

# To what extent do adverse childhood experiences lead to criminal behavior as adults?

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## ABSTRACT:

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Events)/Toxic or stressful times during childhood are experiences such as physical abuse, neglect, family violence, and witnessing community violence. These anomalies have negative effects on children's livelihoods and health in the long term. Dysfunction stemming from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) tends to constantly undermine healthy brain development, especially in the zones of emotional and behavioural growth in young people, hence increasing the tendencies of such people to take risks and commit antisocial acts during the adult years. Taking everything into account, ACEs are also linked with the increased likelihood of someone showing risky behaviour to the degree that this behaviour may lead to physical and mental harm in the longer run which is in some cases criminal in nature.

This essay will explore the research question, "To what extent do adverse childhood experiences influence criminal behaviour as adults?" It is important to understand how early experiences influence criminal behaviour later in life, which has significant implications for the individual's and the community's welfare. This research question allows for the examination of conflicting viewpoints and varying perspectives within the area. However, alternative factors such as socioeconomic factors, also have a major influence on criminal behaviour. Thus, the research delves into how adverse and unfavourable experiences that occur in one's childhood can lead to illicit behaviour,

Through the course of the study, the main perspective is the psychological perspective. Psychological perspectives can be measured in different ways, they identify the forces underlying human behaviour dependent on the environment surrounding them, early childhood experiences and how these can alter one's feelings and emotions. Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) shows that people with high ACE scores suffer from behavioural tendencies such as stress, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, etc. and other impaired consequences clouding one's judgement as to what is normal and acceptable behaviour.

The neurobiological perspective explores and helps understand the biological workings of the nervous system and how it conciliates behaviour. ACEs include maltreatment, being raised in a family of drug abuse and mental health issues, resulting in toxic stress. This kind of toxic stress from childhood trauma can alter one's brain development, essentially exerting influence on their bodily response to stress. This can result in people conducting similar behaviour in their adulthood and leaning to violence almost as a coping mechanism due to how normalised it has been since their time growing up. ACEs can influence and hinder one's brain and nervous system (brain development) and stress response system. The National Academic Press reports that even young children and infants are highly sensitive to what can be communicated through the actions and words of others.. Therefore ACEs can encourage someone into believing that certain actions are viable due to frequent exposure to them while their minds are still premature, causing behavioural controversies in their adulthood.

The socio-economic point of view investigates how economic activity and social conditions can regress one's behaviour. A common example of this is poverty. A person or a group of people who live in poverty lack the financial resources for sustaining themselves or maintaining their standard of life. This can alter one's behaviour as it causes people to avoid a constructive method of problem-solving and thrive by opting for the easier method of being economically stable even if it is illegal such as theft. Financial insecurity can distort people's values and can cause greed, aggression, irresponsibility and neglect of criminal law prohibitions all in order to survive. Having socio-economic problems at a young age results in people swaying to crime in order to be able to afford necessities and sometimes leads to people using these methods as their main source of income in their adulthood.

Each perspective is different and valuable for its unique originality. According to the Houston Academy, a psychological perspective is a school of thought or philosophy that directs how one interprets behaviour. The psychological approach looks into the psychological processes through which individual mental health and emotional well-being are impacted by ACEs, such as abuse or trauma, and how these processes may be linked to criminal behaviour. In contrast, according to Harvard University, neurobiology is concerned with discovering the biological mechanisms by which the nervous system controls behaviour. The neurobiological perspective focuses on the investigation of neural events and functional circuits and how these neural events lead to behaviours linked to more advanced brain functions, from the perspective and control of movement to retain information and memory. According to the American Psychological Association, socioeconomic status, or SES, encompasses a variety of factors in addition to financial stability, academic success, and individual perceptions of social class and position. In addition to the opportunities and benefits that people in a community may have, socioeconomic status can also refer to standard lifestyle traits. Furthermore, SES serves as a reliable and consistent predictor of a wide range of life outcomes, including mental and physical health. As a result, SES is important for research, practice, education, and engagement in many fields of the social and behavioural sciences. This perspective emphasises the reality that people who face financial challenges as children are more prone to turn to crime as a means of getting basic necessities, and in certain situations, may employ such behaviours as their primary source of income as adults.

