

Putting Research to Work for Families



Focus:
Civilian

Adverse Childhood Experiences among Youth Aging Out of Foster Care: A Latent Class Analysis

Rebbe, R., Nurius, P. S., Ahrens, K. R., & Courtney, M. E. (2017). Adverse childhood experiences among youth aging out of foster care: A latent class analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 74, 108-116. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.02.004

SUMMARY: The negative experiences of youth in foster care can contribute to negative outcomes in adulthood. This study examined the relationship between groups of negative childhood experiences by youth in foster care and how they fared in their subsequent early adult years. Results indicate that both greater amounts and different types of childhood adversity influence the way youth experience socioeconomic, psychosocial, and criminal outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Three groups of youth were found within the data: those who experienced complex adversity (29%), environmental adversity (12%), and low adversity (58%).
- Youth in the environmental group were more likely to be male (66%), and those in the complex group were more likely to be White.
- Youth in the complex group were more likely to experience homelessness, depression, and engage in property crime than youth in the lower adversity group; they also experienced greater mental health treatment.
- Youth in the complex and environmental groups reported greater rates of posttraumatic stress disorder, drug, and alcohol abuse symptoms, trading sex for money, convictions for crimes, selling drugs, gang membership, and economic criminal behavior.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

- Screen for multiple types of adverse childhood experiences with youth aging out of foster care to help tailor services to their needs
- Participate in professional development training on childhood trauma and impact on outcomes in adulthood

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Host workshops for foster care caregivers about the heightened risks for negative outcomes for youth who have experienced complex or environmental adversity
- Enhance education, activities, and curriculum related to coping behaviors and dealing with stress.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- Promote prevention and intervention efforts for youth in foster care who have experienced specific types of adversity
- Encourage collaboration between community agencies to reduce community-level environmental risks for youth in foster care

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METHODS

- Youth completed five waves of data collection from ages 17 to 26 years; retention at waves two through five were 81-83%
- Youth completed questionnaires regarding adverse childhood experiences of maltreatment (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse), household factors (e.g., caregiver substance abuse, experiencing adoption plan failure), environmental harm (e.g., witnessing others being hurt/killed, natural disaster).
- Youth also completed questionnaires on outcomes, including socioeconomic (e.g., college, receiving food stamps), psychosocial (e.g., depression, substance abuse), and criminal behaviors (e.g., traded or was paid for sex, using someone else's credit card without permission, using a weapon in a fight).
- Data were analyzed to create three different groups of participants based on their adverse childhood experiences profiles, which were then compared to outcomes.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 732 youth (48.4% male, 51.6% female) across three Midwestern states, between the ages of 17 and 17.5 years old.
- Youth identified as 56% Black, 29% White, 8% Latino, 5% multiracial, and 2% other race/ethnicity.
- Youth had been in foster care for at least one year prior to participation in the study.

LIMITATIONS

- Data were gathered through retrospective self-report, which may have limited accuracy of results.
- Social desirability bias may have affected validity of results by youth either over- or underreporting adversity or outcomes.
- Youth in this study were in specific parts of the country which may have led to differences in adversity or outcomes than youth in other settings

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Gather data from ancillary sources such as case workers or clinical records in order to further support youth report
- Examine timing and number of instances of adversity to provide additional context that may influence outcomes
- Examine the differences among urban and rural youth in foster care and their adversity experiences

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design



Appropriate
Research Plan
and Sample

Methods



Appropriate
Measurement
and Analysis

Limitations



Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>