



# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Report UK 2023

## A Crisis of Parenting and Family Relationships



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful events occurring in childhood and have lifelong impacts on health and behaviour. This is further explained in the next sub-section 1.2. for those who are not aware of ACEs and their effects.

From the author's attendance at conferences and personal research since 2017, it has become clear that there is a lot of participation around ACEs by professionals – educators, academics, health services, social services, etc., but little focus on and involvement of parents and communities. This has led to a great deal of cost and effort on **reducing** the effect of ACEs once they have occurred **rather than prevention** in the first place i.e. dealing with the root causes.

The above highlights a weakness in policy thinking – the ubiquitous '*they should do something about this*'. But can one say that authorities have been doing a good job? One only has to look at the outcomes of children in the care system, the reoffending rates of young offenders and the school exclusion rates as examples to see poor results despite £billions being spent.

**If we look at root causes of ACEs as demonstrated by the data in this report, the key is parenting and family relationships/stability. How can parents improve their skills so as to avoid ACEs in the first place? How can we help family relationships/stability?**

From research, there is evidence in the USA<sup>1</sup> and New Zealand<sup>2</sup> that some successful interventions deeply involve the community.

In October 2021, an exercise was started by the author to research and define ideas that could prevent or reduce ACEs (to prevent ACEs being passed on). The focus though was very much on prevention rather than reduce them once incurred.

Information was captured from NHS staff, persons with lived experience, counsellors, studies, idea challenges, etc., and summarised in 3 broad areas; Prevention of ACEs, Reduction of ACEs, Data/Analytics.

Within these 3 areas, 11 strands were identified e.g. Raise Community Awareness along with 31 ideas within these strands. 20 of the ideas were in the Prevention of ACEs category. Some are serviced already but many are not.

In February 2023, a research survey by the author showed that 50% of 18-50 year old parent respondents had no or little knowledge of ACEs and 76% no, little or moderate knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ciresilient.org/who-we-are/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ms.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/skip-research/>

52% would change their parenting approach a lot or great deal if they had more information about ACEs and 78% a lot, great deal, moderate amount. (+-7% confidence level). **This demonstrates there is great scope here for community awareness actions and behavioural science nudges.**

But what is the current picture regarding ACEs in the UK? Key to this is finding out individual ACE scores and seeing their effects.

In April 2023, the My ACE Story website<sup>3</sup> was created by the author to raise awareness of ACEs, enable visitors to obtain their ACE score, watch regular screenings of the seminal documentary film 'Resilience'<sup>4</sup>, find out about positive parenting courses, etc. This was then promoted across the UK from May to August 2023. 7000 people visited the website and 2000 people completed the ACE Score survey (see Appendix A) and the results are presented in section 3. below.

The respondents were therefore self-selecting and the results are very different than previous UK studies<sup>5</sup>. One could say they are voices of **Lived Experience**.

To counter such biases, a small **National** representative survey (+- 5% confidence level) was also run using the same survey in September 2023 and the results from 350 people compared to the My ACE Story results.

So, this report looks at the results of these two surveys and tries to identify the effect of ACEs and makes suggestions for cost-effective prevention and reduction.

## 1.2. What are ACEs?

In 1995, a survey<sup>6</sup> of patients in a health plan in the USA looked at their health as adults and the childhood traumas they had experienced. Ten traumas were listed:

- Sexual; Verbal; Physical abuse;
- Emotional; Physical neglect;
- Parent who is mentally ill; an alcoholic.
- Mother is domestic violence victim; Family member jailed; Loss of parent by divorce or abandonment.

When the doctor saw the results, *"I saw how much people had suffered and I wept."*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.myacestory.com/>

<sup>4</sup> [Home - Resilience \(kpjrfilms.co\)](https://www.kpjrfilms.co/)

<sup>5</sup> <https://researchportal.ukhsa.gov.uk/en/publications/national-household-survey-of-adverse-childhood-experiences-and-th> 2014

<sup>6</sup> [About the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study | Violence Prevention | Injury Center | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/ACEStudy/)

People affected by several ACEs have much higher risk of poor health, educational failure, imprisonment, addiction, etc. For example, a study<sup>7</sup> of men in prison in Wales found that nearly half of prisoners (46%) reported they had experienced four or more ACEs. This compares to just over 1 in 10 (12%) in the wider population.

People exposed to 4+ ACEs can die 20 years earlier than those with no ACEs.

Four or more ACEs significantly increase the odds of a person:

- Developing cancer (by nearly two times)
- Being a current smoker (just over two times)
- Having sexually transmitted infections (by two and a half times)
- Using illicit drugs (by nearly five times increased risk)
- Being addicted to alcohol (over seven times increased risk)
- Attempting suicide (over 12 times increased risk)

This does not mean that these conditions will only appear in people with a high number of ACEs but the RISK of them appearing is much higher.

Other ACEs have been proposed since the original study e.g. racial abuse, poverty, bullying, etc.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences therefore are a root cause of trauma, result in wasted lives and are a huge cost to society.**

A report<sup>8</sup> in the Lancet in September 2019 estimated these as follows, "*Total annual costs attributable to ACEs were estimated to be US\$581 billion in Europe and \$748 billion in north America. More than 75% of these costs arose in individuals with two or more ACEs. Millions of adults across Europe and north America live with a legacy of ACEs. Our findings suggest that a 10% reduction in ACE prevalence could equate to annual savings of \$105 billion.*"

**Individuals, communities and society therefore pay a huge cost in dealing with the effect of ACEs - wasted lives, premature death, effect on communities e.g. anti-social behaviour, healthcare, justice, education costs i.e. spending taxpayer money.**

Prevention starts with awareness, especially by parents, schools, doctors, social workers, police, local government, etc. Organisations can develop 'trauma-informed practices' to mitigate the effects.

Preventing ACEs in future generations<sup>9</sup> could reduce levels of:

- Early sex by 22%
- Unintended teen pregnancy by 38%

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<sup>7</sup> <https://phw.nhs.wales/news1/news/more-than-eight-in-ten-men-in-prison-suffered-childhood-adversity/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(19\)30145-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(19)30145-8/fulltext)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.liverpoolcamhs.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Liverpool-ACE-briefing-SlideSet-.pdf>

- Smoking (current) by 16%
- Binge drinking (current) by 15%
- Cannabis use (lifetime) by 18%
- Heroin/crack use (lifetime) by 59%
- Violence victimisation (past year) by 51%
- Incarceration (lifetime) by 53%
- Poor diet (current) by 14%
- Mood disorders by 22.9%
- Anxiety disorders by 31%
- Behavioural disorders by 41%
- Psychosis by 33%
- Mental health diagnoses by 29%

## 2. Executive Summary

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful events occurring in childhood and have lifelong impacts on health and behaviour.