### **Methodology:**

Desk research constitutes the basis of the methodology used in this research report. I will use secondary research, including statistical data relevant to the investigation that has been used. Although primary research provides a first-hand glimpse into the issues and enhances the reliability of any research, it has several ethical considerations. As such a comprehensive method requires professional expertise. Hence primary research was not conducted for this investigation. Conducting such research without professional supervision and training may reduce the reliability and accuracy of the findings. To address this issue, a comprehensive analysis of the existing sources of knowledge will be carried out, along with a review of relevant experts' studies and other relevant academic works. The research question-related secondary data analysis have been applied throughout, drawing from a variety of academic institutions and governmental organisations. This has supported the arguments made in the study report and assisted in coming to a relevant and clear conclusion.

### **Psychological perspective:**

ACEs are associated with a number of psychological characteristics that can often contribute to criminal behaviour. These factors can include mental abuse, psychological trauma, etc. The University of Edinburgh claims that, although most people stopped crime in their teens, the researchers reported that drug use among youth who were repeat victims of crime and who had impulsive tendencies were all linked to some people continuing into early adulthood. The University of Edinburgh is a highly reputable global source with a wide spectrum of credibility. High

levels of excellent academic achievement are upheld, and a range of carefully supervised and professional academics undertake the study at the University of Edinburgh. This provides more evidence that the sources generated by the University of Edinburgh are highly reliable.

For example, a study conducted by [Eun Young Kim](#), [Jiung Park](#) & [Bongseog Kim](#). There were two aims of this study: (1) the relationships between a history of childhood maltreatment and mental-health problems, and (2) the independent contribution of specific types of maltreatment and mental-health problems to recidivism, based on epidemiological data of adult probationers in South Korea. This study was published on 19 August 2016. The study included a number of 183 adult probationers which consisted of 107 males and 76 females. Because the researchers employed self-report scales like the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) and the Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI), this study can be regarded as extremely reliable. This implies that other psychologists can repeat the study to evaluate its reliability. In addition, the utilisation of self-report via questionnaires and interviews yields a significant quantity of subjective data by evaluating an individual's emotional and cognitive control. This strengthens the research's validity even more, boosting its credibility and reliability.

The study's findings showed that, on average, people in the group that experienced childhood maltreatment had 56 points. 1 percent of mental disorders, which was significantly higher than the group that did not experience maltreatment's 38 points 2 percent ( $p = 0.017$ ). At least one mental illness (AOR, 3.791; 95 percent CI, 1.703-8.443) and physical neglect (AOR, 2.862; 95 percent CI, 1.213-6.752) were associated with criminal activity. This offers more support for the research question concerning the influence of psychological variables during childhood maltreatment on the likelihood of criminal behaviour in adulthood.

Another recent study was conducted by [Müge Cantürk](#), [Haydeh Faraji](#), and [Ahmet Ertan Tezcan](#). The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between childhood trauma, violence tendency, and crime among male prisoners and inmates in prison. This study was published on 19 January 2021. Because it is current and up to date, this strengthens the credibility of the entire source. Included in the study were 313 male inmates of Mersin Anamur T type closed-open prison who had been found guilty of drug-related, sexual, intentional manslaughter, and theft offences. This implies that the study's external validity can be increased because the sample size was sizable enough to allow the findings to be applied to a broader population. Thus, it is evident through the evaluation of the studies discussed that ACEs have a considerable impact on the psychology of the children who grow up to become individuals with criminal behaviour. This argument is strengthened several primary research based data, collected by professional and experts in the field of psychology

The findings of this study showcased that when it comes to emotional abuse and childhood trauma, divorced individuals performed significantly worse than single and married adults ( $U = 2,273.00$ ,  $P = 0.019$ ;  $U = 2,231.00$ ,  $P = 0.015$ ;  $U = 2,123.50$ ,  $P = 0.006$ ;  $U = 2,150.00$ ,  $P = 0.010$ ). When it came to physical and sexual abuse, those who had previously been in prison performed better than those who had not ( $U = 9,284.00$ ,  $P = 0.010$ ;  $U = 9,766.00$ ,  $P = 0.028$ ).

