

# Research shows childhood abuse can lead to poor stress management, worse health in adults

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People who suffer abuse or neglect as children may have trouble managing stress later in life, a problem that's linked to a host of negative

health conditions, according to new research from Rice University.

The study, "Childhood maltreatment, subjective social status, and health disparities in bereavement," examined how 130 adults who were abused or neglected as children coped with [stress](#) after their spouses died.

Michelle Chen, a graduate student in the Biobehavioral Mechanisms Explaining Disparities (BMED) Lab led by Christopher Fagundes at Rice, is the study's lead author.

Chen and her co-authors found that some adults who experienced childhood [abuse](#) or neglect handled the loss of their spouse better than others, depending on their view of where they stood on the social ladder.

The researchers based much of their work on the amount of inflammation found in people's bloodstreams. Increased [inflammation](#) is linked to increased risk of viral infection, chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and respiratory illness, and depression. The researchers examined how [childhood](#) trauma and a person's view of their own social standing affected their bloodstream's inflammatory response following the loss of a spouse.

Fagundes, an associate professor of psychological sciences at Rice, said the study adds to the growing scientific evidence that considering multiple risk factors is critical to fully understanding how stressful life events impact people's immune systems and overall health.

The researchers hope the study will not only help clinicians identify which adults face the highest risk after a stressful life event, but also lead to policies and programs that will help people who were mistreated as children learn to better manage stress.

**More information:** Michelle A. Chen et al, Childhood maltreatment,

subjective social status, and health disparities in bereavement, *Psychoneuroendocrinology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psyneuen.2021.105595](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2021.105595)

Provided by Rice University

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