There is a lot of participation around ACEs by professionals – educators, academics, health services, social services, etc., but little focus on and involvement of parents and communities. This has led to a great deal of cost and effort on **reducing** the effect of ACEs once they have occurred **rather than prevention** in the first place i.e. dealing with the root causes.

In February 2023, a research survey by the author showed that 50% of 18-50 year old parent respondents had no or little knowledge of ACEs and 76% no, little or moderate knowledge. 52% would change their parenting approach a lot or great deal if they had more information about ACEs and 78% a lot, great deal, moderate amount. (+-7% confidence level). **This demonstrates there is great scope here for community awareness actions and behavioural science nudges.**

But what is the current picture regarding ACEs in the UK? Key to this is finding out individual ACE scores and seeing their effects.

In April 2023, the My ACE Story website<sup>10</sup> was created by the author to raise awareness of ACEs, enable visitors to obtain their ACE score, watch regular screenings of the seminal documentary film 'Resilience', find out about positive parenting courses, etc.

This was then promoted across the UK from May to August 2023 to 18-55 age groups. 7000 people visited the website and 2000 people completed the ACE Score survey and the results are presented in section 3. below.

The My ACE Story survey (see Appendix A) was anonymous and the 21 survey questions included:

- The 10 standard ACE screening questions<sup>11</sup>;
- Some questions from the WHO International ACE questionnaire (ACE-IQ)<sup>12</sup> re bullying, racism, neighbourhood violence as these are sometimes said to be possible external ACEs; demographics e.g. sex, age group, ethnicity, level of education, postal district, etc.;
- Medical information – visits in last 12 months to a GP and health conditions discussed.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.myacestory.com/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ACE-Questionnaire-for-Adults-De-identified-English-rev.7.26.22.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/adverse-childhood-experiences-international-questionnaire-\(ace-iq\)](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/adverse-childhood-experiences-international-questionnaire-(ace-iq))

The respondents were obviously self-selecting and the results are very different than previous UK studies<sup>13</sup>. One could argue they are voices of **Lived Experience**.

Demographics of the Lived Experience sample are as follows; 87% were female, 13% male. 10% were aged 18-25, 23% 26-35, 36% 36-45, 26% 46-55, 5% 55+. 85% defined themselves as 'White British' and 15% other ethnicities. 64% had a degree or post-graduate degree.

To counter the Lived Experience sample biases, a small **National** representative survey (+- 5% confidence level) was also run using the same survey and the results from 350 people compared to the Lived Experience results.

So, this report looks at the results of these two surveys and tries to identify the effect of ACEs and makes suggestions for cost-effective prevention and reduction.

Here are some key insights into the results of the surveys:

Each ACE question in the survey was prefaced with, "**When you were growing up, during the first 18 years of your life . . .**"

**The median number of ACEs in the Lived Experience sample was 4. The median number in the National sample was 2.**

## **2.1. A toxic, stressful family and home environment for those with a high number of ACEs.**

### **i. 60%-72% of children in the Lived Experience sample have lived within a context of violence in the home.**

Three of the top four ACEs reflect violence in the home which is meant to be a safe, nurturing space:

- Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten? 72%
- Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you? 70%
- Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up? 60%

**These were also the top ACEs in the National sample but to a lesser extent – 41%-45%.**

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<sup>13</sup> <https://researchportal.ukhsa.gov.uk/en/publications/national-household-survey-of-adverse-childhood-experiences-and-th> 2014

ii. **44%-63% in the Lived Experience sample have faced drug or mental issues with a parent.**

- Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal? 63%
- Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs? 44%

**Also significant in the National sample but to a lesser extent – 32% and 28%**

iii. **53% in the Lived Experience sample experienced family breakdown.**

- Were your parents ever separated or divorced? 53%

**The National sample result was 34% but the National sample includes a much larger older cohort reflecting perhaps a time of better family stability. Excluding this cohort and aligning the age range with the Lived Experience sample shows that 40% experienced family breakdown.**

## **2.2. A sexually threatening society for those with a high number of ACEs.**

i. **31% of females and 16% of males in the Lived Experience sample have experienced unwanted sexual contact (not necessarily in the home).**

- Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)? 29%

**This is much lower in the National survey – 12% of females and 5% of males – 9% overall.**

## **2.3. Regarding the ethnicity of the individual, the results are the same in the Lived Experience sample (+- 4% max).**

However, in the **National** sample, there are some larger differences. These are:

- Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison? White British 12%, Other Ethnicities 18%.
- Did your mother, father or guardian die? White British 25%, Other Ethnicities 13%.
- Did a parent, guardian or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you? White British 39%, Other Ethnicities 48%.



**2.4. Regarding the sex of the individual, except for unwanted sexual contact, the results are the same in the Lived Experience sample (+- 7% max).**

However, in the **National** sample, there are some larger differences. These are:

- Did your mother, father or guardian die? Male 30%, Female 16%.
- Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up? Male 47%, Female 37%.

Also the gap between male and female for unwanted sexual contact is 7%. Male 5%, Female 12%.

**2.5. Violence in the household in the Lived Experience sample has stayed more or less the same over time but arguments with the child have increased recently.**

Lived Experience
National survey

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?	72%	76%	72%	72%	70%	73%
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?	70%	82%	71%	69%	66%	71%

The **National** sample shows a recently improving picture, although these are still top ACEs in that sample:

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?	45%	33%	52%	51%	46%	41%
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?	41%	33%	38%	50%	47%	33%

**2.6. Mental health and drug issues in the household in both samples have increased over time.**

Lived Experience
National survey

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?	63%	74%	70%	61%	57%	56%
	32%	39%	36%	45%	31%	19%
Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?	44%	47%	45%	43%	43%	36%
	28%	28%	34%	36%	29%	14%

**2.7. Physical violence against the child in both samples has decreased over time.**

Lived Experience
National survey

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up?	60%	45%	58%	62%	61%	75%
	42%	22%	28%	57%	46%	43%

## 2.8. Separation and divorce in both samples has increased over time.

Lived Experience
National survey

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	53%	59%	60%	54%	47%	39%
	34%	36%	44%	43%	35%	19%

## 2.9. Sexual abuse in the Lived Experience sample has remained steady over time.

Lived Experience
National survey

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
	29%	28%	33%	28%	27%	25%

Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)?						
	9%	8%	16%	11%	7%	3%

**2.10. In both samples, the more ACEs, the more visits to GP and more conditions discussed.**

Lived Experience
National survey

No of ACEs (Yes answers)	Lived Experience Median number of times visited GP/A&E in last 12 months	Lived Experience Average number of conditions discussed with GP	National Median number of times visited GP/A&E in last 12 months	National Average number of conditions discussed with GP
0	1	1.2	1	0.9
7-10	3	2.6	3	2.4

**2.11. In both samples, the more ACEs, the more that certain conditions increase.**

Lived Experience
National survey

Condition	Lived Experience 0 ACE	Lived Experience 7-10 ACES	National 0 ACE	National 7-10 ACES
Anxiety	23%	68%	15%	53%
Depression	16%	67%	7%	37%
Other	23%	47%	10%	13%
Allergies	19%	29%	15%	23%
Asthma	15%	22%	10%	27%
Heart Conditions	1%	8%	0%	13%

**2.12. In both samples, family instability raises ACEs significantly.**

<b>Lived Experience</b>
<b>National survey</b>

In the **Lived Experience** sample, the median number of ACEs of those who did not experience their parents separating or divorcing is 3. This compares to 5 for those who did experience their parents separating and/or divorcing.

