

# ACE study (Adverse Childhood Experience)

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# What is the ACE study?

## ACE Study:

- **largest study of its kind ever done to examine the health and social effects of adverse childhood experiences**
- 17,000 participants in the first study done by the CDC.
- Study repeated by 18 other states with similar results.

# What do we mean by ACE?

- Growing up experiencing any of the following before age 18:
  - Recurrent physical abuse or neglect
  - Recurrent emotional abuse or neglect
  - Contact sexual abuse
  - Mother was/is treated violently
  - One or no parents
  - Alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household
  - An incarcerated household member
  - Family member who is suicidal, chronically depressed, mentally ill, or institutionalized

# ACE study summary findings

- The more **ACEs** you have as a **child** (higher ACE score) → higher risk for **health** and **behavioral problems** as an adult.
- **Problems such as:**
  - Alcoholism + alcohol abuse
  - COPD
  - Depression
  - Fetal death
  - Health-related quality of life
  - Illicit drug use
  - Ischemic heart disease (IHD)
  - Liver disease
  - Multiple sexual partners
  - Risk for intimate partner violence
  - STDs
  - Smoking
  - Suicide attempts
  - Unintended pregnancies
  - Early initiation of smoking
  - Early initiation of sexual activity
  - Adolescent pregnancy

# ACE study summary findings

- The more **ACEs** you have as a **child** (higher ACE score) → higher risk for **health** and **behavioral problems** as an adult.

ACE score	Health / Behavior association
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 3-4x higher risk of depression</li><li>- 5x more likely to become an alcoholic</li><li>- 8x more likely to be a victim of rape</li><li>- up to 10x more likely to attempt suicide</li></ul>
6 or higher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 2.6x more likely to have COPD</li><li>- 3x more likely to have lung cancer</li><li>- 4,600x more likely to abuse IV drugs</li></ul>

# ACE study summary findings

- ACEs are implicated in the **10 leading causes of death** in the U.S.
- **\$124 BILLION** cost associated with just 1 year of confirmed ACE cases.
- Cost of ACE rivals cost of other high profile public health problems.

# ACE study summary findings

- ACEs can damage your child's brain structures and functions.
- How?
  - A child living much of their life in **stress** due to ACEs →
  - brain gets overloaded with **stress hormones**
  - brain **stops working** properly
  - child **falls behind** in school and/or fail to develop healthy **relationships**
  - child develops **feelings** of anger, helplessness, frustration and/or guilt
  - un/consciously develop **coping mechanisms** that involve drug, alcohol, food, risky behavior, etc.
  - health problems

What do we do now?

# **Bridging the Chasm**



**Acknowledgment that  
the problem exists.**

## **TODAY:**

**Child  
health  
and  
well-being as  
it  
stands today.**

## **FUTURE:**

**Child  
health  
and  
well-being  
as it  
could be.**

## What Can We Do Now?

- **ACE study** recommends **routine screening** of **all** patients for adverse childhood experiences must take place at the earliest possible point.
- Routinely seek history of adverse childhood experiences from **all** patients.
- Acknowledge their reality by asking, **“How has this affected you later in life?”**
- Arrange a return appointment to discuss possibilities for helping them.

Why ask?

# Benefits of Inquiry

- **A common belief among clinicians is that asking vulnerable consumers detailed questions about their trauma history may be too upsetting.** Goodman
- **Studies conducted with public mental health consumers indicate otherwise.** Goodman
- **There is no evidence in the literature that clients resent or object to being asked about a history of child sexual abuse.** Gallop et al
- **On the contrary, there is increasing evidence that failing to ask represents colluding with society's denial of either prevalence or impact.** Bryer; Doob

# Benefits of Inquiry

- Biomedical evaluation **without ACE** questions **reduced** DOV's during the subsequent year **by 11%** (700 patient sample).
- A neural net analysis of records of 135,000 patients **screened for ACEs** as part of their medical evaluation – showed an **overall reduction in doctor office visits during the subsequent year of 35%**.
- **Why?**
  - Better treatment planning? Decrease in somatization disorder?
  - **Psychoanalyst** conducted a one-time interview of depressed patients; produced a 50% decrease visits in depressed patients because of somatization disorders.

# Benefits of Inquiry

- Disclosure of trauma may have positive neurological effects on **immune function**
- A study of persons writing about their traumatic experiences (including interpersonal violence) suggested that confronting trauma experiences was **physically beneficial**. Positive effects included:
  - 2 measures of cellular immune-system function (mitogen responses and autonomic changes) were positive
  - **Visits** to the health center were **reduced**
  - Self-reports of subjective **distress decreased**
- **Inhibiting or holding back one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors is associated with long-term stress and disease.**

# Benefits of Inquiry

9 partners in Children's Clinic Pediatricians started a pilot to screen the parents of four-month-old babies for ACEs.

- **“amount of intimacy ... with their patients increased. Their comfort level with this was much easier to come to than they expected.”**

Stevens

# Benefits of Inquiry

- A “thorough trauma assessment with children and adolescents is a **prerequisite to preventing** the potentially chronic and severe problems in biopsychosocial functioning that can occur when PTSD and associated or comorbid behavioral health disorders go undiagnosed and untreated”.

Wolpaw & Ford

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