

Childhood Trauma Series in Indian Country

7-Part Series

Presenter

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The brains of traumatized children develop as if the entire world is chaotic, unpredictable, violent, frightening, and devoid of nurturance...

Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D.

The reason that childhood trauma causes adult onset of chronic disease was determined by a group of researchers, including neurobiologist [Martin Teicher](#) and pediatrician [Jack Shonkoff](#), both at Harvard University, and neuroscientist [Bruce McEwen at Rockefeller University](#). They figured out that the toxic stress of chronic and severe trauma [damages a child's developing brain](#). It essentially stunts the growth of some parts of the brain, and fries the circuits with overdoses of stress hormones in others.

<http://wellcommons.com/groups/aces/tags/ace-study>

“Unable to concentrate or participate appropriately, and under such severe stress that **they walked through life with hair-trigger emotions,** they often got into trouble.”

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THE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE STUDY

Kaiser Permanente's Dept of Preventative Med.

Access to 58,000 Medical Psychological and Bio-Social member evaluations per yr. 18,000 volunteers studied 8 categories of childhood abuse household dysfunction

Abuse:

Recurrent Physical, Emotional and Sexual Abuse

Household [Family] Dysfunction:

Someone in prison

Mother treated violently

Alcoholic or drug abuser

One bio-parent lost for any reason

Someone chronically depressed, mentally ill or suicidal

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)

- **Recurrent physical abuse**
- **Recurrent emotional abuse**
 - **Sexual abuse**
- **An alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household**
- **An incarcerated household member**
- **Household member who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal**
 - **Mother is treated violently**
 - **Parental loss**
 - **Emotional or physical neglect**

ACE Scoring

The ACE Study found that the number of categories, not necessarily the frequency or severity of the experiences within a category, determine the quality of mental and physical health

The study showed that the higher the ACE score, the higher the risk of disease, suicide, violent behavior, or being a victim of violence.

+People with an ACE score of 4 or more had starkly higher rates of heart disease and diabetes than those with ACE scores of zero.

The likelihood of chronic pulmonary lung disease increased 390 percent; hepatitis, 240 percent; depression 460 percent; suicide, 1,220 percent.

The percentages climbed to grim and astounding levels as the ACE score increased – people with an ACE score of 6, for example, had a 4,600 percent increase in the likelihood of becoming an IV drug user. And people with high ACE scores die, on average, 20 years earlier than those with low ACE scores.

ACE Score of 4 or More

- 7 times as likely to be alcoholics
- 6 times likely to have sex before age 15
- Twice as likely to be diagnosed with cancer
- Twice as likely to have heart disease
- 4 times as likely to suffer from bronchitis and emphysema
- 12 times more likely to attempt suicide than those with ACE of 0
- Men with ACE of 6 or higher were 46 times as likely to have injected drug than men with Ace of 0

(Tough, 2011)

Children with toxic stress live their lives in fight, flight or fright (freeze) mode. Unable to concentrate, their brains are incapable of learning and they fall behind in school. They respond to the world as a place of constant danger, not trusting adults and unable to develop healthy relationships with peers. Failure, despair, shame and frustration follow. <http://wellcommons.com/groups/aces/tags/ace-study>

As they transition into adulthood, they find comfort by overindulging in food, alcohol, tobacco (nicotine is an anti-depressant), drugs (methamphetamines are anti-depressants), work, high-risk sports, violence, a plethora of sexual partners....anything that pumps up feel-good moments so that they can escape – even briefly – the sharp, tenacious claws of agonizing memories and despair.

<http://wellcommons.com/groups/aces/tags/ace-study>

In a study when told: people with a score of 1 or 2, and that responses to higher ACE scores – such as alcoholism, drug addiction, obesity, depression -- are normal. “For somebody who is an ACE survivor, a sense of shame is going to be one of their fundamental feelings,” Zorrah says. “When we normalize it, explain it as a science-based thing, it helps them reframe to move away from shame.”