In the **National** sample, the median number of ACEs of those who did not experience their parents separating or divorcing is 1. This compares to 4 for those who did experience their parents separating and/or divorcing.

There is less nurturing, more drug and mental health issues, more violence in the home.

<b>ACE Question</b>	<b>Lived Experience Did NOT separate /divorce Number answering 'Yes'</b>	<b>Lived Experience Did separate /divorce Number answering 'Yes'</b>	<b>Lived Experience % Increase</b>	<b>National % increase</b>
Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison?	5%	17%	240%	187%
Thinking about the way your parents/guardians cared for and supported you, did they withhold food or did not provide clean clothes or left you alone for long periods or not protect or take care of you?	17%	35%	106%	155%
Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?	29%	56%	93%	137%
Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)?	23%	34%	48%	117%

Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?	61%	81%	33%	68%
Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?	54%	71%	31%	88%
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?	64%	75%	14%	56%
Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up?	57%	63%	11%	29%
Did your mother, father or guardian die?	13%	14%	-	18%

**2.13. In both samples, bullying is rife regardless of sex (60% have experienced) but is more prevalent in White British populations (+7% to 11% vs Other Ethnicities).**

**2.14. In both samples, 40%-45% of Other Ethnicities (excluding White British) have experienced racism.**

**2.15. In both samples, males (+5% to 12% vs Females) and Other Ethnicities (+6% vs White British) are more likely to have experienced violence in their communities.**

## **2.16. Preventing ACEs**

Thinking root causes, how do we successfully engage one of these groups in PREVENTING some ACEs in the first place, in a low-cost way?:

- youth (future parents),
- parents,
- caregivers e.g. grandparents

It should be noted that any solution is a long-term one – think at least 1 generation. There are no quick fixes.

13 ideas are presented for prevention (and reduction) of ACEs. A summary of these is as follows. The ideas are further discussed in section 4:

- a) All new and expectant parents should be made aware about ACEs and their effects.
- b) Behavioural science nudges could be used to keep ACEs in focus and change behaviours e.g. like 5-a-day.
- c) The '*SEEN: Secondary Education around Early Neurodevelopment*' curriculum<sup>14</sup> for Key Stage 3 pupils should be extended for ACEs and rolled out to all secondary schools.
- d) Online Positive Parenting Courses<sup>15</sup> should be offered free to all new and expectant parents.
- e) There has been a successful community initiative in the USA – Children's Resilience Initiative (now Community Resilience Initiative<sup>16</sup>) which has resulted in the whole community learning about ACEs and also agencies introducing trauma-informed practices. In one community, they have seen a 33% reduction in domestic violence, a 59% decrease in youth suicide attempts and a 62% decrease in secondary school drop-outs. Could that be replicated here via community champions? In that regard, open up the Resilience Challenge<sup>17</sup> to any community organisation.
- f) Scotland are endeavouring to become a 'trauma-informed nation'<sup>18</sup>. This started by screenings across Scotland in 2017 of the film 'Resilience'<sup>19</sup> along with a panel discussion. Could this film become free-to-view on a major channel in the UK with a lot of promotion as well?
- g) Could there be a mandatory parents' assembly at primary schools on ACEs?
- h) Socially prescribe volunteering.  
A study<sup>20</sup> in Australia has found that if a child is involved in volunteering before the age of 13, the odds of having poor mental health are reduced by around 28%. As well, children who demonstrate 'prosocial' behaviours, such as caring for others or doing acts of kindness, were 11% less likely to experience mental ill-health.

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<sup>14</sup> [SEEN: Secondary Education around Early Neurodevelopment — Department of Psychiatry \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Triple P positive parenting | what is it & how can it help? | Online Parenting Programme | Triple P \(triplep-parenting.uk.net\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Community Resilience Initiative | Trauma-Informed Training \(criresilient.org\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.resiliencechallenge.org.uk/>

<sup>18</sup> [Partner - Tigers Group](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Home - Resilience \(kpfjfilms.co\)](#)

<sup>20</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/research/commissioned-reports/prosocial-behaviours-and-positive-impact-mental-health>

- i) Mandatory screening for ACEs of all children and adults up to 65 at GP level.  
*"135,000 adults going through a US Health Appraisal with ACE screening with follow-up produced a 35% reduction in GP visits and an 11% reduction in Emergency Department visits over the following year compared with that group's prior year utilization. We realized that asking with later follow up, coupled with listening and implicitly accepting the person who had just shared his or her dark secrets, is a powerful form of doing."*<sup>21</sup>  
 In California<sup>22</sup>, mandatory screening for ACEs of all children and adults up to 65 was introduced in 2020 and is administered by the Center for Youth Wellness<sup>23</sup>. This has also led to fewer drugs given to children<sup>24</sup>.
- j) Introduce self-help groups for ACE survivors to share experiences. *"Self-Help Plus participants were significantly less likely to have any mental disorders at six-month follow-up compared to the ECAU group (22% versus 41%). The risk reduction appeared to be similar across the most common diagnoses of mental disorders – depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety disorders."*<sup>25</sup>
- k) Increase child-at-risk attachment to an independent adult. Scale initiatives such as TLG<sup>26</sup>.
- l) What nudges/education could be introduced re family stability/relationships? Do policies incent family stability? While the Government has focussed on the 'Troubled Families Programme' – now 'Supporting Families', the evidence above re ACEs and increasing family instability shows something more radical is needed. *"Since its launch in 2011, up to £1.533 billion of funding through the Troubled Families Programme has helped families and local areas to achieve a huge amount. The programme supported over 400,000 families to achieve positive outcomes between 2015-2021. Each one of these outcomes means a family's life changed for the better, whether it has meant improving a child's school attendance, so they get the best start in life, supporting a parent to overcome their substance misuse and keep their family together, or supporting victims of domestic abuse so they can build a more positive future for themselves and their family."*<sup>27</sup>
- m) Collect ACE scores at a local level and publish indices to help communities realise what issues are prevalent.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6326558/>

<sup>22</sup> [Trauma-informed Care: It Takes More Than a Clipboard and a Questionnaire | by Center for Youth Wellness | Medium](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Center for Youth Wellness](#)

<sup>24</sup> ['A Paradigm Shift' | News | North Coast Journal](#)

<sup>25</sup> [WHO psychological intervention effective in preventing mental disorders among Syrian refugees in Turkey](#)

<sup>26</sup> [TLG - Transforming lives for good](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Supporting Families - 2021-22 and beyond - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)



## 3. Results

### 3.1. Demographics

The My ACE Story survey (see Appendix A) was anonymous and the 21 survey questions included:

- The 10 standard ACE screening questions<sup>28</sup>;
- Some questions from the WHO International ACE questionnaire (ACE-IQ)<sup>29</sup> re bullying, racism, neighbourhood violence as these are sometimes said to be possible external ACEs; demographics e.g. sex, age group, ethnicity, level of education, postal district, etc.;
- Medical information – visits in last 12 months to a GP and health conditions discussed.

