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**IMPACT OF VIOLENCE
LASTING, SEVERE**

Several new studies shed light on the effects of domestic and sexual violence. They find that being a victim of child abuse results in higher health care costs for women decades later, children of mothers experiencing violence are twice as likely to end up in emergency rooms as other children, and physical abuse during pregnancy can increase the chances of preterm delivery.

Years Later, Health Costs Higher

Middle-aged women who suffered physical or sexual abuse as children spend up to one-third more on health care than women who were not abused, a new study finds. Decades after the abuse, these women use health services at significantly higher rates than women who did not experience abuse when they were children.

In comparison with non-abused women, health costs are 36 percent higher for women who suffered both physical and sexual abuse, 22 percent higher for women who suffered only physical abuse, and 16 percent higher for women who suffered only sexual abuse.

“What’s remarkable is that women with an average age in their late 40s still suffer consequences from abuse that occurred decades ago,” the study’s leader, Amy Bonomi, an Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Science at Ohio State University, told *Science Daily*. “This study provides the strongest evidence to date about the impact of abuse well into adulthood.”

It examines data from 3,333 women over an average of 7.5 years, taking into account their age and education which also

can affect women’s use of health services. The women belong to Group Health, a health care system in the Pacific Northwest.

“The reasons why some adults have high levels of ambulatory and emergency service use should be explored by health care providers, and the possibility of past child abuse and or current intimate partner violence explored,” the study concludes. “Interventions have been successful in improving mental health and abating symptoms and should be offered.”

“Health Care Utilization and Costs Associated with Childhood Abuse” is in the March issue of the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.

Children At-Risk

Children whose mothers experience severe abuse from an intimate partner are more than twice as likely as other children to end up in the emergency room. This increased risk may continue for three years after the mothers’ abuse has ended.

“It appears that even when the abuse ends, children’s health and health care use may continue to be affected,” the study’s lead investigator, Dr. Megan H. Bair-Merritt of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, told *Reuters Health*. “That has implications for how we think about designing screening and interventions for abused women and their children.”

“Health Care Use of Children Whose Female Caregivers Have Intimate Partner Violence Histories” looks at data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being on more than 2,500 children whose families were reported to Child Protective Services in 1999 and 2000. The mothers were asked if they had been abused

at the study's outset, and researchers followed up after 18 and 36 months.

Researchers did not examine why the children were brought to emergency rooms – for injuries, preventative care, or other reasons. Bair-Merritt told *Reuters Health* that she and her colleagues plan to further investigate.

The study is in the February issue of Archives of Pediatrics and Archives of Adolescent Medicine, and can be found at <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/162/2/134>.

Abuse during Pregnancy

A new study of Portuguese women finds that nearly one-quarter of those who delivered prematurely were physically abused, including being hit, slapped or kicked, usually by their partner. “Women who were physically abused before but not during pregnancy also showed an increased risk of preterm delivery when compared with never abused women, although the association is weaker,” it says.

Direct physical abuse, like trauma to the abdominal area, may lead to preterm delivery but severe psychological distress may be a significant factor as well, researchers conclude.

In Portugal, women are not routinely assessed for violence. The study recommends assessment, “Health professionals should recognize physical abuse as a risk factor for preterm delivery and inquire pregnant women about it.”

Researchers interviewed 2,660 Portuguese women shortly after giving birth in 1999 and 2000. “Physical Abuse During Pregnancy and Preterm Delivery” is in the February issue of the *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*.