

Insecure childhood clouds teen years, adulthood

Insecure childhood casts its shadow well into teens and adulthood, says a new study.

Isabelle Tremblay, researcher at the Sainte-Justine University Hospital Centre, and Michael Sullivan, psychology professor at McGill University, launched this study to elaborate on why childhood experiences play a major role in later relationships.

'Although previous studies in adults found that an individual's security level was influenced by painful experiences, it was not clear why relationship security should be related to pain,' says Tremblay.

'We found that adolescents with insecure relationships tend to be more 'alarmist' about their pain symptoms; they have a tendency to amplify the degree of threat or severity of their pain. This amplification leads to more intense pain and more severe depressive symptoms.'

Insecure teenagers experience more intense pain in the form of frequent headaches, abdominal pain and joint pain. They are also more likely to be depressed than peers with secure attachments.

Some 382 students, from Class 8-12, were recruited for the study from a high school in Montreal, Canada. Participants were asked to fill questionnaires on the frequency and intensity of their emotional and physical pain.

'It is possible that individuals who have insecure relationships may perceive the world as more threatening or more stressful and that manifests in physical symptoms,' says Sullivan.

'Alternately, it is possible that individuals who feel insecure might 'express' more intense distress as a means of eliciting support from others in their social environment,' he adds.

Interpersonal factors must be considered when managing adolescent experiences of pain and depression, according to researchers, says a McGill release.

'Adolescents have different health and mental health needs than adults. Although interpersonal factors have not been considered integral component of the treatment of pain and depression in adults, these factors might need to be considered in the treatment of adolescents,' stresses Sullivan.

These findings were published in the Journal of Pain.

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