#### a) The Lived Experience sample

The survey from on the My ACE Story website was closed at 2000 respondents who were obtained via Google and Facebook promotion to 18-55 year olds (likely current parents) across the UK during May to August 2023. The respondents were therefore self-selecting and the results are very different (worse) than previous UK studies<sup>30</sup>. One could say they are voices of lived experience.

87% were female, 13% male.

10% were aged 18-25, 23% 26-35, 36% 36-45, 26% 46-55, 5% 55+.

85% defined themselves as 'White British' and 15% other ethnicities.

64% had a degree or post-graduate degree.

#### b) The National sample

To counter the biases in the Lived Experience sample, a small national representative survey (+/- 5% confidence level) was also run using the same survey and the results from 350 people compared to the Lived Experience sample results.

50% were female, 50% male.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ACE-Questionnaire-for-Adults-De-identified-English-rev.7.26.22.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/adverse-childhood-experiences-international-questionnaire-\(ace-iq\)](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/adverse-childhood-experiences-international-questionnaire-(ace-iq))

<sup>30</sup> <https://researchportal.ukhsa.gov.uk/en/publications/national-household-survey-of-adverse-childhood-experiences-and-th> 2014

10% were aged 18-25, 18% 26-35, 21% 36-45, 24% 46-55, 15% 56-65, 11% 65+. **Note the inclusion of the older age groups.**

81% defined themselves as 'White British' and 19% other ethnicities.

37% had a degree or post-graduate degree.

### 3.2. ACE scores

Looking at no/yes answers to the original 10 ACE questions:

No of ACEs (Yes answers)	Lived Experience % of respondents	Lived Experience Cumulative %	National % of respondents	National Cumulative %
0	4%	4%	20%	20%
1	7%	11%	18%	38%
2	9%	20%	13%	52%
3	13%	33%	11%	63%
4	19%	52%	13%	76%
5	18%	70%	8%	84%
6	13%	83%	7%	91%
7-10	18%	100%	9%	100%

**Lived Experience** - 52% had 0-4 ACEs. 48% 5-10 ACEs. **The median number of ACEs was 4.**

**National** - 52% had 0-2 ACEs. 48% 3-10 ACEs. **The median number of ACEs was 2.**

### 3.3. The Top ACEs

#### 3.3.1. The data from the survey.

**When you were growing up, during the first 18 years of your life . . .**

Rank of ACE	ACE Question	Lived Experience Number of respondents answering 'Yes'	National Number of respondents answering 'Yes'	% gap between Lived Experience and National
1.	Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at,	72%	45%	+60%

	insulted or humiliated or beaten?			
2.	Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?	70%	41%	+71%
3.	Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?	63%	32%	+91%
4.	Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up?	60%	42%	+43%
5.	Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	53%	34%	+56%
6.	Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?	44%	28%	+57%
7.	Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)?	29%	9%	+222%
8.	Thinking about the way your parents/guardians cared for and supported you, did they withhold food or did not provide clean clothes or left you alone for long periods or not protect or take care of you?	27%	13%	+108%
9.	Did your mother, father or guardian die?	14%	23%	-44%
10.	Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison?	11%	13%	-15%

### 3.3.2. Insights

### 3.3.2.1. Lived Experience sample

#### a) A toxic, stressful family and home environment for those with a high number of ACEs.

##### i. 60%-72% of children in the Lived Experience sample have lived within a context of violence in the home.

Three of the top four ACEs reflect violence in the home which is meant to be a safe, nurturing space:

- Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten? 72%
- Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you? 70%
- Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up? 60%

**These were also the top ACEs in the National sample but to a lesser extent – 41%-45%.**

##### ii. 44%-63% in the Lived Experience sample have faced drug or mental issues with a parent.

- Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal? 63%
- Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs? 44%

**Also significant in the National sample but to a lesser extent – 32% and 28%**

##### iii. 53% in the Lived Experience sample experienced family breakdown.

- Were your parents ever separated or divorced? 53%

**The National sample result was 34% but the National sample includes a much larger older cohort reflecting perhaps a time of better family stability. Excluding this cohort and aligning the age range with the Lived Experience sample shows that 40% experienced family breakdown.**

#### b) A sexually threatening society for those with a high number of ACEs.

i. **31% of females and 16% of males in the Lived Experience sample have experienced unwanted sexual contact (not necessarily in the home).**

- Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)? 29%

**This is much lower in the National survey – 12% of females and 5% of males – 9% overall.**

c) **Regarding the ethnicity of the individual, the results are the same in the Lived Experience sample (+- 4% max).**

However, in the **National** sample, there are some larger differences. These are:

- Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison? White British 12%, Other Ethnicities 18%.
- Did your mother, father or guardian die? White British 25%, Other Ethnicities 13%.
- Did a parent, guardian or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you? White British 39%, Other Ethnicities 48%.

d) **Regarding the sex of the individual, except for unwanted sexual contact, the results are the same in the Lived Experience sample (+- 7% max).**

However, in the **National** sample, there are some larger differences. These are:

- Did your mother, father or guardian die? Male 30%, Female 16%.
- Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up? Male 47%, Female 37%.

Also the gap between male and female for unwanted sexual contact is 7%. Male 5%, Female 12%.

