

# Strong link found between emotional childhood abuse and schizophrenia-like experiences in adulthood

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A new University of Hertfordshire study has, for the first time, identified a strong link between childhood emotional abuse and

schizophrenia-like experiences in healthy adults, such as paranoia, hearing voices, and social withdrawal.

Researchers say that those who have experienced emotional abuse in [early life](#) are 3.5 times more likely to have schizophrenia-like experiences in adulthood. Researchers also say that the more significant the abuse, the more severe the schizophrenia-like experiences adults have.

The research, published in *PLOS ONE*, is the first to summarize and quantify studies (25 in total) that have explored the relationship between [childhood trauma](#) and schizophrenia-like experiences in over 15,000 healthy people.

Researchers at the University of Hertfordshire analyzed the findings of past research to see whether specific types of abuse, such as emotional, sexual and [physical abuse](#), as well as emotional and physical neglect, increased the likelihood of having schizophrenia-like experiences in later life.

They found a much stronger link between childhood emotional abuse and schizophrenic-like experiences in adulthood than other types of childhood abuse.

The relationship between childhood trauma and schizophrenia, a serious mental health condition, is well known. However, far less research has examined the impact of childhood trauma on the prevalence of less severe schizophrenia-like experiences in [healthy adults](#).

Researchers believe their findings could show that schizophrenia is a condition on a spectrum, like autism, where healthy people can have schizophrenia-like episodes without meeting the diagnosable threshold.

University of Hertfordshire researcher Dr. Diamantis Toutountzidis led on this study with supervision from Keith Laws, Professor of Neuropsychology at the University.

Dr. Toutountzidis says that "emotional abuse differs from other types of abuse. It is more common, often happens over longer periods of time, and is not treated in law the same way that physical or [sexual abuse](#) is."

"Our research has shown a significant link between childhood emotional abuse and schizophrenia-like experiences in healthy adults, and that [emotional abuse](#) is a stronger predictor of schizophrenia-like experiences than other types of abuse. This is something [mental health professionals](#) should consider when looking to tackle the root causes of schizophrenia-like experiences in people suffering from them."

Professor Laws added that their "research has opened the door to future studies that help better understand how specific types of childhood abuse are linked to specific schizophrenia-like experiences much later in life. It will also help us start to understand why such trauma is linked to disorders like schizophrenia in some, while others experience milder manageable experiences."

**More information:** Diamantis Toutountzidis et al, Childhood trauma and schizotypy in non-clinical samples: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *PLOS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0270494](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0270494)

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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