

Survey: Trauma common for teens

75% say that they have experienced such events

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USA TODAY

It's far more common to live through childhood trauma than to grow up without it.

A new study found that 3 in 4 high school students experienced at least one potentially traumatic event involving violence, abuse or exposure to mental health or substance use problems.

And, notably, 1 in 5 high school students said they experienced at least four potentially traumatic events.

Health experts call these events adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, and they've been shown to increase the risk of developing chronic health problems and mental health issues in adulthood.

The report, published Tuesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, offers a deeper look at a 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 20,000 public and private high school students nationwide.

It marks the first time the CDC surveyed respondents about childhood trauma while they're still in high school rather than surveying them later in adulthood or asking parents.

"It means that it's timely data," said Dr. Allison Arwady, director of the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. "I'm excited about this work because it lets us think concretely about what we can do to get ahead of those problems."

In the survey, the students were asked about examples of emotional, physical and sexual abuse; physical neglect; intimate partner violence, substance abuse and poor mental health in the household; and the incarceration of a parent or guardian.

Emotional abuse surpassed all other traumas, affecting more than 61% of students. Physical abuse and poor mental health in the household came in second and third.

Researchers found ACEs varied by gender, with teen girls reporting more events than boys.

The results also varied by race and

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ethnicity.

American Indian and Alaskan Native students were the most likely to witness intimate partner violence and substance abuse. Asian American and Black students were more likely to experience physical abuse.

The study authors also asked students about negative health outcomes, such as risky behaviors.

They found students who experienced at least one ACE were likelier to experience these conditions and behaviors than students who reported zero ACEs.

Preventing traumatic events could reduce a person's chances of considering suicide by 85%, misusing prescription opioids by 84%, carrying a weapon at school by 65% and binge drinking by 64%.

Students who experienced four or more ACEs were at the greatest risk of suicide attempts and misuse of prescription opioids.



Adverse childhood events, or ACEs, are linked to chronic health problems and mental health illness in adulthood. SEVENTYFOUR/GETTY IMAGES

Preventing ACEs can also reduce the risk of health conditions, including asthma, kidney disease, stroke, coronary heart disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity, according to the CDC.

There are multiple strategies for preventing or mitigating adverse childhood experiences. Arwady from the CDC said talking to kids about mental health, monitoring for signs of distress and supporting emotional development and self-esteem can all help.