### **3.4. Are results different for an age group?**

#### **3.4.1. The data from the surveys.**

**When you were growing up, during the first 18 years of your life . . .**

**Lived Experience**

**National survey**

Rank of ACE	ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
1.	Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?	72%	76%	72%	72%	70%	73%
		45%	33%	52%	51%	46%	41%
2.	Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?	70%	82%	71%	69%	66%	71%
		41%	33%	38%	50%	47%	33%
3.	Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?	63%	74%	70%	61%	57%	56%
		32%	39%	36%	45%	31%	19%
4.	Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up?	60%	45%	58%	62%	61%	75%
		42%	22%	28%	57%	46%	43%
5.	Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	53%	59%	60%	54%	47%	39%
		34%	36%	44%	43%	35%	19%
6.	Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?	44%	47%	45%	43%	43%	36%
		28%	28%	34%	36%	29%	14%
7.	Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)?	29%	28%	33%	28%	27%	25%
		9%	8%	16%	11%	7%	3%
8.	Thinking about the way your parents/guardians cared for and supported you, did they withhold food or did not provide	27%	30%	29%	26%	25%	26%
		13%	17%	16%	15%	11%	12%

	clean clothes or left you alone for long periods or not protect or take care of you?						
9.	Did your mother, father or guardian die?	14%	8%	13%	14%	16%	16%
		23%	8%	11%	26%	25%	34%
10.	Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison?	11%	11%	13%	11%	11%	6%
		13%	22%	14%	18%	9%	9%

### 3.4.2. Insights

#### 3.4.2.1. Lived Experience sample

a) Violence in the household in the Lived Experience sample has stayed more or less the same over time but arguments with the child have increased recently.

Lived Experience
National survey

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?	72%	76%	72%	72%	70%	73%
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?	70%	82%	71%	69%	66%	71%

The **National** sample shows a recently improving picture, although these are still top ACEs in that sample:

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?	45%	33%	52%	51%	46%	41%
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?	41%	33%	38%	50%	47%	33%

**b) Mental health and drug issues in the household in both samples have increased over time.**

Lived Experience
National survey

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?	63%	74%	70%	61%	57%	56%
	32%	39%	36%	45%	31%	19%
Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?	44%	47%	45%	43%	43%	36%
	28%	28%	34%	36%	29%	14%

**c) Physical violence against the child in both samples has decreased over time.**



<b>Lived Experience</b>
<b>National survey</b>

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up?	60%	45%	58%	62%	61%	75%
	42%	22%	28%	57%	46%	43%

**d) Separation and divorce in both samples has increased over time.**

<b>Lived Experience</b>
<b>National survey</b>

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	53%	59%	60%	54%	47%	39%
	34%	36%	44%	43%	35%	19%

**e) Sexual abuse in the Lived Experience sample has remained steady over time.**

<b>Lived Experience</b>
<b>National survey</b>

ACE Question	Overall number of respondents	Age Group 18-25	Age Group 26-35	Age Group 36-45	Age Group 46-55	Age Group 55+
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	answering 'Yes'					
Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)?	29%	28%	33%	28%	27%	25%
	9%	8%	16%	11%	7%	3%

### 3.5. How do the number of ACEs affect health?

#### 3.5.1. The data from the survey.

Respondents were asked to state the number of times they have visited a GP and/or A&E in last 12 months. Then selecting from a standard insurance list of medical conditions, to state what conditions they had experienced that they had spoken to their GP about. This also included an 'Other' to allow further conditions.

No of ACEs (Yes answers)	Lived Experience Median number of times visited GP/A&E in last 12 months	Lived Experience Average number of times visited GP/A&E in last 12 months	Lived Experience Average number of conditions discussed with GP	National Median number of times visited GP/A&E in last 12 months	National Average number of times visited GP/A&E in last 12 months	National Average number of conditions discussed with GP
0	1	2.3	1.2	1	1.6	0.9
1	1	2.2	1.5	1	1.9	1.1
2	2	3.1	1.8	1	1.9	1.3
3	2	2.9	2.0	2	2.4	1.6
4	2	2.7	1.9	2	2.4	1.7
5	2	3.2	2.4	3	3.9	1.6
6	2	2.4	2.1	2	3.1	2.4
7-10	3	3.5	2.6	3	3.9	2.4

#### Leading conditions by number of ACEs.

Lived Experience
National survey

Condition	Overall % reported	0 ACE	1 ACE	2 ACES	3 ACES	4 ACES	5 ACES	6 ACES	7-10 ACES
Anxiety	58%	23%	37%	46%	56%	57%	66%	62%	68%
	29%	15%	13%	26%	33%	36%	39%	56%	53%
Depression	49%	16%	33%	37%	43%	47%	58%	53%	61%
	24%	7%	6%	21%	31%	32%	39%	60%	37%
Other	31%	23%	22%	30%	32%	26%	34%	21%	47%
	17%	10%	19%	17%	8%	23%	36%	16%	13%
Allergies	25%	19%	19%	22%	23%	23%	30%	27%	29%
	16%	15%	19%	15%	13%	17%	11%	16%	23%
Asthma	19%	15%	14%	18%	18%	16%	19%	23%	22%
	16%	10%	13%	13%	21%	19%	11%	28%	27%
High Blood Pressure	9%	8%	10%	9%	10%	8%	12%	8%	10%
	18%	17%	19%	15%	18%	23%	11%	20%	17%
Heart Conditions	5%	1%	3%	3%	5%	4%	5%	7%	6%
	5%	0%	5%	6%	5%	4%	4%	16%	13%
Under 5%									

Diabetes, Cancer, Atrial Fibrillation, Epilepsy, COPD, Crohn's, MS, Stroke, HIV

### Lived Experience - Leading 'Other' conditions.

637 'Other' conditions were recorded by respondents, many with multiple conditions. Separating these out, here are the top conditions (above 1% of respondents) mentioned:

Condition	No of mentions	% of 'Other' conditions	% of all respondents i.e. 2000
Fibromyalgia	39	6.1%	2.0%
ADHD	31	4.9%	1.6%
Arthritis	25	3.9%	1.3%
IBS	25	3.9%	1.3%
Migraine	23	3.6%	1.2%
Fatigue - ME/CFS	22	3.5%	1.1%
PTSD	22	3.5%	1.1%
Personality Disorder	21	3.3%	1.1%
Autism	19	3.0%	1.0%

**Ethnicity and presenting conditions.**

Although prevalence of ACEs are more or less the same regardless of Ethnicity, are there any differences with presenting conditions for ‘White British’ and ‘Other Ethnicities’?

In the **Lived Experience** survey, the median number of visits to the GP in last 12 months are the same – 2 times. Other Ethnicities discussed 1.8 conditions, White British 2.1.

In the **National** survey, the median number of visits to the GP in last 12 months are the same – 2 times. Other Ethnicities discussed 1.1 conditions, White British 1.6.

Condition	Lived Experience White British % reported	Lived Experience Other Ethnicity % reported	National White British % reported	National Other Ethnicity % reported
Anxiety	59%	49%	29%	28%
Depression	50%	41%	25%	18%
Other	33%	26%	18%	9%
Allergies	26%	22%	15%	22%
Asthma	19%	15%	17%	12%
High Blood Pressure	9%	10%	20%	6%
Heart Conditions	5%	4%	5%	6%

**3.5.2. Insights**

a) In both samples, the more ACEs, the more visits to GP and more conditions discussed.

