A Public Health Approach to Preventing and Treating Child Abuse and Neglect

Melissa T. Merrick, PhD
President & CEO
National Governors Association’s Annual Policy Institute for Governors’ Human Services Advisors

September 11, 2019 * Chicago, IL
Public health is what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions in which (all) people can be healthy.

Institute of Medicine
A Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention

- Describe the problem
- Identify risk and protective factors
- Determine “what works” to prevent violence
- Assure widespread adoption

Problem Response

Public health approach:
• 4 steps based on science
• population-based vs. care of the individual
• emphasis on prevention and collective action drawing upon multiple disciplines and sectors
1 BILLION CHILDREN EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE ANNUALLY

the issue
When people think of child abuse & neglect, they often picture this...
...but probably not this
Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts
Adverse Childhood Experiences

ACEs are experiences that may be traumatic to children and youth during the first 18 years of life such as experiencing violence or other types of emotionally disturbing exposures in their homes and communities.

ACEs not included in the traditional measure:

- Bullying
- Teen dating violence
- Peer to peer violence
- Witness violence in community or school
- Homelessness
- Death of a parent

Graphic Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
The Pair of ACEs

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Maternal Depression

Physical & Emotional Neglect

Emotional & Sexual Abuse

Divorce

Substance Abuse

Mental Illness

Domestic Violence

Incarceration

Homelessness

Poverty

Violence

Adverse Community Environments

Discrimination

Poor Housing

Community Disruption

Quality & Affordability

Lack of Opportunity, Economic Mobility & Social Capital

Adverse childhood experiences or adverse childhood socioeconomic conditions?

David C Taylor-Robinson, Viviane S Straatmann, Margaret Whitehead
How Common are ACEs?
ACE Score Prevalence for Participants Completing the ACE Module from the 2011-2014 BRFSS

- ZERO: 38%
- ONE: 24%
- TWO: 13%
- THREE: 9%
- FOUR OR MORE: 16%

# of ACEs
ACES can have lasting effects on....

Health (obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, STDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, broken bones)

Behaviors (smoking, alcoholism, drug use)

Life Potential (graduation rates, academic achievement, lost time from work)

ACEs have been found to have a graded dose-response relationship with 40+ outcomes to date.

*This pattern holds for the 40+ outcomes, but the exact risk values vary depending on the outcome.
Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan
Leading Causes of Death in the U.S. in 2017

1. Heart disease
2. Cancer
3. Unintentional injuries
4. Chronic lower respiratory diseases
5. Stroke
6. Alzheimer's disease
7. Diabetes
8. Influenza and Pneumonia
9. Kidney disease
10. Suicide

Role of Public Health in Violence Prevention

ROLE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE, CHILD WELFARE, SOCIAL SERVICES, HEALTHCARE
Our Mission:
To prevent the abuse and neglect of our nation’s children

Our Vision:
For every child to have a great childhood
Assuring Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments For All Children
Creating the Conditions for

STRONG

THRIVING

FAMILIES

and Communities where
Children are Free From Harm
Prioritize Environmental Change

The Health Impact Pyramid

- Sociocultural Factors
- Changing the Context to make individuals’ default decisions healthy
- Long-lasting Protective Interventions
- Clinical Interventions
- Counseling & Education
- Increasing Population Impact
- Increasing Individual Effort Needed

Helping States and Communities Take Advantage of the Best Available Evidence

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities

STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence

A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors

Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices

Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices

http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/technical-packages.html
5 Strategies to Prevent Child Abuse & Neglect

- Change social norms to support parents and positive parenting
- Enhance parenting skills to promote healthy child development
- Strengthen economic supports for families
- Provide quality care and education early in life
- Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risk
TOGETHER We Can Prevent Early Adversity
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Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts

- Traumatic Brain Injury Fractures Burns
- Depression Anxiety Suicide
- Mental Health
- Unintended Pregnancy Pregnancy Complications Fetal death
- Maternal Health
- HIV STDs
- Infectious Disease
- Cancer Diabetes
- Chronic Disease
- Alcohol & Drug Abuse Unsafe Sex Opioid Misuse
- Risk Behaviors
- Education Occupation Income
- Opportunity
- CAN

Unintended Pregnancy, Pregnancy Complications, Fetal death, Depression, Anxiety, Suicide, HIV, STDs, Unintended Pregnancy, Suicide, Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts.
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Discrimination
Community Disruption
Lack of Opportunity, Economic Mobility & Social Capital

Violence
Poor Housing Quality & Affordability

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Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

- Generational Embodiment / Historical Trauma
- Social Conditions / Local Context
- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Disrupted Neurodevelopment
- Social, Emotional, & Cognitive Impairment
- Adoption of Health Risk Behavior
- Disease, Disability, & Social Problems
- Early Death

Death
Conception
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Violence Across the Lifespan

- Early Childhood
  - Child Maltreatment/ACEs
  - Bullying
- Adolescence
  - Youth Violence
  - Dating Violence
  - Intimate Partner Violence
  - Sexual Violence
  - War and Other Collective Violence
  - Suicide
- Adulthood
  - Elder Maltreatment
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Thank you

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