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What Difficult Life Events Do Children from Low-Income Families Experience?

Feature by Research Officers Sze Min, Jasmine, and Denise



In 2017, Singapore Children's Society started on a research study on resilience in children from low-income families.

Our study focused on one type of difficult life event - **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**.

Why study Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)?

ACEs are traumatic or stressful experiences that happen to people under 18 years old. Examples include:



Abuse



Neglect



Household Problems

ACEs can have severe and long-lasting impacts on the physical health and mental well-being of a person. Furthermore, research shows that children from low-income families are more likely to experience ACEs.

About the study

Our study seeks to understand the prevalence of ACEs experienced by children from low-income families.



What Difficult Life Events Do Children from Low-Income Families Experience?



Who took part?

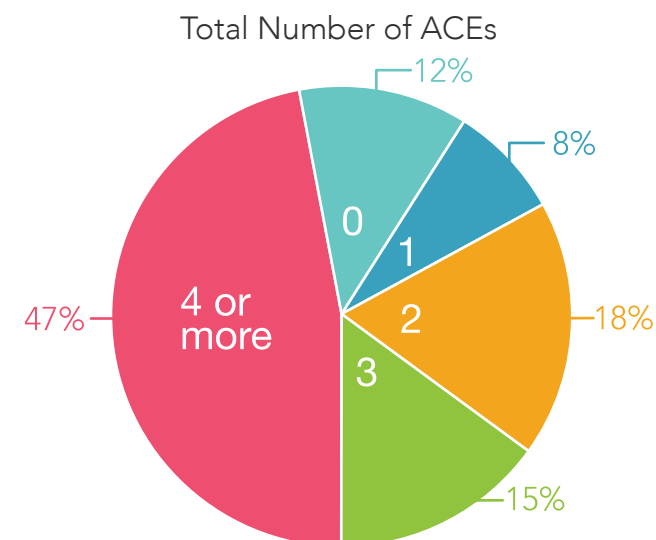
120 caregiver-child pairs from low-income families have taken part in the study so far. We are still interviewing children and caregivers, so the results presented are not final.



What questions?

We asked children to complete a questionnaire* to find out whether they had experienced 18 different types of ACEs.

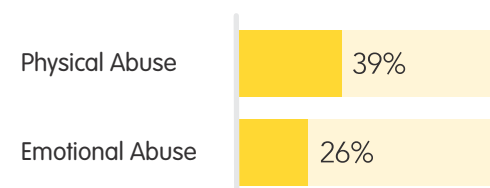
How common are ACEs among children?



- About **half** the children experienced **4 or more adverse childhood experiences**
- Around **9 out of 10** children from low-income families faced **at least 1 adverse childhood experience**

What types of ACEs do children experience?

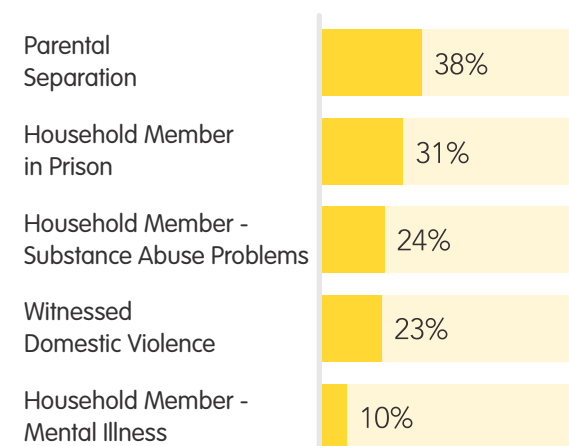
Abuse



Other ACEs



Household Challenges



Child indicated 'Yes'

*ACEs were assessed using a modified version of the Center for Youth Wellness Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire

WHAT DID WE FIND?

Similar to previous research, we found that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are common in children from low-income families.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?



ACEs can have severe and lasting impacts on children. Children who experience ACEs have a higher risk of developing mental health and substance use problems in adulthood. Hence, it is important to reduce the impact of ACEs and prevent ACEs from recurring.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

As practitioners, we can...



EDUCATE

Educate ourselves and caregivers on warning signs that children show after going through ACEs. Children might not talk about their difficult experiences and these can occur outside the home.



