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ABSTRACT 78

Title: Stress and mental health in early life are linked with physical health later in life.

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Background. Some research links childhood psychosocial stressors with adult physical health but this research has a number of limitations. Very little is known about how mental health early in life might influence physical health later in life.

Objective - This study investigated whether childhood adversities and early onset mental disorders are independently associated with increased risk of a range of adult onset chronic physical conditions in culturally diverse samples spanning the full adult age range.

Methods - The dataset consisted of cross-sectional, general population surveys of adults (n=18,303) in ten countries participating in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys Initiative. The association of childhood adversities and early onset DSM-IV depression and anxiety disorders with adult onset physical conditions was studied using survival analyses, using retrospectively reported age of diagnosis or onset of the physical condition. Cox proportional hazards models estimated the risk of each physical condition as a function of number and type of childhood adversities and early onset (< 21 years of age) depression/anxiety disorder status.

Results - A history of three or more childhood adversities was independently associated with onset of all six physical conditions studied (heart disease, asthma, diabetes, arthritis, chronic spinal pain, and chronic headache), with hazard ratios ranging from 1.44-2.19. Controlling for current mental disorder made little difference to these associations. Early onset mental disorders were independently associated with onset of five physical conditions (hazard ratios from 1.43-1.66).

Conclusions - These results suggest that early onset mental disorders and childhood adversities have independent, broad spectrum effects that increase risks of diverse chronic physical conditions in later life. The findings illustrate the integral action of mental and physical health, and the importance of a life course approach to healthy aging.