

Society may be willing to pay a high price to prevent child abuse and neglect, study suggests

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The amount the public will pay to prevent the death of a child may be twice that of an adult, according to a new University of Georgia study that asked 199 individuals how much they would pay to prevent a death from child abuse or neglect.

The research, published in the March edition of the [American Journal of Public Health](#), found that respondents were willing to pay an average of \$150 to reduce the mortality risk associated with [child maltreatment](#) by one in 10,000.

"This study is trying, for the first time, to put a dollar value on what it means to prevent a case of child maltreatment, and in this case, to prevent a death associated with child maltreatment," said Phaedra Corso, head of the department of [health policy](#) and management in the UGA College of Public Health.

If applied to a hypothetical group of 100,000 people, the study found that society may value preventing a death from child maltreatment at \$15 million. These numbers suggest that if an intervention is effective enough to save even one life, the benefits will outweigh the costs, explained Corso.

The number that the government now uses for value of statistical life is \$7.4 million. The figure is used to assess regulatory policies, explained

Corso. "Is it the case that people value preventing the death of a child more than they do an average adult? I would say yes," said Corso. "It could very well be the case that as a society we care more about kids because they have more to lose and they have not experienced life."

The government only uses the standard value, explained Corso, so age adjusting according to different values of statistical life could affect the way that federal money is appropriated.

Corso uses the term child maltreatment to cover abuse, which can be sexual, physical or emotional abuse, and neglect, which can be emotional or physical. Further study of how much people are willing to pay to prevent the death of a child from abuse or neglect could influence government programs such as home visitations by public health professionals, which have proven to be so effective that the federal government designated billions of dollars for such programs across the country as part of health care reform, said Corso.

The results of willingness-to-pay studies provide an opportunity to economically evaluate intervention programs, said Corso. "We now have a dollar value for the interventions, so we can start balancing the cost of the intervention with the benefits of the intervention."

The study also found that people were willing to pay more in taxes than in donations. "The explanation is that when there is a good that you are paying for, a public good, like programs that prevent violence, which is something that could hit all of us, people want that spread around so that we all take care of it," said Corso. "This has policy implications. If we care about [child abuse](#) and neglect as a community, it means we all have to pay for it."

Corso suggested that future studies explore how child maltreatment compares to other childhood problems such as cancer and substance

abuse. "Is it that people are willing to pay because it's child maltreatment, or is it that they are willing to pay because it's a kid?" asked Corso.

Provided by University of Georgia

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