Helena Dias de Castro Bins a, Renata Maria Dotta Panichi a, José Geraldo Vernet Taborda a 1, Ygor Arzeno Ferrão conducted a study which was published on 26 February 2020. The aim of the study was to investigate whether five childhood trauma subtypes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect are associated with adult psychiatric disorders, BDNF levels, and criminality among incarcerated women. Due to

the recent publication, the source, it can be considered as highly credible. The sample size of the study consisted of 110 women. The Mini-International Neuropsychiatric Interview-Plus and the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire were given to the entire group, and a subsample of 54 women had their Brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) levels measured. In order to obtain as much information as possible from a comparatively small sample size, the researchers of this study used self-report scales of this kind to gather a variety of qualitative data. Considering that participants can express themselves while contributing data. This adds to the validity of the study.

According to the study's findings, the forensic group had significantly higher rates of mental illness and childhood trauma. Emotional abuse was more common in the forensic and clinical groups than in the healthy control group. It has been shown that emotional and sexual abuse are linked to decreased BDNF levels in both forensic and healthy controls. Multinomial logistic regression revealed that the clinical psychiatric group was associated with lower levels of BDNF, higher levels of emotional abuse, and the presence of familial crime. The findings of this study support the hypothesis that BDNF may play a critical role in the development of illnesses and criminal activity in women who have experienced childhood trauma, potentially serving as a biological marker.

Thus, it is evident from the evaluation of the studies discussed that ACEs have a considerable impact on the psychology of the children who grow up to become individuals with criminal behaviour. This argument is strengthened by several primary research-based data collected by professionals and experts in the field of psychology.

#### **Neurobiological Perspective:**

The Harvard University Centre On Developing Child states that the neural network is infamously susceptible to outside influences, both positive and negative, during the early and vital stages of growth and development. During these critical years, responsive, consistent adult interaction influences the best possible emotional and cognitive development; however, prolonged or severe hardship can interfere with normal brain development. The excellent calibre of the Center's affiliated faculty and staff, along with their unwavering commitment to its main goal which is to attain withstanding results for children facing adversity through science-based transformations. are its greatest assets. The Center's conclusions and suggestions are more credible because of this commitment to a research-based methodology. Because Harvard University is renowned for producing top-notch academic research, the centre's affiliation with the university enhances its standing. Additionally, renowned academics in their respective fields of expertise are conducting the research. This increases the source's legitimacy and dependability.

Rasmus M. Birn, Barbara J. Roeber, and Seth D. Pollak conducted a study that was published on December 4, 2017. This study looked into a potential mechanism that could explain why stressed people make poor decisions and choices. This was accomplished by first assessing the life circumstances of a community sample of primary school-aged children. The study included 54 individuals (17 females) with high and verifiable levels of stress during childhood, as well as 25 individuals (11 females) with relatively low levels of stress during their early childhood. The researchers assessed both groups again in their adulthood. The basal ganglia are part of the reward pathway in the brain that is triggered by this. The anticipation and drive to work toward a reward (or prevent a loss) were gauged by the researchers based on the participants' reactions upon experiencing the reward or loss. This experiment investigates whether people who have gone through a lot of stress as children may be more prone to engage in maladaptive behaviours as a result of altered thought processes regarding potential gains or losses. The researchers in this study thoroughly studied the potential mechanism that could explain why stressed people make poor decisions

and choices. The many experiments conducted during the investigation were laboratory experiments. Laboratory experiments are highly standardised. This allows other researchers to duplicate their findings and assess reliability. Hence, it is very reliable. Despite the fact that this source does not specifically address the research question as it states the potential mechanism that could explain why stressed people make poor decisions and choices and participate in risk taking behaviour. Therefore it is not directly linked to criminal behaviour. But it can be deduced that risk taking behaviour may result in crimes as well. Moreover, various claims made throughout the research can be supported by the analysis from this source.

