

Lay Summary

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Title: ***The impact of adverse childhood experiences on sensory thresholds in adults living with multimorbidity and chronic pain (the ACE-MAP study): an observational feasibility study***

This research looked at whether **adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** can affect how we feel physical sensations as adults.

ACEs are difficult or stressful things that occur during childhood. They include abuse, neglect, problems in the household (such as domestic violence), or problems in the community (such as bullying). ACEs are common: almost half of adults in the UK report having at least one such experience.

Multimorbidity is when a person lives with 2 or more long-term health conditions. Past research shows that people with ACEs are more likely to develop multimorbidity as adults. **Chronic pain** is any pain lasting longer than 3 months. Similarly, past research shows that people with ACEs are more likely to develop chronic pain as adults. We don't know exactly why this is. One theory is that ACEs change how the nervous system develops. This might make people more sensitive to pain or other symptoms in later life.

To explore this, the researchers performed a study using quantitative sensory testing (QST). This involves applying controlled sensations (such as heat) to the skin. They also asked participants to answer questionnaires, including about ACEs. This was a feasibility study, meaning its main goal was to see whether the research methods were practical and acceptable to participants.

Sixty adults took part. Most reported at least one ACE, and many were living with chronic pain and multimorbidity. The study procedures were well tolerated. All participants completed the session. Almost all participants rated the experience as "completely acceptable".

Early findings suggested that people who reported more ACEs were more likely to have multimorbidity or chronic pain. They were also more likely to be taking medications. These results match existing research. In QST tests, the findings were difficult to interpret. ACEs were linked to greater sensitivity in some of the sensory tests but not others.

This was a feasibility study, and so the results are not final. The researchers hope to secure funding to perform a larger study to investigate this in more people.