

Study finds physical, emotional abuse can dampen young adults' earnings

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Experiencing physical or emotional abuse in childhood can measurably reduce the wages of young adults, according to a study conducted in South Africa by an international research team, including Dr. Xiangming Fang of the School of Public Health at Georgia State University.

On average, the researchers found that [child maltreatment](#) was associated with a 12 percent loss of wages for the young adult study participants in South Africa.

Child [maltreatment](#) in developing countries "plays a key role in the [economic burden](#) and socioeconomic inequality" in those societies, the researchers said. "Developing countries cannot afford any loss to the economy, let alone one that results from a human rights violation, and it is clear that prevention and intervention programs in low- and middle-income countries like South Africa are urgently needed."

The findings are published in the paper "Association of Child Maltreatment with South African Adults' Wages: Evidence from the Cape Area Panel Study" published in the journal *Health*

Economics Review. The researchers used survey data of 14-to-22-year-olds who self-reported whether they had experienced physical or emotional abuse while growing up. They then assessed the self-reported wages of those young people when they were 21-29 years old. The number of study participants was 2,644.

The researchers found some gender differences, with females suffering an overall greater negative impact on wages if they experienced either physical or emotional maltreatment in childhood. Males' wages were more affected by childhood experiences of [emotional abuse](#) and females' [wages](#) were more affected by physical abuse in childhood.

In a previous paper, Dr. Fang and the same team of researchers found that the [economic burden of violence against children in South Africa](#) in 2015 was 173 billion rand, the equivalent of \$13.5 billion. That study focused on the value of years of life lost because of illness, disability or early death caused by violence, as well as the cost of survivors' reduced earnings and the cost of child welfare services.

More information: Xiaodong Zheng et al. Association of Child Maltreatment with South African Adults' Wages: Evidence from the Cape Area Panel Study, *Health Economics Review* (2018). [DOI: 10.1186/s13561-018-0206-6](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13561-018-0206-6)

Provided by Georgia State University

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