

Link Found Between Childhood Physical Abuse and Asthma in African-Americans

Written by Alexis Taylor

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Researchers have made a connection between childhood abuse suffered by African-American women and asthma which develops later in their lives.

As part of the Black Women's Health Study at the Slone Epidemiology Center at Boston University, conducted from 1995 to 2011, a total of 28,456 women gave information on physical and sexual abuse suffered before age 11, as well as between the ages of 12 and 18.

The study found that an African-American woman who suffered abuse as a child saw her chances of developing asthma later in life increase 20 percent.

The link between physical abuse and asthma was stronger than that seen between sexual abuse and asthma, researchers said. Physical abuse includes actions intended to injure a child, while sexual abuse includes actions intended for the gratification of the abuser.

"This is the first prospective study to show an association between childhood abuse and adult-onset asthma," Patricia Coogan, the lead author of the report, said in a statement. "The results suggest that chronic stress contributes to asthma onset, even years later."

Coogan said childhood abuse causes stress that leads to "physiological consequences." The stress of living in an abusive situation takes a toll on the body, specifically "on the immune system and on airway development."

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“Given the high prevalence of asthma and of childhood abuse in the United States, the association is of significant public health importance,” said Coogan, a senior epidemiologist at the Slone Epidemiology Center and an associate professor of epidemiology at the Boston University School of Public Health.

The prevalence of asthma among Americans increased from 7.3 percent, or approximately 20.3 million people, in 2001 to 8.2 percent, or 24.6 million people, in 2009.

Of those living with asthma, prevalence of the disease was greatest in children from low-income families and African-American children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

According to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, the disease is characterized by the inflammation and narrowing of the airways leading to the lungs. These incidents lead to “wheezing, a whistling sound when you breathe, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and coughing.” The episodes usually take place at night or in the early hours of the morning.

According to the CDC, some 3,388 Americans die asthma-related deaths each year. Approximately 17 million asthma-related visits to doctor’s offices, hospitals, and emergency rooms take place each year, with most admitted patients having to receive care for an average of four days.

The United States Department of Health and Human Service’s National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System found that approximately 695,000 children under age 18 suffered some type of abuse or neglect in 2010

Among children who had crimes against them reported to Child Protective Services, 22 percent were African-American.

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