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Impact of early growth on blood pressure from childhood to adulthood: birth-twenty cohort

Kagura, Juliana

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Elevated blood pressure in childhood persists into adulthood

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Wits-lead research team, comprising Juliana Kagura (PhD student at MRC/WITS Developmental Pathways for Health Research Unit [DPHRU]), Professor Linda Adair (University of North Carolina and honorary Professor at Wits), Dr Mogi Musa (Postdoctoral fellow at DPHRU), Professor Shane Norris (DPHRU) and Wits Emeritus Professor, John Pettifor, say the road to hypertension in adulthood might start as early as childhood and adolescence in the urban black South African population.



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The study is said to be the first in South Africa to show that elevated blood pressure in childhood and adolescence, classified according to blood pressure charts for age, sex and height, significantly persists into early adulthood.

"Approximately one-third to a half of the children who were hypertensive at some time during childhood and adolescence were hypertensive at age 18 years. The risk of having elevated blood pressure at 18 years of age was lowest at age five years and highest at age 14 years," the Wits-lead research team reported.

Researchers from the DPHRU and the Department of Nutrition, University of North Carolina in the US published a study, entitled 'Blood pressure tracking in urban black South African children: birth to twenty cohort in the BMC Paediatrics'.

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The researchers said that hypertension is a rapidly increasing global public health problem that disproportionally affects low and middle-income countries. South Africa has the highest prevalence of hypertension in adults (78%), according to a recent global report from the World Health Organization - Strategic Advisory Group of Experts collaborative study.

Using birth to 20 cohort data of children born in Soweto, Johannesburg in 1990, investigators reported that approximately a third to half of the participants of black ethnicity with elevated blood pressure at one occasion between childhood and adolescence had sustained the elevated blood pressure status at 18 years of age.

"This work may suggest the importance of routine blood pressure measurement in children for early identification of at-risk children, which may inform timely interventions to prevent complications associated with elevated blood pressure," the researchers cautioned.

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