Childhood Adversity and Resilience in California

What It Is
Childhood adversity and resilience measures on kidsdata.org originate from three separate data sources and provide a rich and conceptually-related perspective on childhood adversity. Taken together, they present a broad framework to look at child adversity across the lifespan and provide useful data to inform and facilitate interventions. However, due to differences in methodology, data from the three sources should not be compared. The data sources are:

- National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH)
- Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA)
- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)

Why This Topic Is Important
Childhood adversity—such as child abuse, exposure to violence, family alcohol or drug abuse, and poverty—can have negative, long-term impacts on health and well being. Nearly half of U.S. children have experienced at least one adverse childhood event. Early experiences affect brain structure and function, which provide the foundation for learning, emotional development, behavior, and health. The toxic stress associated with traumatic, and often cumulative, early adverse experiences can disrupt healthy development and lead to behavioral, emotional, school, and health problems during childhood and adolescence. It also can lead to serious behavioral, emotional, and health issues in adulthood, such as chronic diseases, obesity, alcohol and other substance abuse, and depression. The more traumatic and toxic events experienced by a child, the more likely the impact will be substantial and long-lasting.

Resilience, an adaptive response to hardship, can mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences. It is a process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, threats, or other significant sources of stress. Resilience involves a combination of internal and external factors. Internally, it involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that anyone can learn and develop. Resilience is also strengthened by having safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments within and outside the family.

How Children Are Faring
Childhood adversity is common among California children, and many children experience multiple adverse circumstances or...
childhood experiences (ACEs), by race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2016-2019, 17.1% of Hispanic/Latino children in California had experienced two or more ACEs).

**Data Source:** U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Survey of Children’s Health (Oct. 2020).

### Prevalence of Childhood Hardships (Maternal Retrospective): 2013-2014

![Prevalence of Childhood Hardships Graph](https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/95/childhood-adversity-and-resilience/summary)

**Definition:** Estimated percentage of women with a live birth who before age 14 experienced childhood hardships (e.g., an estimated 7.5% of California women with a live birth in 2013-2014 experienced four or more childhood hardships).

**Data Source:** California Department of Public Health, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) Program, & University of California, San Francisco, Center on Social Disparities in Health, Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA) Survey (Mar. 2018).

### Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (Adult Retrospective): 2011-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of ACEs</th>
<th>California with Children</th>
<th>California without Children</th>
<th>All Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 ACEs</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 ACEs</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or More ACEs</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition:** Estimated percentage of adults with and without adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) before age 18, by presence of children in the household and number of ACEs (e.g., among California adults ages 18 and older living in households with children in 2011-2017, 17% were exposed to four or more ACEs).

**Data Source:** UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program, tabulation of data from the California Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and American Community Survey (Apr. 2020).

According to the 2013-2014 Maternal and Infant Health Assessment, one in four California women with a recent birth (25%) experienced two or more childhood hardships before age 14. Among young mothers ages 15-19, one-third (33%) experienced two or more hardship as children, compared with fewer than one-fifth (19%) of mothers ages 35 and older.

Statewide, an estimated 34% of postpartum women living at or below the federal poverty guideline were exposed to at least two childhood hardships, more than double the estimate (16%) for women with higher family incomes (above 200% of the federal poverty guideline).

The California Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System ACEs Module, combining data from 2011 to 2017, shows that among California adults living in households with children, an estimated 17% experienced at least four ACEs before age 18.

**View references for this text and additional research on this topic:**