

## How Being Trauma-Informed Improves Criminal Justice System Responses

### Fact Sheet: Childhood Trauma

#### Adverse Childhood Experiences

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study analyzes the relationship between multiple categories of childhood trauma, and health and behavioral outcomes later in life. The study found that children who experienced certain adverse conditions in the household prior to age 18 are more likely to experience negative consequences as an adult. The study assessed recurrent experiences, as well as those experiences that occurred at least one time (single event).

Adverse Childhood Experiences include:

- Recurrent physical abuse
- Recurrent emotional abuse
- Contact sexual abuse
- An alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household
- An incarcerated household member
- Someone who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal
- Mother is treated violently
- One or no parents
- Emotional or physical neglect



Negative adult consequences resulting from these childhood experiences may include:

- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Smoking
- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Stress
- Alcoholism

([www.acestudy.org](http://www.acestudy.org); Felitti, 1998)

#### Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Abuse

A study by Draper, et al. (2007) of more than 21,000 older adults found that childhood sexual and physical abuse are associated with poor physical and mental health outcomes later in life. Over 10% of participants reported having experienced either childhood physical or sexual abuse, with 3% reporting having experienced both.

Participants who reported either type of childhood abuse:

- Were more likely to engage in risky health behaviors such as smoking and harmful levels of alcohol consumption

- Had poor mental health outcomes compared to their peers
- Were less likely to rate themselves as being “very happy” and more likely to rate themselves as “not happy at all” or “not very happy”
- Attempted suicide at a rate that was 4-5 times higher than their peers

## Court-Involved Individuals

The MacArthur Mental Health Court (MHC) Study explored the histories of trauma in MHC participants. The study was based on interviews with 311 MHC participants in three states. In this study:

- 70% of women & 25% of men – were sexually abused or raped before age 20
- 46% of women & 27% of men – parents hit or threw things at one another
- 61% of women & 68% of men – parents beat or hit them with a belt, whip, or strap
- 43% of women & 36% of men – parents beat or hit them with something hard
- 42% of women & 36% of men – parents beat or really hurt them with their hand
- 22% of women & 8% of men – parents injured them badly enough to need medical attention
- 39% of women & 28% of men – father-figure was arrested
- 25% of women & 20% of men – father-figure used drugs
- 33% of women & 25% of men – lived with biological father to age 15 or longer

## Trauma Prevalence among Children and Adolescents

The rates of PTSD and exposure to trauma among children and adolescents in the general population are quite high and increase dramatically among urban populations.

- General population
  - Trauma exposure approximately 25%
  - PTSD 6 to 10%
- Urban populations
  - Trauma exposure as high as 80%
  - PTSD as high as 30%

(Buka et al., 2001; Costello et al., 2002, Dyregory & Yule, 2006; Seedat et al., 2004, as cited in Brock, 2007)



## Further Reading and References

Brock, S. (2007). Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Effective School Mental Health Response. California State University, Sacramento. Retrieved from <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/b/brocks/Workshops/District/PTSD.cps.pdf>

Draper, B., Pfaff, J. J., Pirkis, J., Snowdon, J., Lautenschlager, N. T., Wilson, I., & Almeida, O. P. (2008). Long-term effects of childhood abuse on the quality of life and health of older people: Results from the depression and early prevention of suicide in general practice project. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 56(2), 262-271.