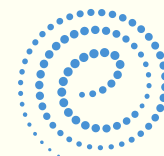


# Resilience in the face of adversity: a qualitative evidence synthesis on the strategies young people employ to cope with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

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# Research Question & Methods

## What are ACEs?

Stressful experiences during childhood which could harm or negatively affect living environment <sup>1</sup>

Example: physical, sexual, emotional abuse, neglect, DV, homelessness, living in care, substance misuse, parents in prison, separation or death.

<sup>1</sup> Bellis MA, Ashton K, Hughes K, Ford K, Bishop J, Paranjothy S (2015a) Adverse Childhood Experiences and their impact on health-harming behaviours in the Welsh adult population. Cardiff: Public Health Wales.

What strategies do individuals employ to mitigate the negative impacts of ACEs?

- Methods: Thematic Synthesis
- Evidence: 21 qualitative studies of people exposed to ACEs in the UK published in or after 2008
- 18 studies focused on YP & three focused on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

# Findings

We identified three overarching strategies used by individuals to mitigate negative impacts of ACEs

## Strategy one: Coping

- YP finding ways to manage emotions such as anger or guilt.
- Coping strategies were emotionally charged leading to destructive or health harming behaviours
- Masking emotions ‘act like a normal kid...didn’t let it show’ <sup>2</sup>
- Or covering by needing to excel ‘be a high - flyer’ <sup>3</sup>

### Coping

*internal* strategies used to manage the emotional impact of ACEs



***“Even though I was having them problems at home I didn’t let it show in school”***

(Houmoller 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Houmoller K, Bernays S, Wilson S, Rhodes T (2011) Juggling Harms: Coping with Parental Substance Misuse. London: London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

<sup>3</sup> Saha S, Cheung Chung M, Thorne L (2011) A narrative exploration of the sense of self of women recovering from childhood sexual abuse. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* 24(2):

## Strategy two: Dealing

### Dealing

*practical strategies to address problems related to ACEs*



***“[Mum] used to take overdoses... so I used to hide all the tablets so that she couldn’t find them”***

(Fraser, McIntyre and Manby 2009)

Related to practical strategies young people employed to deal with adversities in their life:

- Bonding with family in adversity finding comfort in normal things e.g. such as making cups of tea or going shopping.
- Shouldering responsibility : self-reliance, young carer, being in charge
- Beyond confines of home: recreational activities, allowing permission to have fun! “Ever since I started martial arts my panic attacks and anxiety attacks have pretty much gone” <sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Brewer JD, Sparkes AC (2011) Young people living with parental bereavement: insights from an ethnographic study of a UK childhood bereavement service. *Social Sciences and Medicine* 72(2): 283-290.

<sup>5</sup> Fraser C, McIntyre A, Manby M (2009) Exploring the Impact of Parental Drug/Alcohol Problems on Children and Parents in a Midlands County in 2005/06. *British Journal of Social Work* 39(5): 846-866.

## Strategy three: Sharing

YP described challenges and benefits of reaching out for support.

- Vital role of friendships – a source of help and normality/
- There is some stigma –barriers to trust and not wanting to be perceived differently
- Silent Sharing – seeking external spaces that are **quiet and safe**, where this is **unspoken understandings**, and **non-judgemental**: “I would not tell people my problems anyway. I would just hint it. Like bits and bits...”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Collins P, Barker C (2009) Psychological Help-Seeking in Homeless Adolescents. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 55(4): 372-384.

### Sharing

*support strategies used for mitigating impact of ACEs*



*“My friends have really helped me out, I talked to them and felt a lot better”*

(Brewer and Sparkes 2011)

# Conclusion

- Precarious nature of ACEs at home meant YP were seeking to offset with **‘mundane’ normal activities**
- They also reveal an incredible breadth of resourcefulness and resilience.
- Findings show young people want to exercise some sense of **agency and autonomy** on decisions that impact them
- **Bearing the burden** and seeking respite, many of these young people take caring responsibilities, which can have a positive impact. However young people also require ‘escapism’ and require outlets to ease the pressure rather than being separated from their families.
- By supporting and building on these strategies services may foster inclusion and help to tackle the inequalities faced by this group.



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