

Do parents pass down trauma to their children?

When the children of Holocaust survivors came of age in the 1970s, psychologists realized that they felt the trauma of their parents' experiences even though they hadn't lived through them. The theory of trauma transmission has since extended into genetics. It's still controversial, but scientists may be finding physical evidence of multigenerational trauma in the gene expression of descendants of trauma survivors.

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Trauma transmission wasn't just taking place in Holocaust families, but also among survivors of Japanese-American internment camps, the atomic bombs in Japan,...and the persecution of the Baha'i community in Iran.

[But for] a country with so much suffering, China was notably absent.

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In 2014, Brian Dias and Kerry Ressler from Emory University exposed rats to acetophenone, a chemical that smells very good. They administered a mild foot shock at the same time, and eventually the rats became fearful of the smell. Then Dias bred the rats. The next generation, though they'd never smelled acetophenone before, seemed to fear it too.

When the researchers looked at the rats' genes, they found what they were looking for: methylation changes that made a specific odour receptor more sensitive to acetophenone...[I]t was like the babies had inherited the fears of their parents. What did that mean for children of trauma survivors?

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"It's just a sensitivity, and what we do with that sensitivity, I think, depends on the environment we find ourselves in," he explains. "If every individual whose ancestor was traumatized is going to bear all the imprints of that trauma, we'd all be a pretty screwed-up race."

Dias says that current epigenetic studies often focus on one specific gene and may be missing a larger picture – other genes could have been affected in addition to the single olfactory gene they examined. For now, scientists have to do gene-specific examinations, usually in animals, but the knowledge built from those kinds of studies could inform the future.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [My grandparents survived the Cultural Revolution: have I inherited their trauma?](#)