

CHILDHOOD ADVERSITY AND FOOD INSECURITY IN ADULTHOOD

Intergenerational Transfer of Hardship

THE ISSUE

Female caregivers exposed to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including abuse, neglect, and household instability in childhood, are more likely to report food insecurity as adults and among their own children, particularly if they also experience depressive symptoms.

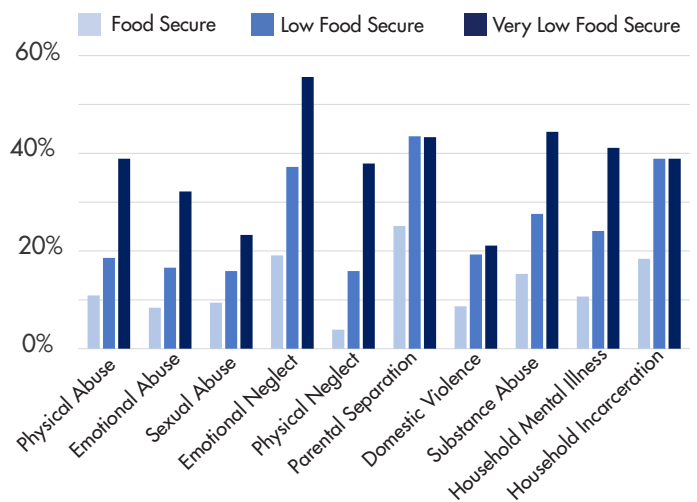
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are experiences before the age of 18 that include:

- emotional, physical, and sexual abuse
- emotional and physical neglect
- household instability, including loss or abandonment of a parent; domestic violence; mental illness, substance abuse, and incarceration of a household member

ACEs are associated with poor physical and mental health.¹⁻²

Food insecurity is defined as lack of access to enough food for an active and healthy life because of economic hardship.³ It can be measured at the household and child levels. Food insecurity is categorized into low food security and very low food security, a more severe form.

Reports of ACEs by Household Food Security Status



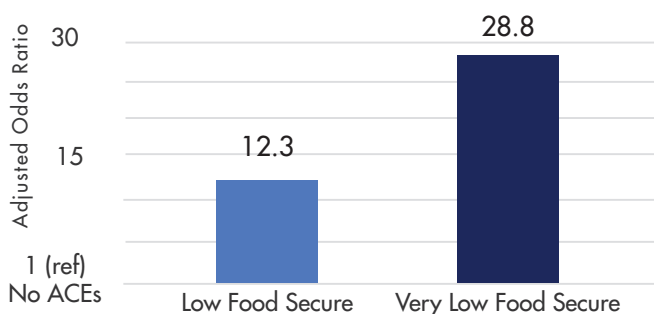
OUR RESEARCH

Through the Children's HealthWatch-Philadelphia study, we interviewed 1,255 Philadelphia mothers of children under 4 years about their ACEs, depressive symptoms, and current food security status for their households and children. ACEs were given a score from 0-10, with each experience counting for 1 point. Food insecurity was categorized into food secure, low food secure, and very low food secure at both the household and child level.

We measured the relationship between mothers' ACE score and household and child food security status. We also measured if mothers' depressive symptoms affected that relationship.

WHAT WE FOUND

Mothers with 4 or more ACEs were more likely to report low and very low household food security



Compared to caregivers with no ACEs or depressive symptoms, caregivers who reported depressive symptoms and 4+ ACEs were about 12 times as likely to report low household food security and about 29 times as likely to report very low household food security.

Compared to caregivers with no ACEs or depressive symptoms, caregivers who reported depressive symptoms and 4+ ACEs were about 18 times as likely to report food insecurity among their own children (not shown).

Adjusted for self-reported health, demographics, child's health insurance status, and public assistance participation. $p < 0.05$.

Children's HealthWatch is a pediatric research study that monitors the health and well-being of young children under age 4 and their families. The Center for Hunger-Free Communities operates the Children's HealthWatch site in Philadelphia at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in North Philadelphia, and has interviewed over 10,000 families since 2005. Research from Children's HealthWatch shows how public policies and economic instability affect children during critical periods of growth and development.

CONCLUSIONS

The more Adverse Childhood Experiences a caregiver reported, the more likely she was to report more severe forms of food insecurity. Among caregivers who reported ACEs, those who reported depressive symptoms had an increased risk of both household and child food insecurity.

For more information about this study, please see the following article:

Sun J, Knowles M, Patel F, Frank DA, Heeren TC, & Chilton, M. (2016). Childhood adversity and adult reports of food insecurity among households with children. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 50(5), 561-572.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2015.09.024>

RECOMMENDATIONS



Two-Generation Approach. Invest in coordinated programs that support families in order to address the mental health and economic stability of caregivers simultaneously with the health and development of children.



Scale Up Systems Approaches. Develop comprehensive policy interventions that combine nutrition assistance and behavioral health support to address intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

REFERENCES

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2. Dong M, Anda RF, Felitti VJ, et al. 2004. The interrelatedness of multiple forms of childhood abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28(7), 771-784.
3. Coleman-Jensen A, Rabbit MP, Gregory C, Singh A. 2015. Household food security in the United States in 2014. US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, ERR-194. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1896841/err194.pdf>.

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