Lived Experience
National survey

No of ACEs (Yes answers)	Lived Experience Median number of times visited	Lived Experience Average number of conditions	National Median number of times visited	National Average number of conditions
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	GP/A&E in last 12 months	discussed with GP	GP/A&E in last 12 months	discussed with GP
0	1	1.2	1	0.9
7-10	3	2.6	3	2.4

**b) In both samples, the more ACEs, the more that certain conditions increase.**

Lived Experience
National survey

Condition	Lived Experience 0 ACE	Lived Experience 7-10 ACES	National 0 ACE	National 7-10 ACES
Anxiety	23%	68%	15%	53%
Depression	16%	67%	7%	37%
Other	23%	47%	10%	13%
Allergies	19%	29%	15%	23%
Asthma	15%	22%	10%	27%
Heart Conditions	1%	8%	0%	13%

### 3.6. How does separation and divorce affect number of ACEs?

#### 3.6.1. The data from the surveys.

Separation and/or divorce of parents can be a painful event for children involved. Looking at the data, we can identify those that did and did not experience this and see what happens to ACEs as a result.

In the **Lived Experience** sample, 934 did not experience their parents separating or divorcing, 1068 did. **The median number of ACEs of those who did not experience their parents separating or divorcing is 3. This compares to 5 for those who did experience their parents separating and/or divorcing.**

In the **National sample**, 230 did not experience their parents separating or divorcing, 120 did. **The median number of ACEs of those who did not experience their parents separating**

or divorcing is 1. This compares to 4 for those who did experience their parents separating and/or divorcing.

**The top ACES**

**When you were growing up, during the first 18 years of your life . . .**

ACE Question	Lived Experience Did NOT separate /divorce	Lived Experience Did separate /divorce	National Did NOT separate /divorce	National Did separate /divorce
Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	0%	100%	0%	100%
Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?	61%	81%	37%	62%
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?	64%	75%	34%	53%
Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?	54%	71%	25%	47%
Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up?	57%	63%	38%	49%
Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?	29%	56%	19%	45%

Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)?	23%	34%	6%	13%
Thinking about the way your parents/guardians cared for and supported you, did they withhold food or did not provide clean clothes or left you alone for long periods or not protect or take care of you?	17%	35%	9%	23%
Did your mother, father or guardian die?	13%	14%	22%	26%
Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison?	5%	17%	8%	23%

### 3.6.2. Insights

#### a) In both samples, family instability raises ACEs significantly.

<b>Lived Experience</b>
<b>National survey</b>

In the **Lived Experience** sample, the median number of ACEs of those who did not experience their parents separating or divorcing is 3. This compares to 5 for those who did experience their parents separating and/or divorcing.

In the **National** sample, the median number of ACEs of those who did not experience their parents separating or divorcing is 1. This compares to 4 for those who did experience their parents separating and/or divorcing.

There is less nurturing, more drug and mental health issues, more violence in the home.

ACE Question	Lived Experience	Lived Experience	Lived Experience % Increase	National % increase
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	<b>Did NOT separate /divorce Number answering 'Yes'</b>	<b>Did separate /divorce Number answering 'Yes'</b>		
Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison?	5%	17%	240%	187%
Thinking about the way your parents/guardians cared for and supported you, did they withhold food or did not provide clean clothes or left you alone for long periods or not protect or take care of you?	17%	35%	106%	155%
Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?	29%	56%	93%	137%
Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)?	23%	34%	48%	117%
Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?	61%	81%	33%	68%
Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?	54%	71%	31%	88%
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?	64%	75%	14%	56%
Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up?	57%	63%	11%	29%
Did your mother, father or guardian die?	13%	14%	-	18%

### **3.7. Other possible external ACEs.**



Question	Number of respondents answering 'Yes'	Female answer 'Yes'	Male answer 'Yes'	White British answer 'Yes'	Other Ethnicities answer 'Yes'
Bullying is when a young person or group of young people say or do bad and unpleasant things to another young person. Were you bullied to an extent that made you frightened or anxious?	58%	57%	61%	59%	48%
	45%	46%	44%	46%	39%
Were you made fun of or abused because of your race, nationality or colour?	13%	12%	19%	8%	40%
	15%	13%	18%	8%	45%
Thinking about the community you lived in, did you see someone being beaten up or threatened with a knife or gun or stabbed or shot in real life?	20%	18%	30%	19%	25%
	19%	16%	21%	18%	24%
Due to wars, terrorism, conflicts, etc., were you forced to go and live in another place or suffered destruction of your home or saw or experienced violence by soldiers, police, militia, or gangs?	2%	2%	3%	2%	7%
	6%	5%	7%	5%	12%

**3.7.2. Insights**

- a) In both samples, bullying is rife regardless of sex (60% have experienced) but is more prevalent in White British populations (+7% to 11% vs Other Ethnicities).**
- b) In both samples, 40%-45% of Other Ethnicities (excluding White British) have experienced racism.**
- c) In both samples, males (+5% to 12% vs Females) and Other Ethnicities (+6% vs White British) are more likely to have experienced violence in their communities.**

## 4. Discussion and recommendations

### 4.1. Why do ACEs occur?

Some thoughts:

#### 4.1.1. Parents can pass their ACEs on to their children (intergenerational trauma) because of their own learned behaviour/trauma<sup>31</sup>.

Q: What could be done to raise awareness of the effect of their parenting and/or change their parenting approaches?

Q: Would helping them deal with their ACEs change their parenting?

#### 4.1.2. Do parents generally (not just those with ACEs) know how to parent well and know about ACEs? Where do parents go for advice? One person with lived experience of ACEs told the author their source of advice were other members of their family. Is that the norm?

Q: What can be done to change parenting behaviours?

Q: Could parents help other parents by demonstrating good practices i.e. change social norms?

Q: Could behavioural science 'nudges' be used? If so, what might they be?

#### 4.1.3. As seen from the above data, unstable families seem to be another root cause.

Q: How can good, stable family relationships be incentivised, encouraged and created?

#### 4.1.4. Much of what goes on behind family doors stays a secret. Children may not feel free to tell their parents, another family member or someone in the community.

Q: Would early disclosure, screening by doctors prevent further ACEs? Early trauma can be spotted.

Q: Are children's stories dismissed too readily? How can children be encouraged to speak out?

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<sup>31</sup> [Intergenerational transmission of trauma effects: putative role of epigenetic mechanisms - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

**4.1.5. Parents are often stressed due to work, finance, illness, etc., This could lead to lack of quality time with children (although time with parents has doubled in the last 50 years<sup>32</sup>), lack of patience, etc.**

Q: How can stress be reduced within the family setting?

