

# Mothers with troubled childhoods more likely to have children with emotional and behavioural difficulties

25 July 2017



Mothers who had a difficult or traumatic upbringing are more likely to have children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, according to a study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*.

Researchers at King's College London and Canterbury Christ Church University worked with the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) to collect data from over nine thousand [mothers](#) and their children, looking at each mother's history of cruel or violent treatment during childhood, as well as their child's experience of emotional and [behavioural difficulties](#) across childhood and adolescence.

The study found a significant link between the two, with almost half (49 per cent) of children whose mothers had been mistreated as children, developing emotional and behavioural difficulties such as excessive worrying or anger at 10, 11 and 13 years of age.

Mothers with troubled childhoods were also significantly more likely to have a lower level of education, to have a psychiatric history, to drink and smoke more in pregnancy and to have lower social support.

The study offers a way to combat the psychological difficulties experienced by children and to promote good mental health in future generations. This entails offering mothers with troubled childhoods and low mood access to psychological and [social support](#), including offering parenting programmes aimed at fostering sensitive and warm caregiving practices.

Dr Susan Pawlby, joint senior author and member of the research team at King's College London said: 'It is important that vulnerable women are identified as early as possible, such as during pregnancy when they routinely come into contact with healthcare services, and that support and interventions are offered on an ongoing and regular basis going forward.'

Dr Trudi Seneviratne, chair of the perinatal faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists said: 'One in five women suffer from [mental health](#) problems during pregnancy. If left untreated, this can have devastating consequences for both mother and baby, as well as their families.'

'This study demonstrates the transgenerational impact of trauma and the importance of nurturing mothers' mental wellbeing during and after [pregnancy](#), to ensure that their [children](#) get the best start in life.'

**More information:** Dominic T. Plant et al. Association between maternal childhood trauma and offspring childhood psychopathology: mediation analysis from the ALSPAC cohort, *The British Journal of Psychiatry* (2017). [DOI: 10.1192/bjp.bp.117.198721](#)

Provided by King's College London

APA citation: Mothers with troubled childhoods more likely to have children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (2017, July 25) retrieved 2 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-07-mothers-childhoods-children-emotional-behavioural.html>

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