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The Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

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Introduction

Childhood trauma, also known as Adverse Childhood experiences (ACEs) can affect every aspect of a person’s life until the day they die.

Trauma affects a person’s physiology and rewires brain functioning. It is shown to even change the way the body reads its DNA.

The more trauma a person experiences, the more negative outcomes they must cope with.

Dr. Robert Block, former President of the American Academy of Pediatrics said, “Adverse Childhood experiences are the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today.”

Methods

The original ACE study (1998) by Felitti and Anda was conducted with CDC Kaiser Permanente. They surveyed 17,000 patients about childhood trauma, current health and behaviors. The survey included questions regarding:

1. Abuse
2. Neglect
3. Household dysfunction

Since then, many replications of this study have been conducted in different areas with similar results.

Results

Each ACE study that is conducted shows support for the shocking results of the original ACE study. Someone who has experienced several ACEs has:

- 3x higher chance to develop heart disease and lung cancer.
- A 20 year lower life expectancy.
- 4-12x higher chance of developing alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and attempting suicide.
- Increased risk of ischemic heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, skeletal fractures, and liver disease.

ACE	Kaiser study	Utah 2013	Cache County, 2017 Trauma Project
Emotional abuse	11%	36%	53.7%
Physical abuse	28%	19%	43.9%
Sexual abuse	21%	11%	34.1%
Domestic violence	13%	14%	22%
Substance abuse	27%	24%	19.5%
Mental illness	19%	22%	58.5%
Separation/divorce	23%	22%	31.7%
Incarceration	5%	8%	2.4%
Emotional neglect	15%	No data	58.5%
Physical neglect	10%	No data	19.5%

Population percentages from the original ACE study, and related studies in Utah and Cache County.
Utah numbers from Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance Survey, 2013

The Whole Life Perspective



When not addressed, ACEs can lead to negative social, emotional, and physical outcomes.

Conclusions

Doctors everywhere are beginning to screen for ACEs no matter the patient’s age. Communities that are trauma informed are seeing positive results in preventing ACEs. However, not all trauma is easily prevented. By creating trauma informed communities and readily available resources, many of the negative side effects of childhood trauma can be prevented.

