



A new study links childhood toxic stress to adult outcomes in Shelby County

Negative childhood experiences can have detrimental impacts on adult health and well-being.¹ Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, can cause excessive activation of physiological stress responses, which can disrupt proper physical development in children.

In 2014, the ACE Task Center Force of Shelby County, in partnership with Baptist Memorial Hospital for Women, Knowledge Quest, and Porter Leath, commissioned the Public Health Management Corporation to assess the prevalence of ACEs in the Memphis area. Through a carefully constructed scientific survey, the study **interviewed 1,506 adults across Shelby County**. The study sample included every zip code and accurately reflected the County's demographics.

ACEs are common across adults in Shelby County.

- 52% of the adult population, an estimated 361,200 adults, reported having experienced at least one ACE.
- One out of five adults experienced two to three ACEs (21%).
- 12% of adults experienced four or more ACEs.

Across Shelby County, adults of all races and ethnicities report having experienced ACEs. ACE prevalence, however, varied by location, economic status, and education. Adults living in the city of Memphis and those in poverty were more likely to have experienced four or more ACEs, as were adults with less than a high school education.

The most prevalent ACE factors in Shelby County are:

- Household substance abuse
- Emotional or verbal abuse
- Violence between adults in the home

Additionally, adults in Shelby County were more likely to experience certain ACEs than adults in the rest of Tennessee or across the nation.

- 20% of Shelby County adults reported having experienced childhood sexual abuse (compared to 11% in Tennessee and 12% across the nation).²
- Rates of violence between adults are also higher in Shelby County (22%) than in Tennessee (19%) or nationally (16%).

There is a relationship between childhood trauma and adult social and health outcomes

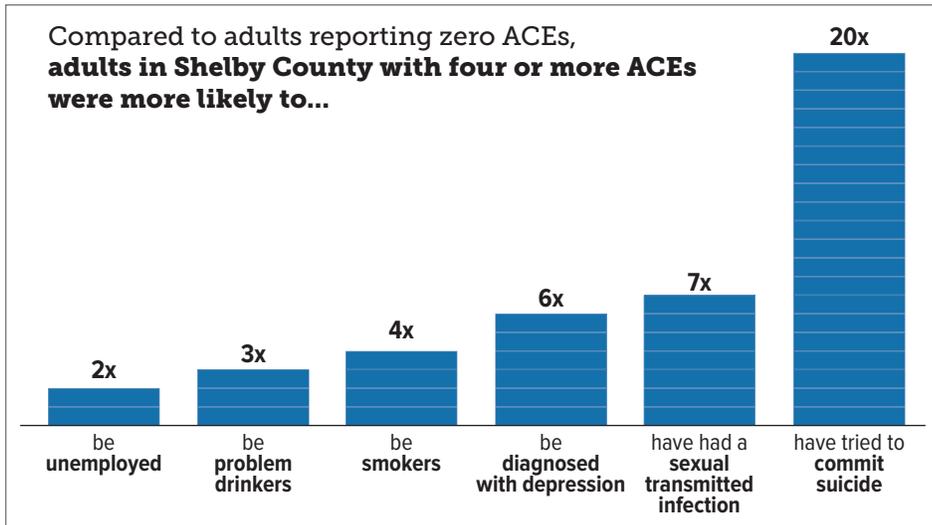
In the original ACE Study conducted between 1995 and 1997 in San Diego, CA, Doctors Vincent Felitti and Robert Anda found a positive relationship between the number of ACEs, and negative adult social and health outcomes, including an increased risk for smoking, drinking to excess, increased drug use, and compromised mental health.³ These relationships were also found in subsequent studies conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Notable Findings

- » 52% of adults in Shelby County report having experienced at least one ACE.
- » Individuals reporting four or more ACEs have heightened risk for negative adult social and health outcomes.
- » The most prevalent ACE in Shelby County are substance abuse, emotional abuse, and violence between adults in the home.
- » Shelby County has higher prevalence of childhood sexual abuse and violence between adults in the home than the state and the nation.



Similar to earlier studies, there is a relationship between the number of ACEs reported and negative adult outcomes.



The Shelby County ACE survey also collected information on additional traumatic childhood experiences. These results include:

- 37% of adults in Shelby County have witnessed a shooting or stabbing.
- 41% of adults were bullied as children.

The results presented in this report follow the trends found in other studies and suggest a need for policy and program development to prevent ACEs among Shelby County youth and reduce the impact of ACEs on adults.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Center Task Force of Shelby County is a team of 40 local leaders dedicated to transforming the way our medical systems and policies address health and behavioral outcomes for all citizens. More at www.acecentershelbycounty.com.

References

1 Adverse Childhood Experiences in Shelby County, Tennessee. (2014, November). Public Health Management Corporation.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Adverse Childhood Experiences Reported by Adults—Five States, 2009. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*. 59(49); 1609-1613.

3 Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, Williamson D, Spitz A, Edwards V, Koss M, and Marks J. Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *Am J Prev Med*. 1998; 14(4): 245-258