**4.1.6. They say it takes a 'village' to raise a child. Has the sense of 'village' (the community) weakened? Could this have allowed ACEs to increase?**

Q: How could you bring back the 'village' as something that prevents ACEs?

## **4.2. Towards some solutions**

Thinking about these and other root causes, how do we successfully engage one of these groups in PREVENTING some ACEs in the first place, in a low-cost way?:

- youth (future parents),
- parents,
- caregivers e.g. grandparents

It should be noted that any solution is a long-term one – think at least 1 generation. There are no quick fixes.

### **4.2.1. A policy approach**

Legislation has been passed in 30+ US states and other countries have taken a Public Health approach. The author developed a summary of this legislation, and it is directed towards four main policy considerations:

- Building knowledge and expertise of trauma-informed best practice
- Building capability and capacity in services and communities for trauma-informed best practice
- Collecting evidence of the extent of adverse childhood experiences
- Innovating new models

However, these approaches seem to focus on action by state agencies e.g. schools, police, healthcare, local government i.e. professionals. State agencies are developing/have developed 'trauma-informed practices' to mitigate the effects – moving from 'why did you do that?' to 'what has happened to you?' approaches.

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<sup>32</sup> [Educational Gradients in Parents' Child-Care Time Across Countries, 1965–2012 - Dotti Sani - 2016 - Journal of Marriage and Family - Wiley Online Library](#)

**This means the focus is in REDUCING the effect of ACEs once they have occurred, at huge cost. There seems to be very little focus on PREVENTION which naturally involves parents and addressing root causes.**

#### **4.2.2. Ideas for prevention**

Here are some ideas – there are many ways these can be implemented. Many could be piloted and then scaled.

- n) All new and expectant parents should be made aware about ACEs and their effects. There is a lot of very understandable information and resources about ACEs that has been created already. These could be shown/given to new and expectant parents by NHS, health visitors, etc.
- o) Behavioural science nudges could be used to keep ACEs in focus and change behaviours e.g. like 5-a-day re food habits. Behavioural scientists should identify and trial nudges that create better parenting and relationship behaviours while avoiding accusations of ‘nanny state’.
- p) The ‘*SEEN: Secondary Education around Early Neurodevelopment*’ curriculum<sup>33</sup> for Key Stage 3 pupils should be extended for ACEs and rolled out to all secondary schools. The focus here is future parents. This short court should be supplemented with information on ACEs as well.
- q) Online Positive Parenting Courses<sup>34</sup> should be offered free to all new and expectant parents. Triple P has been tested with thousands of families over more than four decades and been shown to help families in many different situations and cultures. Triple P’s evidence base now includes; more than 650 international trials, studies and published papers, including more than 170 randomised controlled trials. It has been shown to help reduce kids’ and teenagers’ problem behaviour and also reduce their emotional problems. The evidence also shows it helps parents feel more confident, less stressed, less angry and less depressed.
- r) There has been a successful community initiative in the USA – Children’s Resilience Initiative (now Community Resilience Initiative<sup>35</sup>) which has resulted in the whole community learning about ACEs and also agencies introducing trauma-informed practices. In one community, they have seen a 33% reduction in domestic violence, a 59% decrease in youth suicide attempts and a 62% decrease in secondary school drop-outs.

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<sup>33</sup> [SEEN: Secondary Education around Early Neurodevelopment — Department of Psychiatry \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Triple P positive parenting | what is it & how can it help? | Online Parenting Programme | Triple P \(triplep-parenting.uk.net\)](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Community Resilience Initiative | Trauma-Informed Training \(criresilient.org\)](#)

Could that be replicated here via community champions? In that regard open up the Resilience Challenge<sup>36</sup> to any community organisation.

The Resilience Challenge was offered to churches in UK in late 2019 as an initiative to bring together various stakeholders in the community to raise awareness of ACEs and create actions going forward. This was based on a successful church-led event in a UK city. Churches in 37 towns signed up but then Covid hit and the Challenge was parked. All the materials have been prepared and this initiative could easily be opened up to any community organisation.

- s) Scotland are endeavouring to become a 'trauma-informed nation'<sup>37</sup>. This started by screenings across Scotland in 2017 of the film 'Resilience'<sup>38</sup> along with a panel discussion. Could this film become free-to-view on a major channel in the UK with a lot of promotion as well?

The Resilience Challenge is also focused around this film but could the licence for showing in the UK be renegotiated for showing on a major channel? Would a showing attract a large audience? The screening would also need a panel discussion.

- t) Could there be a mandatory parents' assembly at primary schools on ACEs? When infants start primary school, could there be a 'out-of-the-box' standard parent's evening raising awareness of ACEs and having a discussion on parenting practices?

- u) Socially prescribe volunteering.

A study<sup>39</sup> in Australia has found that if a child is involved in volunteering before the age of 13, the odds of having poor mental health are reduced by around 28%. As well, children who demonstrate 'prosocial' behaviours, such as caring for others or doing acts of kindness, were 11% less likely to experience mental ill-health.

The data was collected as part of Growing Up in Australia: A Longitudinal Study of Children (LSAC) which has been following the development of 10,000 children since 2003. Researcher, Karlee O'Donnell, said the findings indicate that parents should encourage their children to volunteer in the community, particularly in the pre-teen years.

"Volunteering is one way for children to develop their prosocial skills as it provides the opportunity to care for others, show kindness and learn to take on others' perspectives. This study shows the tremendous benefits of volunteering for reducing the risk of mental ill-health – especially in the pre-teen years when mental health symptoms often come to the fore for children or become worse."

The volunteering can take many forms, such as helping at a local community sports club, participating in a community working bee, or more formal volunteering with a charity or church group. "It's the act of helping others in the wider community, and building

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.resiliencechallenge.org.uk/>

<sup>37</sup> [Partner - Tigers Group](#)

<sup>38</sup> [Home - Resilience \(kpjrfilms.co\)](#)

<sup>39</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/research/commissioned-reports/prosocial-behaviours-and-positive-impact-mental-health>

empathy and understanding, that is a critical protective factor against mental ill-health,” Karlee said.

- v) Mandatory screening for ACEs of all children and adults up to 65 at GP level.  
*“135,000 adults going through a US Health Appraisal with ACE screening with follow-up produced a 35% reduction in GP visits and an 11% reduction in Emergency Department visits over the following year compared with that group’s prior year utilization. We realized that asking with later follow up, coupled with listening and implicitly accepting the person who had just shared his or her dark secrets, is a powerful form of doing.”<sup>40</sup>*  
In California<sup>41</sup>, mandatory screening for ACEs of all children and adults up to 65 was introduced in 2020 and is administered by the Center for Youth Wellness<sup>42</sup>. This has also led to fewer drugs given to children<sup>43</sup>.