The study showed that poor decision-making can result from maladaptive risk-taking behaviour because it can be difficult to process potential rewards and predict potential losses. The investigators looked at gains and losses separately. The findings of the study suggested that The activation of the lingual gyrus and precuneus during reward anticipation and the left inferior frontal gyrus during loss response has been found to be a significant mediator between early life stress and maladaptive risk-taking behaviours.

After having a thorough evaluation of the study and authoritative sources, the significance of neurobiological effects encountered during ACEs can fairly contribute to criminal behaviour as adults. While the study doesn't focus on behaviour, it highlights how adverse experiences can influence processes and potentially lead to maladaptive behaviours. This accentuates the relationship between childhood experiences, cognitive growth and future behavioural patterns adding depth to my research. Incorporating data from the findings of these academic and reputed sources further enhances the credibility of this research report.

### **Socio-Economic perspective:**

According to the American Psychological Association, a person's socio-economic status (SES) is more than just their financial standing level. It also takes into account a person's educational achievements, job status, and individual impressions of their position in society and class. SES mainly represents the quality of life and possibilities accessible to individuals in society, and it constantly predicts a variety of psychological outcomes. With more than 157,000 researchers, teachers, health professionals, consultants, and students, APA is the largest psychology and professional association in the United States. Because it adheres to a broad variety of ethical issues for psychology research, practices, and teachings, the American Psychological Association is likewise very ethical. Additionally, the psychologists adhere to a strict code of conduct and specific ethical guidelines. Furthermore, APA provides evidence-based resources with practical expertise, making them highly credible and reliable. The Government of Canada has investigated the social and economic factors that affect crime level in a community. In 1999, Canada accounted for 86% of all adults and 75% of all offenders (ages 12-17). Social and economic deprivation has been shown to be strongly associated with crime, particularly more violent crimes such as assault, robbery and murder. This investigation has been uploaded on the Department of Justice Canada's official website. This suggests that it is extremely likely to be authorised by professionals, exhibiting a level of expertise and authority in the subject topic. The source has provided a wide range of statistical data, further strengthening the argument making it credible. Although this investigation is outdated, it indicates the interconnections between socio-economic and criminal behaviour as adults.

For example, a study conducted by Olalekan Taoreed Kazeem which was published on 6th October 2020. The main aim of this study was to investigate the influence of adverse childhood

experiences (ACEs) and socio-economic status (SES) on criminal behaviour. The researcher has used various self report scales such as The Adverse Childhood Experience International

Questionnaire (ACE-IQ), The Criminal and Violence Scale (CVS), The 12-item General Conflict Tactic Scale (GCTS), the 7-item Property Crime Scale (PCS), the 7-item Interpersonal Crime Scale (ICS), and the 5-item Drug Crime Scale (DCS) make up the Criminal and Violence Scale (CVS) and The SES (socio-economic status) questionnaire making it highly reliable. Moreover, the research was highly ethical as the researchers ensured the ethical guidelines were followed such as right to confidentiality, right to withdraw, no physical or psychological harm was done to the participants whatsoever. This makes the study highly credible. These reports assessed the participants own perceived emotions instead of the behavioural and physiological emotions.

The study's findings indicate that adverse childhood experiences (family environment, peer violence, interpersonal violence, and participation in war/collective violence) were significant independent and combined predictors of criminal behaviour ( $R^2 = 0.78$ ;  $F(4248) = 61.1$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ). Adverse childhood experiences significantly influenced general conflict strategies ( $R^2 = 0.62$ ;  $F(4248) = 11.2$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ), property crimes ( $R^2 = 0.37$ ;  $F(4248) = 8.5$ ;  $p = 0.05$ ), and interpersonal relationships. ( $R^2 = 0.42$ ;  $F(4248) = 10.5$ ;  $p = 0.04$ ) and drug offence ( $R^2 = 0.61$ ;  $F(4248) = 11.2$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ). Inmates with low socioeconomic status were more likely to conduct violent offences than those with high socioeconomic level ( $t(251) = 3.26$ ;  $p = .02$ ). This is crucial to my report because it provides scholarly evidence to support my research as it indicates that negative socio-economic factors experienced during one's childhood can contribute to criminal activity in adulthood.