The client responses? “Well, duh!” was typical. So was: “No wonder I'm so messed up.” “No wonder I’m sick all the time.” “No wonder I can't quit using.....drugs, alcohol, cigarettes.”

When one woman in her 60s who was parenting her grandchild was told that her ACE score was an 8, she said: “These are very, very good questions. Nobody has asked me about this before.” Understanding her own past motivated her to agree to mental health services for her grandchild.

Cole isn't interested in giving kids ACE scores. "We don't want to define kids by ACEs," she said. If children who are experiencing trauma and the neurobiological, psychological and social challenges associated with trauma, focusing on three things will help them be successful:

A strong relationship with a parent, or surrogate care-giver, who can be a teacher.

Good cognitive skills

An ability to self-regulate attention, emotions and behaviors.

<http://wellcommons.com/groups/aces/tags/ace-study/>

Vulnerability of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Youth (ACE Comparison)

- Physical abuse status. American Indian and Alaska Native children are over represented in the foster care system due to child maltreatment (Hill 2006).
- Emotional abuse (higher rates of disruptive behavior and substance use disorders than other same age children and youth, Beals 1997)
- Sexual abuse (Rates of sexual victimization)
- Alcohol and/or drug abuser in household (National statistics reveal that 13% of AI/AN adults are drug dependent, compared to 9 for nonAI/AN, SAMHSA 2009)

Vulnerability of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Youth (ACE Comparison)

- Incarcerated household member (American Indian and Alaska Native adults have a 38% higher incarceration rate than other groups (Smith 2008), this does not address the number of incarcerated American Indian and Alaska Native juveniles in state and federal custody and the number of American Indian and Alaska Native adults on probation, parole, or under the custody of law enforcement in other legal status retention).

Vulnerability of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Youth (ACE Comparison)

- Someone who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal (American Indians and Alaska Natives have the highest rate of suicide for all groups; in addition, they lead the nation in death due to injuries and homicides. It is understandable that this is correlated with high levels of depression, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Center for Disease Control, 2004; National Center for Health Statistics 2007))

Vulnerability of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Youth (ACE Comparison)

- Mother is treated violently (American Indian and Alaska Native women experience the highest rate of violent assaults and other levels of violence with a rate that is 50% higher than Black males, BJS, 2003)
- One or no parents (53% living with one parent, National Kids COUNT program 2009)

Vulnerability of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Youth (ACE Comparison)

- Emotional or physical neglect (According to the National Indian Child Welfare Association, American Indian and Alaska Native children have the highest rate of neglect for all populations, Earle & Cross, 2001)

Additional Factors with American Indians

- Boarding School, Foster Care and Adoption
- Cultural-based variables assessed
- 86% participants experience one or more categories of exposure and 33% reported four or more categories
- Strong relationship between childhood sexual abuse and subsequent drinking problems among the general population similar in American Indian population
- Combined sexual and physical abuse increased alcohol dependence for men
- Combined sexual abuse and boarding school attendance were significant for women

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Trauma-Informed Principles for Children in Indian Country

- Need for Safety
- Need for Supervision
- Need for Protection
- Need for Guidance
- Need for Monitoring
- Need for Teachings
- Need to know they are Connected
- Need to know they are Sacred
- Need to know they are Honored

Trauma is a part of the circle of life. There is a long history of trauma in Native American families, communities, and Nations.

Trauma is like a roadblock or burden in our path. Healing is the way to make the roadblock or burden more manageable or to make it go away completely.

Healing means that the circle is whole again. One must know how to change one's thinking, feelings, and beliefs about a traumatic experience in order to regain balance or harmony.

Practices that teach Sacredness

Practice Based Evidence

- Teach that wellness is spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and relational balance and that these are all interconnected aspects of ourselves
- Help the individual to draw upon traditional healing practices to assist moving forward toward spiritual balance
- Help instill an enthusiasm for life, a sense of hope, and a willingness to meet new challenges
- Increase sense of self-identity, self-worth, self knowledge