

Putting Research to Work for Families



Focus:
Civilian

The Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Internalizing Versus Externalizing Outcomes

Muniz, C.N., Fox, B., Miley, L.N., Delisi, M., Cigarran, G.P., II, & Birnbaum, A. (2019). The effects of adverse childhood experiences on internalizing versus externalizing outcomes. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 46(4), 568-589.
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SUMMARY: Understanding the impact of youth's adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on externalizing and internalizing outcomes has important implications for prevention and intervention programs. This study investigated whether specific ACEs are predictive of internalizing outcomes (e.g., anxiety) or externalizing outcomes (e.g., runaway behavior). The findings indicate that many ACEs increase the risk of negative youth outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Reports of emotional abuse, physical abuse, household violence, household substance abuse, and household member incarceration increased risk of externalizing behavior in youth.
- Childhood sexual abuse increased risk of internalizing behavior in youth.
- The strongest predictor for externalizing behaviors was emotional abuse.
- Physical neglect was the only ACE that did not predict internalizing or externalizing outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

- Provide workshops to help youth learn about self-management of externalizing and internalizing behavior
- Host activities that build systems of support between the community and families with youth who experience ACEs

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Develop curricula to help youth program staff and educators use early identification strategies for youth with ACEs
- Disseminate information to parents regarding common difficulties faced by youth who have experienced ACEs

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- Encourage the development of preventative programs that promote resilience among youth
- Support research that investigates the impact of youth programs on youth internalizing and externalizing behavior

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METHODS

- Data were obtained from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FDJJ).
- Internalizing and externalizing outcomes were measured using the Positive Achievement for Change Tool (PACT) risk assessment (from the FDJJ data) which included identifying behaviors for internalizing (e.g., depression) and externalizing outcomes (e.g., violence) as well as instances of ACE.
- Statistical analyses examined if ACEs predicted youth experiences of internalizing and externalizing behavior.

PARTICIPANTS

- This study included 30,909 youth. Male participants comprised 78.3% of the sample.
- The ages of the sample were as follows: 24.9% were 12 years old and younger, 53.7% of the sample were between 13 years and 15 years old, and 21.4% of the sample were 16 years old and older.
- Most of the sample (61.8%) identified as either Black, Latino, and Asian, while 38.2% identified as White.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample consisted of youth in the legal system which restricts generalizability of findings to non-incarcerated developing youth.
- The Positive Achievement for Change Tool (PACT) risk assessment was not fully intended to explore the impact of ACEs on youth; therefore, it is unknown if the assessment missed key behaviors or outcomes.
- Co-occurrence of externalizing and internalizing outcomes was not included within the study, so findings may not be applicable for youth who exhibit both externalizing and internalizing behavior.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Compare the incidences of ACEs among incarcerated and non-incarcerated youth
- Use personality profiling to examine if youth with certain ACEs are more likely to develop externalizing or internalizing behavior
- Explore gender differences in the predictors of externalizing and internalizing youth behavior among youth who have experienced ACEs

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



Design

Appropriate
Research Plan
and Sample

A circular graphic with a dark red background. At the top, the word "Design" is written in white. Below it are three yellow stars. At the bottom, the text "Appropriate Research Plan and Sample" is written in white.

Methods

Excellent
Measurement
and Analysis

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Limitations

Few

A circular graphic with a dark red background. At the top, the word "Limitations" is written in white. Below it are three yellow stars. At the bottom, the word "Few" is written in white.

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
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