

Press Release

Immediate Release

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Adverse Childhood Experiences Linked to Poor Adult Health Issue Brief Three of a Five Issue Brief Series

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA) has released the third brief in a series of five documenting how adverse childhood experiences effect health in adulthood. This third issue brief describes the increasingly common problem of domestic violence in Oklahoma and the impact it is having on the state's children. "Data from 2004, the most recently available data, showed a 32 percent increase in domestic abuse in Oklahoma. Over 24,500 domestic violence cases were reported that year." explains OICA executive director, Anne Roberts

This brief is the third in a series with information derived from the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) Study, a collaborative research project of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Department of Preventive Medicine at Kaiser Permanente (KP) in San Diego, California. This on-going study has tracked over 17,000 middle-class people to determine the correlation between childhood experiences and adult health.

Divided into ten ACE categories, the study examines five areas of child maltreatment and five areas of household or family dysfunction: emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, mother treated violently, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce and incarcerated household member.

"One of the most distinctive pieces of this study," says Roberts, "is the way it was able to track the co-occurrence of these forms of childhood abuse and household dysfunction. Many children who experience one type of abuse or dysfunction are also likely to experience other forms."

The third brief in the series claims that the long-term impact of domestic violence cannot be overstated. This claim is backed up by information about domestic violence's impact on several stages of childhood. Even before birth, babies can be exposed to high levels of the stress hormone cortisol which can result in poor fetal growth and a reduction in early brain development. The still-developing brains of infants are most vulnerable to the impact of traumatic experiences during the first year of life. Older children exposed to domestic violence often exhibit signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Several policy opportunities are available to slow the growing rate of domestic violence in Oklahoma and its impact on children. The brief suggests that policymakers could establish a state-level coordinating mechanism, bringing together plans from a variety of agencies for clients. Also, there is a need to develop clear connections between the fields of domestic violence and substance abuse treatment. Finally, protective factors for both mothers and children should be increased by a variety of organizations joining together to create safe, supervised and enriching opportunities for children and families.

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Adverse Childhood Experiences

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OICA is hosting a series of presentations by Dr. Vincent Felitti, author of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, on January 25th at Children's Hospital and the Oklahoma History Center. On that same day, OICA will release the *2006-07 Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook* that highlights the ACEs Study, and documents the status of Oklahoma's children and youth on a county-by-county basis. For a detailed agenda and registration information, go to www.oica.org. Issue briefs four and five will be released throughout the month of January.

Adverse Childhood Experience categories

CHILD MALTREATMENT

Emotional Abuse:

An adult in the household often swearing, insulting or putting down a child and /or the child occasionally fearing being physically hurt.

Physical abuse:

A child being pushed, grabbed, slapped or having an object thrown so hard that marks or injuries were made.

Sexual abuse:

An adult touching or fondling a child in a sexual way.

Emotional neglect:

Participants used a scored scale to show the extent that their family was a source of strength including feeling loved, special, protected and supported.

Physical neglect:

Participants used a scale to show how the household adults met their physical needs such as having enough to eat, having clean clothes and being taken to the doctor.

HOUSEHOLD OR FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

Mother treated violently:

A child hearing or seeing the mother or stepmother being physically abused.

Household substance abuse:

A child living with a person who abused alcohol or drugs.

Household mental illness:

A child living with a person who was depressed or mentally ill or had attempted suicide.

Parental separation or divorce Incarcerated household member

Parents were ever separated or divorced.

Incarcerated household Member:

A household member went to prison.