Adverse Childhood Experiences: Early Intervention to Trauma as a Public Health Imperative

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Kentucky Struggles With Public Health Outcomes

- Highest rate of child abuse
- 3rd highest rate of drug overdose deaths
- A ”Top 10” state for suicide
- 5th lowest per capita income
- 3rd worst self-reported health status
- Highest cancer death rate
The Roots of These Challenges May Be Found In Childhood Experiences
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Potentially Traumatic Events That Occur In Childhood

ACEs are a measure of *individual risk*

ACEs are a measure of *community health*
Traumatic Childhood Events

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are three kinds of adversity children faced in the home environment:

1. physical abuse
2. emotional abuse, neglect, and
3. household dysfunction.
ACE Impact Increases With ACE Number

• One ACE increases risk of mental illness by 30%
• Students with at least three ACEs are three times as likely to experience academic failure
• A child with four or more ACEs is 32 times more likely to be labeled with a behavioral or cognitive problem
• Six or more ACEs predict 20-year shortened life span
• Seven or more ACEs increased suicide attempts by 3,100%
ACEs In Kentucky

On average, 64% of Americans have at least 1 ACE

On average, 64% of Kentuckians have at least 2 ACEs

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System 2014
Racial Trauma & Other Discrimination Are Additional Sources of Trauma
COVID-19 Has Been A Huge Amplifier
The Cost of ACEs Is Huge

**Personal**
- Poor mental health
- Increased substance abuse
- Unhappiness
- Poor health
- Lower productivity
- Less creativity
- Shorter life expectancy
- Reduced hope & optimism

**Community**
- Higher healthcare costs
- Increased criminal justice costs
- Reduced educational outcomes
- Less effective workforce
- Less compassion
- Weaker social connections
- Reduced vitality & attractiveness
- Reduced hope & optimism
ACEs Are Rooted In Inequality

The Pair of ACEs

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Maternal Depression
- Physical & Emotional Neglect
- Emotional & Sexual Abuse
- Divorce
- Substance Abuse
- Mental Illness
- Domestic Violence
- Incarceration
- Homelessness

Adverse Community Environments

- Poverty
- Discrimination
- Community Disruption
- Violence
- Poor Housing
- Lack of Opportunity, Economic Mobility & Social Capital
- Quality & Affordability

Trauma Can Beat Us... Or Lead To Growth
Our Thinking Needs To Change

What is wrong with you?  →  You deserve bad consequences

What happened to you?  →  You deserve supportive and educational intervention

The Shift
Interventions for ACEs
Reduce Prevalence of ACEs In Communities

• Universal ACEs screening
• Restorative practices in criminal justice
• Restorative practices in schools
• Reduce economic inequality
• Reducing food insecurity
• Healthcare access
• Educational access
• Violence prevention
• Reducing discrimination
Mitigating The Impact of ACEs On Individuals

- Know your numbers
- Teaching resilience strategies
- Improving safety
- The basics: Nutrition, exercise, sleep, hugs
- Universal Trauma Precautions
- Connection to a caring adult
- Behavioral health intervention
- Healthy family initiatives
Summary

- ACEs are a common fact of life and current events amplify their impact
- ACEs affect us personally and as a community
- ACEs drive public & private costs
- Better policies and supports reduce ACE impact
- Early intervention pays off