All patients at GP surgeries should be screened for ACEs and these should be discussed with the individual (or their parent, if a child) by a nurse practitioner. This could be prioritised by those that visit the GP frequently and show high levels of anxiety and/or depression.

- w) Introduce self-help groups for ACE survivors to share experiences.  
*“Self-Help Plus participants were significantly less likely to have any mental disorders at six-month follow-up compared to the ECAU group (22% versus 41%). The risk reduction appeared to be similar across the most common diagnoses of mental disorders – depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety disorders.”<sup>44</sup>*  
These is more of a reduction/healing measure. It could be specialised Patient Participation Groups (PPGs)<sup>45</sup> attached to a surgery.

- x) Increase child-at-risk attachment to an independent adult. Scale initiatives such as Transforming Lives for Good (TLG)<sup>46</sup>.  
TLG specialise in early Intervention with a volunteer adult becoming a coach for one child for one hour a week. Coaches work on a one-to-one basis with children, with the overall aim of reducing the child’s felt anxieties and increasing their confidence and aspirations. They become a trusted support to the child, their teacher and their family.

- y) What nudges/education could be introduced re family stability/relationships? Do policies incent family stability? While the Government has focussed on the ‘Troubled Families

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6326558/>

<sup>41</sup> [Trauma-informed Care: It Takes More Than a Clipboard and a Questionnaire | by Center for Youth Wellness | Medium](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Center for Youth Wellness](#)

<sup>43</sup> ['A Paradigm Shift' | News | North Coast Journal](#)

<sup>44</sup> [WHO psychological intervention effective in preventing mental disorders among Syrian refugees in Turkey](#)

<sup>45</sup> [Patient Participation Group - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.tlg.org.uk/your-church/early-intervention>

Programme’ – now ‘Supporting Families’, the evidence above re ACEs and increasing family instability shows something more radical is needed.

*“Since its launch in 2011, up to £1.533 billion of funding through the Troubled Families Programme has helped families and local areas to achieve a huge amount. The programme supported over 400,000 families to achieve positive outcomes between 2015-2021. Each one of these outcomes means a family’s life changed for the better, whether it has meant improving a child’s school attendance, so they get the best start in life, supporting a parent to overcome their substance misuse and keep their family together, or supporting victims of domestic abuse so they can build a more positive future for themselves and their family.”<sup>47</sup>*

There are various preventative aspects to consider here e.g. entering into safe and loving relationships, improving relationships between partners, splitting well. Improving such aspects is a complex and multifaceted process. Public policy should be to help people construct the foundations upon which a stable family life can be built - economic security, good incomes, the opportunity to acquire skills and education, reducing the time pressures on parents, and providing access to effective health care. Apart from policy considerations, communication is key, talking to a partner about feelings and what they both need to feel happy and fulfilled in the relationship. Alongside this, kindness and showing appreciation for a partner will strengthen a relationship. There must be behavioural nudges to develop here which will help realignment of social norms.

- z) Collect ACE scores at a local level and publish indices to help communities realise what issues are prevalent.

Identify through data collected, specific populations or geographic locations with a high incidence of measured Adverse Childhood Experiences, including by considering such data when promoting behavioural nudges, awarding grants and contracts to entities serving such populations or locations.

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<sup>47</sup> [Supporting Families - 2021-22 and beyond - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/supporting-families-2021-22-and-beyond)

## 5. Conclusion

Analysis of the two samples have brought out many observations, many of them common to both samples. What would be the top four that stand out to you?

For the author, these are:

**a) Family instability raises ACEs significantly.**

In the Lived Experience sample, the median number of ACEs of those who did not experience their parents separating or divorcing is 3. This compares to 5 for those who did experience their parents separating and/or divorcing.

In the National sample, the median number of ACEs of those who did not experience their parents separating or divorcing is 1. This compares to 4 for those who did experience their parents separating and/or divorcing.

There is less nurturing, more drug and mental health issues, more violence in the home.

**b) The top ACEs involved the behaviour of parents – around violence in the home along with the potential effects.**

- Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?
- Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?
- Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?
- Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up?

**c) The more ACEs, the more visits to GP, the more conditions discussed and the more certain conditions increase.**

**d) For a certain section of the population, unwanted sexual contact is high - 31% of females and 16% of males have experienced unwanted sexual contact (not necessarily in the home).**

We, as a society, could continue to focus on handling the results of ACEs at great cost, not only in money but also in wasted lives. We must move to prevention to address the root causes if we are to create a society where people thrive and reach their full potential.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: The survey

When you were growing up, during the first 18 years of your life . . .

\* 1. Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?

Yes No

\* 2. Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?

Yes No

\* 3. Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison?

Yes No

\* 4. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

Yes No

\* 5. Did your mother, father or guardian die?

Yes No

\* 6. Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, insulted or humiliated or beaten?

Yes No

These next questions are about certain things YOU may have experienced. When you were growing up, during the first 18 years of your life . . .

\* 7. Thinking about the way your parents/guardians cared for and supported you, did they withhold food or did not provide clean clothes or left you alone for long periods or not protect or take care of you?

Yes No

\* 8. Did a parent, guardian or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?

Yes No

\* 9. Did a parent, guardian or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you up?

Yes No

\* 10. Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or intercourse)?

Yes No

We are now going to ask questions about the community(ies) you grew up in. When you were growing up, during the first 18 years of your life . . .

\* 11. Bullying is when a young person or group of young people say or do bad and unpleasant things to another young person. Were you bullied to an extent that made you frightened or anxious?

Yes No

\* 12. Were you made fun of or abused because of your race, nationality or colour?

Yes No

\* 13. Thinking about the community you lived in, did you see someone being beaten up or threatened with a knife or gun or stabbed or shot in real life?

Yes No

\* 14. Due to wars, terrorism, conflicts, etc., were you forced to go and live in another place or suffered destruction of your home or saw or experienced violence by soldiers, police, militia, or gangs?

Yes No

Tell us a little about yourself...

\* 15. Sex

Male Female

\* 16. What is your age?

18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 66+

\* 17. Please enter the first part of your postcode e.g. if your postcode is B67 3DA then enter B67.

\* 18. Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background:  
White British, White other nationality, Mixed ethnic group, Asian British, Asian other nationality, Black British, Black other nationality, Other ethnic group

\* 19. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

No GCSEs, GCSEs, A Level, Vocational, Diploma, Degree, Post graduate degree

\* 20. Number of times you have visited a GP and/or A&E in last 12 months?

\* 21. Please tell us what medical conditions you have experienced from this list that you have spoken to your GP about (tick all that apply)?

Allergies, Anxiety, Asthma, Atrial Fibrillation, Cancer, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Crohn's Disease, Depression, Diabetes, Epilepsy, Heart Conditions, High Blood Pressure, HIV, Multiple Sclerosis (MS), Stroke, Other (please specify), None of the above



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