



Maryland Special Emphasis Report: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

What Are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)?

ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0 -17 years), such as experiencing violence, abuse or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, or having a family member attempt or die by suicide. Also included are aspects of a child’s environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding, such as growing up in a household with substance misuse, mental health problems, or instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison.*

But ACEs are preventable. Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are essential to children’s health and well-being. However, many children do not have these types of relationships and environments, placing them at risk for ACEs.

*These examples do not comprise an exhaustive list of childhood adversity, as there are other traumatic experiences that could impact health and well-being.

Figure 1: Number of ACEs Experienced During Childhood Among Maryland Adults, BRFSS, 2020

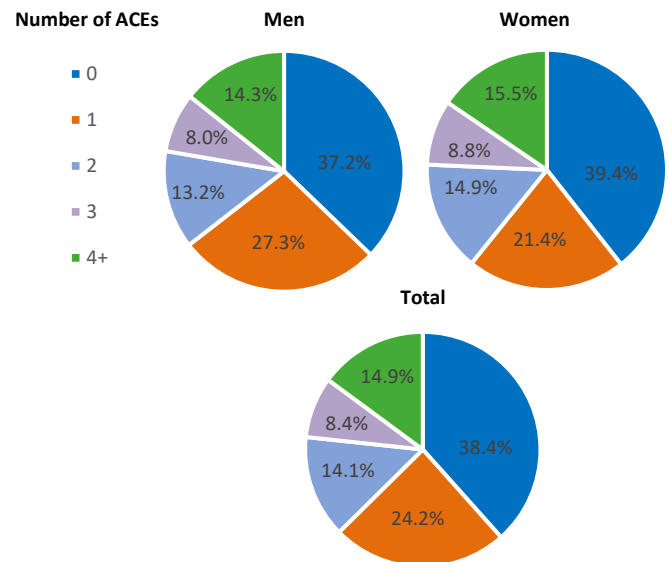
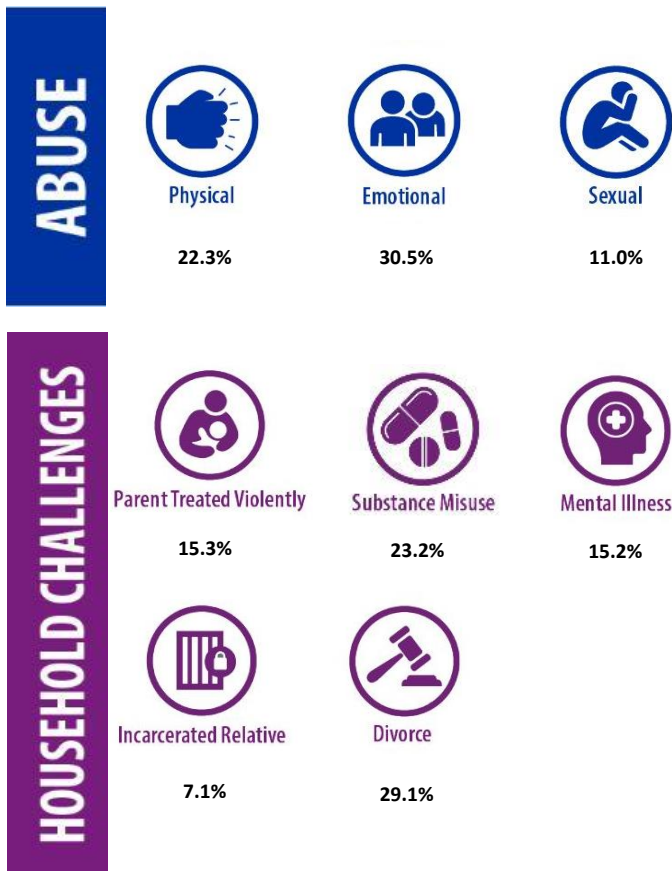


Figure 2: Prevalence of Specific ACEs Experienced During Childhood Among Maryland Adults, BRFSS, 2020



ACEs Are Common.

In Maryland, **61.6%** of adults have experienced at least one ACE, and almost one in seven have experienced four or more ACEs. Among Maryland men, **14.3%** experienced four or more ACEs compared to **15.5%** of women. The most common ACE experienced by adults in Maryland during childhood was **emotional abuse** with 30.5% of adults indicating that a parent or adult swore, insulted, or put them down before the age of 18. The next most common ACEs that adults reported experiencing during childhood were **parental separation/divorce** (29.1% of adults) and **household substance misuse** (23.2% of adults).

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a statewide phone survey of non-institutionalized Maryland adults 18 years and older. The questions from the ACE module described in this report were adapted from the original CDC-Kaiser ACE study to collect information on child abuse and select household challenges. Questions on neglect were not added to the BRFSS until 2021. In the BRFSS ACEs module, adults are asked about specific ACEs they experienced during childhood, before age 18.

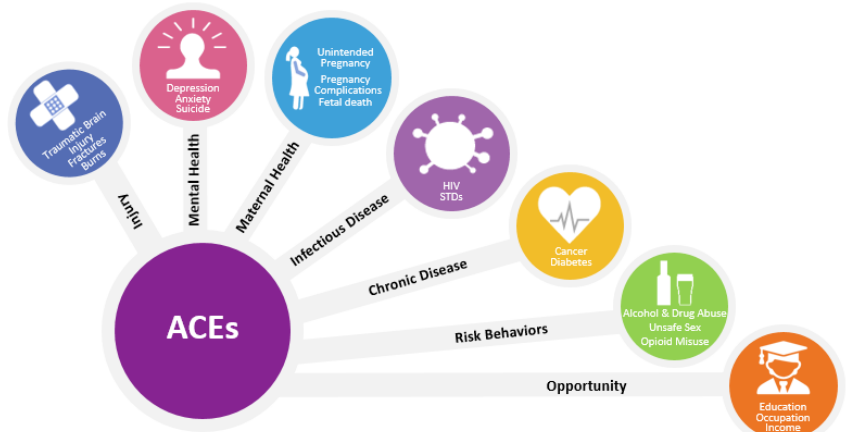


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ACEs Impact Lifelong Health.

Experiencing ACEs can affect optimal health across the lifespan. For example, across research studies, ACEs are consistently associated with a wide range of poor behavioral, health, and social outcomes, including substance misuse, depression, being overweight, having lower education and earnings potential, and having chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for poor outcomes.

Experiencing ACEs does not mean a child will have poor outcomes. Positive childhood experiences, such as having a mentor or experiencing a sense of belonging, can protect against many negative health and life outcomes even after adversity has occurred.



But ACEs Are Preventable.

The wide-ranging health, social, and economic consequences of ACEs underscore the importance of preventing ACEs. A CDC resource, [Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences: Leveraging the Best Available Evidence](#), can help states and communities use the best available evidence to prevent ACEs from happening in the first place, as well as lessen harms when ACEs do occur. This resource features six strategies drawn from the [CDC Technical Packages to Prevent Violence](#):



Strengthen economic supports to families



Promote social norms that protect against violence and adversity



Ensure a strong start for children



Teach skills



Connect youth to caring adults and activities



Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms

Data source: 2020 Maryland Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

<https://health.maryland.gov>

Released July 2022