

The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences Excerpt (Centers of Disease Control)

The Centers of Disease Control (CDC) conducted a two-year study of 25 states and the results yielded compounding insights of the impact of ACEs. The excerpt from the study's Introduction is as follows:

"Healthy child development contributes to overall population health and prosperity. Decades of research have shown that exposure to violence in childhood (e.g., physical, sexual, or psychological) and witnessing potentially traumatic experiences in the home (e.g., intimate partner violence, mental illness, or substance misuse), collectively referred to as adverse childhood experiences, can have profound and lasting negative effects on health and social outcomes (1–8). Given the connection between adverse childhood experiences and health, preventing these experiences is strategic for reducing several of the leading causes of adult morbidity and mortality.

Adverse childhood experiences are common and have important implications for health and well-being (6,9). Whereas everyone is at risk for adverse childhood experiences, numerous studies have documented inequities in such experiences attributed to the historical, social, and economic environments in which some families live (9–11).

Exposure to adverse childhood experiences can be traumatic, evoking toxic stress responses that have immediate and long-term adverse physiologic and psychologic impacts. These adverse childhood experiences can derail optimal health and development by altering gene expression, brain connectivity and function, immune system function, and organ function (8). Adverse childhood experiences can also compromise development of healthy coping strategies, which can affect health behaviors, physical and mental health, life opportunities, and premature death (1–8,12). Adverse childhood experiences have been linked to increased risk for alcohol and substance use disorders, suicide, mental health conditions, heart disease, other chronic illnesses, and health risk behaviors throughout life. Adverse childhood experiences have also been linked to reduced educational attainment, employment, and income, which directly and indirectly affect health and well-being (1–8). At least five of the 10 leading causes of death have been associated with exposure to adverse childhood experiences, including several contributors to declines in life expectancy (6,13).

Adverse childhood experiences are preventable (14–16). Randomized controlled and matched-group trials have demonstrated 48%–52% reductions

in rates of child abuse and neglect associated with preschool enrichment and early childhood home visitation programs (14,15). Preventing adverse childhood experiences is critical to addressing multiple public health and social challenges and to improving the lives of children, families, and communities. To understand the potential impact of preventing adverse childhood experiences in reducing negative health and well-being outcomes, state survey data were used to estimate population attributable fractions representing potential percentage reductions in the number of observed cases of health conditions, health risk behaviors, and socioeconomic impacts."

Merrick MT, Ford DC, Ports KA, et al. Vital Signs: Estimated Proportion of Adult Health Problems Attributable to Adverse Childhood Experiences and Implications for Prevention — 25 States, 2015–2017. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2019;68:999-1005. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6844e1external icon>.