



## **PREVENTING CHILDHOOD TRAUMA REDUCES CHANCES OF DRUG ABUSE, CHRONIC DISEASES AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS, CDC SAYS**

*by Hunter Moyler*

ACEs can refer to a variety of events that a child can undergo, but which all can have lasting impacts. They include "all types of abuse and neglect as well as parental mental illness, substance use, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence," according to the United States Department of Health and Human Services. "Exposure to ACEs can result in extreme or repetitive toxic stress responses that can cause both immediate and long-term physical and emotional harms," a CDC press release about the findings said.

While the scientific community was already cognizant of many of the numerous negative health impacts of ACEs prior to the Vital Signs study, the report provides concrete numbers for the phenomenon. The study used data collected from 144,017 respondents in 25 states on the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, a telephone survey conducted annually in every U.S. state, territory and the District of Columbia. Each respondent was classified according to how many ACEs they reported living through as a child: zero, one, two, three, four or more.

More than 60 percent of all the respondents in the population used for the analysis had experienced at least one ACE, according to the study, while 15.6 percent reported that they had lived through four or more ACEs. These participants were found to carry increased odds for a multitude of unhealthy conditions as adults compared to those who had not experienced ACEs.

For example, those who had reported four or more ACEs were 44 percent more likely to be depressed and 24 percent more likely to be heavy drinkers (meaning the men consumed 15 alcoholic beverages per week and the women drank eight per week). They had a twice the chances of being overweight or obese, and were 27 percent more likely to have developed chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a lung condition that disrupts airflow.

Further, those who had reported the highest number of ACEs were also more likely to be currently facing "negative socioeconomic challenges" such as unemployment. Dr. Patricia Logan-Greene, a professor at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work, told Newsweek that the CDC study was intriguing because it looked at factors such as "extreme poverty, experiences of discrimination, exposure

to community violence [and] being placed in foster care," phenomena some previous studies on ACEs have neglected to consider. "All of those experiences can be extremely toxic, and typically are not included in the studies about childhood adversities for a variety of reasons," Logan-Greene said.

In general, data correlation does not imply that one factor causes the other. However, in this case, the CDC is confident that ACEs do indeed influence the development of these conditions, and that by preventing ACEs, the U.S. could have avoided up to 21 million cases of depression, 1.9 million cases of heart disease and 2.5 million cases of overweight and obesity in 2017 alone, according to the CDC.

According to the press release, the CDC is already working to prevent and better understand ACEs. The organization plans to implement several initiatives to better educate governments and communities about how to solve the issue with "social and economic supports that address financial hardship" and other factors that can lead to ACEs.

Logan-Greene also said that government initiatives that provide aid to low-income families and families struggling with addiction would go far in helping to prevent ACEs. Child neglect, which she said is by far the most common form of child maltreatment, could be ameliorated by government assistance that helps families afford food and quality daycare. Further, she said that maintaining government policies like the Affordable Care Act, which provides mandatory substance use treatment and mandated mental health treatment coverage, would go a long way in preventing ACEs.

"We now know that adverse childhood experiences have a significant impact on an individual's future health," CDC Director Robert R. Redfield said in the study's news release. "Preventing traumatic experiences in childhood and initiating key interventions when they do occur will lessen long-term health consequences and benefit the physical and emotional well-being of individuals into adulthood."

Source: **Newsweek**

<https://www.newsweek.com/cdc-adverse-childhood-experiences-cause-depression-addiction-chronic-illness-1470200?fbclid=IwAR27oh3GD929y-p1E2ywlcyV71ys-YOPJxrPAVM6GyFimSw7i0MIIMurVNPM>