

Snapshot: 2018-2020 Bermuda Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study

Adverse Childhood Experiences:

Adverse childhood experiences or ACEs is what we call the combination of traumatic experiences from a person's life before the age of 18 that can continue to impact them throughout adulthood. ACEs include multiple types of abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, such as violence between caregivers or alcohol and substance abuse within the household. These types of experiences or events were included as ACEs, because they are common and pervasive, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

ACEs in Bermuda:

Research on the frequency, impact, and associations of ACEs has been done in over 120 countries around the world. In 2018, Dr. Stephanie Guthman of Family Centre led the charge to bring ACEs research to Bermuda. In partnership with Bermuda Health Council and Ms. Tara Hines, a study was created so that Bermuda could have its own ACEs measures. The intent has always been to have accurate and accessible findings for people and organizations to use.

Research:

From 2018 to 2020, baseline data was collected on health behaviors and exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences using the ACE-IQ survey with added questions, specific to Bermuda. The basis of the survey was validated by the World Health Organization and was enhanced by the inclusion of 3 Bermuda-specific questions that reflect the island's unique culture. Information was collected from more than 700 respondents from a cross-section of the Bermuda community about events they experienced during the first 18 years of their lives. Each of the respondents were willing participants in the survey and were assured that their responses would remain anonymous. Full ethical approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Review Committee of the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

Results of Bermuda ACEs Study:

The Bermuda ACEs Study shared similar findings with other countries, when looking at the incidence of ACEs in childhood and associations with chronic disease, risk seeking behaviours, or cognitive difficulties (like not being able to focus), later in life. The more ACEs a person has led to up to a 35-fold increased risk of developing diseases like type II diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. The results also showed how strongly the community of Bermuda carries the burdens of trauma and tragedy for one another, with ACEs impacting people even if they themselves had not directly experienced it.

A Call to Action:

Findings can be of great value in advocating for increased investments by government and social service agencies to reduce childhood adversities through prevention, assessment, and early intervention initiatives as well as supportive ACEs based initiatives in treatment and intervention development for adults.

The results can also be used to inform the design and prevention of Bermuda-specific support programs that:

- (1) Promote community awareness of ACEs,
- (2) Support parents & caregivers,
- (3) Provide training and professional development in trauma informed care,
- (4) Advance policies and practice that help children and families thrive, and
- (5) Continue research on ACEs and their long-term impact on Bermudian society.

Visit www.tfc.bm or Call 232-1116 for more information!



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