is other social disadvantages, such as how well the child does in education, which are triggered by having experienced parental divorce which are important".

This study underlines the importance of supporting separating families in order to help reduce the risk of later disease.

The study concludes "pathways through education appear to be particularly important and supporting children through education may be beneficial". This work was funded by the European Research Council, Economic and Social Research Council and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

More information: 'Parental separation in childhood and adult inflammation: The importance of material and psychosocial pathways' by Rebecca E. Lacey, Meena Kumari, Anne McMunn, *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2013.05.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2013.05.007)

Provided by University College London

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