What is an adverse childhood experience?

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an adverse childhood experience is any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm or threat of harm to a child\(^1\). The importance of monitoring adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is that they are influential in the mental health development of an individual. ACEs are common and have been related with negative health outcomes across the life course.

Common adverse childhood experiences\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abuse</th>
<th>Household Challenges</th>
<th>Neglect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11% Emotional</td>
<td>13% Mother treated violently</td>
<td>15% Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28% Physical</td>
<td>27% Substance abuse</td>
<td>10% Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% Sexual</td>
<td>19% Mental illness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23% Separation/divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5% Incarcerated family member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following data from the 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) show what percent of adults in Oregon reported adverse childhood experiences\(^3\). The chart compares people with and without disabilities. The BRFSS is a telephone base survey that is conducted annually in each state in the US, it collects information regarding demographic information, behavioral risk factors, and chronic health conditions among survey respondents.

Figure 1: Adverse Childhood Experiences, BRFSS 2014

We found that Oregon adults with disabilities are more likely to have had an adverse childhood experiences when compared to Oregon adults without disabilities. In Oregon:
- 37.1% of adults with disabilities had adverse childhood experiences, whereas only 18.0% of adults without disabilities had adverse childhood experiences.
- 82.0% of adults without disabilities did not have adverse childhood experiences, whereas 62.9% of adults with disabilities did not have adverse childhood experiences.

**How do adverse childhood experiences affect health?**

As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk of possible negative health outcomes, including but not limited to:

- Asthma
- Mental distress
- Depression
- Smoking
- Disability
- Unemployment
- Lowered education attainment
- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke
- Diabetes
- Suicide attempts
- Obesity
- Missed work
- Lowered life expectancy
- Substance abuse

**How do adverse childhood experiences affect the economy and society?**

The following graphs illustrates the associated cost of childhood experience to our economy and society. The CDC estimated this number to be $124 billion dollars.

![Lifetime costs associated with childhood maltreatment](chart.png)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Productivity Loss</th>
<th>Health Care</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Child Welfare</th>
<th>Criminal Justice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$4.60</td>
<td>$4.40</td>
<td>$3.90</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$83.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What can be done about ACEs?**

- Parenting training programs
- Intimate partner violence prevention
- Social support for parents
- Mental illness and substance abuse treatment
- High quality child care
- Sufficient income support for lower income families
- Home visits to pregnant women and families with newborns

Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments can have a positive impact and prevent ACEs before they happen and can assist development of skills to help children reach their full potential.

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