SCREEN

Regularly screen children for ACEs to provide timely help.

As a community, we can...



COMMUNICATE

Talk to the child, listen and be supportive. Ask open-ended questions to encourage sharing. (e.g. *What did you like about your day? Was there anything you didn't like?*)



INFORM

Speak to professionals such as counsellors or teachers if you suspect a child is experiencing difficulties.



Back To School Woes

How do we support children with school attendance issues?

Feature by Research Officer Jerrine Khong



Children may miss school for a variety of reasons. Even after their return following long absence, they continue to face challenges in school. It is important to promote protective factors that facilitate their return and continual stay in school.

Under the Compulsory Education Act, all Singaporean children have to attend school regularly and complete primary school education.



Since 2003,

our caseworkers have been working with families to ensure children are registered for school and attend school regularly.



To improve service delivery, in 2014,

we interviewed **28 past clients** (children and their caregivers) to find out how we can further support them in our interventions.

So, why do children have school attendance issues?



Home Issues

E.g., Financial difficulties, housing problems



Parent's Issues

E.g., Lax parenting, parental beliefs that education is not a priority

Being away from school not only made it hard to catch up with school work, but also weakened friendship ties useful for academic and emotional support.



"...I felt that I was isolated, maybe [because] I haven't been to school for a while and [was] no longer close to my classmates, so they did not help me."

- Child, on feelings after returning to school

Lack of empathy from teachers could further dampen the child's motivation to be in school.

"...the teacher [told] him 'you don't know how to read.... stand behind.' Then the teacher ignored him."

- Mother, on the teacher's reaction to her child's academic difficulties



Emotional support from school personnel and practitioners is just as important as academic help.

"She [caseworker] always say I can do better than this [...] I am a smart kid ... [child's name] you are a very bright child. I remembered."

- Child, on being inspired by caseworker

"[My form teacher] would help with any subjects we have difficulties [with], any problems, as long as we ask her she will teach us very patiently."

- Child, on support given by teacher

Implications

1 Peer Support

Peer support systems can be put in place to help the children cope with feelings of isolation when they return to school.

2 School personnel

School personnel and practitioners will need to provide more emotional support to these children to re-assimilate them into the school environment.

Spotlight!

Singapore Children's Society Research Grant Recipient Goh Mei Fang conducted the following study as part of her Master of Psychology (Clinical) with the National University of Singapore and University of Melbourne in 2013.

Feature by Research Officer Lui Zhi Jing

Having enough sleep is important for children to stay alert and energetic during the day.

But, do parents really know how much sleep their child needs?



According to her study with 73 parents and caregivers of healthy children aged 7-12 in Singapore, she found that...

1 Most parents underestimated their child's sleep needs.

ZZZZZZZZZZZZ

91% of children did not receive about 10 hours of sleep daily as recommended

ZZZZZZZZZZZZ

Only 34% of parents correctly identified that their child was not getting enough sleep

School-aged children should receive 9 to 11 hours of sleep at night in order to be active and alert in the day.

2 Parents' knowledge of sleep could be improved.

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Only 58% of parents answered more than half of the questions on sleep knowledge questionnaire correctly

Practitioners can share tips with parents to promote better sleep among children. E.g. It is best for children to have set times for going to bed and waking up.

3 Many children engaged in media and electronics use before bedtime.

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79% of children watched TV/DVD/videos and used computer/electronic media 1 hour before bedtime

Screen use before bedtime can overstimulate the brain, making it harder to sleep well. Instead, children can engage in a calming bedtime routine (e.g. reading stories) to help them wind down.

Play your part to promote resilience in children

Do you work with low-income families?

Want to find out what challenges your clients face and how to better help them?

Invite your clients to our study!

Who can take part?

- Children between **10 to 15 years old** and their main caregiver
- Households with an income of **\$4000 per month** or less, or **Per Capita Income (PCI)** of **\$1000 per month** or less

Benefits for your organisation



Refer at least **10 children** to get a **summary report** of your clients



Refer at least **30 children** to get a **free talk** on Resilience by a principal clinical psychologist and experienced trainer/consultant

Participants will receive



A \$20 NTUC voucher per caregiver-child pair as a token of appreciation

Want more details?

Contact Sze Min at...



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