Preventing
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES
Through Positive Connections & Policies

Children are shaped by their earliest experiences and relationships. Creating safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are needed to support early brain development and promote lifelong learning and success. Conversely, negative early experiences, called Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), cause high levels of stress, called toxic stress. Frequent and prolonged levels of toxic stress can dramatically change how the brain develops.

This report summarizes data collected in 2016 and 2018 through Georgia's ACEs module (11 questions) as a part of the Georgia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (GA-BRFSS)[1].

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Georgia

Respondents Reporting ACEs (n=11,581)

- Divorce — 33%
- Substance Abuse — 25.9%
- Emotional Abuse — 25.2%
- Domestic Violence — 18.6%
- Physical Abuse — 16.3%
- Mental Illness — 15.2%
- Sexual Abuse — 12.9%
- Incarceration — 9.5%

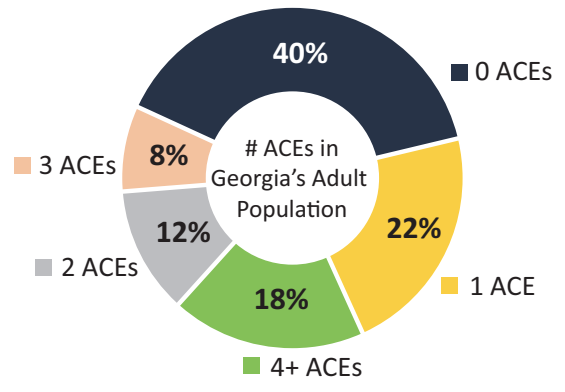**ACEs by Demographic Characteristics**

- Females had a slightly higher prevalence of four or more (4+) ACEs compared to males
- Having 4+ ACEs did not significantly differ by race or ethnicity
- College graduates had a significantly lower prevalence of 4+ ACEs than adults with other educational levels.
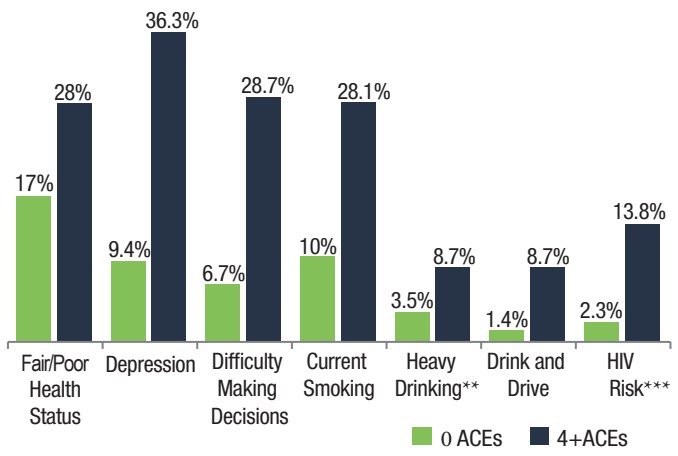
Potential Outcomes

National data shows adults with 4+ ACEs compared to zero are:

- 6 times* more likely to have clinical depression
- 3.6 times* more likely to have serious job problems
- 2.2 times* more likely to have a heart attack

Georgia Essentials for Childhood is a statewide network of organizations and individuals working to build resilient communities, address and prevent adverse childhood experiences, improve community environments, and other forms of trauma, and to create communities where all children thrive in safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments.

Abuse.PublicHealth.GSU.EDU/Essentials

3 in 5 Georgians Reported at Least One ACE

ACEs in Georgia's Adult Population

- 0 ACEs — 40%
- 1 ACE — 22%
- 4+ ACEs — 18%
- 2 ACEs — 12%
- 3 ACEs — 8%

Health Behaviors and Outcomes for GA Adults Reporting 4+ ACEs Compared to 0 ACEs*

	0 ACEs	4+ACEs
Fair/Poor Health Status	17%	28%
Depression	9.4%	36.3%
Difficulty Making Decisions	6.7%	28.7%
Current Smoking	10%	28.1%
Heavy Drinking**	3.5%	8.7%
Drink and Drive	1.4%	8.7%
HIV Risk***	2.3%	13.8%

Adults with 4+ ACEs were more likely to:

- Have poor mental health for 14 days or more in the previous month
- Have been diagnosed with depression
- Have difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions due to a physical, emotional, or mental condition

*All displayed results are significant

**Heavy Drinking- Male respondents who reported having more than 14 drinks per week, or female respondents who reported having more than 7 drinks per week.

***HIV Risk- Adults who reported that in the past year they had:
1) Injected any non-prescribed drug, 2) Treated for a sexually transmitted disease, or 3) Given or received money or drugs in exchange for sex

Many children who experience ACEs have a parent or guardian who also experienced ACEs. The adverse effects of a parent's traumatic experiences as a child can exacerbate a family crisis. The official Adverse Childhood Experiences scale only captures a piece of the story. The Communities in which families and children live may also face adversity: widespread poverty, lack of opportunity, and lack of needed social services—including mental health. These social determinants of health are at the root of widespread adversity, inequities, and trauma. Thus, a comprehensive solution must address adversities experienced at both the individual and community level.

The Pair of ACEs Tree depicts the interconnectedness of Adverse Childhood Experiences of the family environment and Adverse Community Environments—the soil in which families' lives are rooted.

The Pair of ACEs

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

9.5% of children had a guardian with substance abuse[4].

10% of children had a parent incarcerated[2].

Mental Illness

Homelessness

Substance Abuse

Emotional & Sexual Abuse

Divorce

Incarceration

Domestic Violence

Maternal Depression

Physical & Emotional Neglect

30% of children live in housing that costs more than 30% of the household income[2].

21% of children live in poverty[2].

ADVERSE COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES

Poor Housing Quality & Affordability

Systemic Racism

Lack of Opportunity, Economic Mobility & Social Capital

Poverty

Community Violence

Holocaust

Slavery

Genocide

Mass Incarceration

Forced Displacement

Pandemics

ADVERSE COLLECTIVE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES

Positive Childhood Experiences

Science shows that providing stable, responsive, nurturing relationships in the earliest years of life can prevent or even reverse the damaging effects of early life stress, with lifelong benefits for learning, behavior, and health[5].

Examples include sharing family meals, caregivers participating in a child's activities, educators and mentors who are engaged and invested in their children. This can extend to the larger community, thus emphasizing that one caring adult can make all the difference.

Policy Implications

Providing supportive and positive conditions for early childhood is more effective and less costly than attempting to address the consequences of adversity later. Policies and programs that identify and support families, and communities who are most at risk for experiencing trauma and disparities as early as possible will reduce or avoid the need for more costly and less effective remediation.

High quality early childhood programs can yield a $4-$9 return per $1 invested[6].

By Focusing On

Policies directed toward early care and education, adult and child mental health, family economic supports, and many other areas...

We Can

Promote the safe, supportive environments and stable, caring relationships that children need to thrive.

1. Suggested Citation. Davis, V.N., Bayakly, A.R., Chosewood, D., Drenzek, C. 2018 Data Summary: Adverse Childhood Experiences. Georgia Department of Public Health, Epidemiology Section, Chronic Disease, Healthy Behaviors, and Injury Epidemiology Unit
2. Kids Count Data Center, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Retrieved from https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#GA
3. Bloomberg. (November 21, 2019). In America's most unequal city, top households rake in $663,000. Retrieved from https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-21/in-america-s-most-unequal-city- top-households-rake-in-663-000
4. Data Resources Center for Child & Adolescent health https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=7210&r=12
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