Therefore, through the analysis of these academic studies and authoritative sources, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between lack of socio-economic status (SES) during one's childhood and its positive correlation with criminal behaviour in adulthood. The ethical considerations and diligent methodology followed in these academic studies further amplifies its credibility and reliability providing strong evidence to the research report.

### **Conclusion and reflection:**

The research report investigates the association between adverse childhood experiences and their impact on adult criminal behaviour. This association between ACEs and criminal activity raises several interesting, in-depth questions from the socioeconomic, neurological, and psychological domains. One cannot determine which of these perspectives is more impactful after carefully weighing the pros and cons of each. One study, for instance, discovered that specific types of maltreatment and mental health conditions independently influence criminal behaviour. In addition to physical and psychological abuse, parental physical and emotional neglect is also considered a form of maltreatment that can have a substantial effect on a child's future criminal behaviour.

The psychological perspective examines adult behaviours, the various effects of childhood trauma, and the victim's psychological interpretation of these behaviours. Activities that have a detrimental effect on a victim's mental health and may increase their likelihood of committing crimes as adults are examples of this in particular. These consist of negative behavioural, emotional, and physical traits. High levels of stress, hopelessness, or drug abuse are associated with ACEs scores, according to research, and these factors can significantly affect an individual's capacity for behaviour, learning, and decision-making.

From a neurobiological perspective, the effects of ACEs on brain development and functioning can be better understood. Additionally, research on the neurobiology of toxic stress suggests that people are able to rewire the neural circuits in their brains that govern their emotions. These components have the potential to influence someone to act aggressively, risk-taking, or illegally. Furthermore, research has shown that a child's early years may be seen as the most crucial since it is during these times that the child's brain development can be positively and significantly impacted by meaningful and responsive relationships with adults. Similar negative behaviours and challenges during these stages may have a detrimental effect on their normal brain development.

A socioeconomic perspective also looks at an individual's general social and economic standing in society. Socioeconomic traits include things like income, level of education attained, ethnicity, social class, and so on. Research has shown that adverse childhood experiences or deprivation may increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour as an adult, particularly for more serious crimes like assault, robbery, and murder. Data from another study conducted by Olalekan Taoreed Kazeem showcase that crimes are more likely to be committed by convicts from low socio-economic classes.

In essence, this research report emphasises the intricate relationship between ACEs and criminal behaviour, alluding to new insights into the problem. It is critical to understand early experiences are not the only source of criminal behaviour, although they should not be looked upon while considering the other factors.

My comprehension of the factors that influence how ACEs affect criminal behaviour in adulthood has drastically changed as an outcome of my research and study. Prior to my research, I believed that the focal elements that influence criminal behaviour in adults were just primary factors such as biological and psychological aspects of childhood trauma (ACEs), although after concluding my research I realised my presumption was incorrect. Adverse childhood experiences can have a significant impact on criminal behaviour in adults due to multiple factors mentioned throughout the study. It explores the distinct psychological, neurological and socioeconomic characteristics of early experiences and how they have an impact on the development of criminal behaviour. To further magnify my knowledge, I explored and dug deeper into the study by carefully selecting and combining data from other academic sources.

My objective was to compile the key findings and revelations from several scholarly sources into a coherent narrative. This required going over the information, looking for concepts, and bringing numerous perspectives together into an integrated argument. My goal was to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the complex relationship between ACEs and criminal behaviour.

Ensuring that the framework was arranged logically and cohesively was a crucial aspect of report writing. I included the following sections in the report: a methodological section, a psychological viewpoint, a neurobiological perspective, and a socioeconomic perspective. This framework allows for a methodical examination of the topic from multiple angles, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of ACEs and their impact on criminal behaviour. The psychological perspective holds that early trauma has a significant detrimental impact on a person's mental health and can be a contributing factor in the emergence of various psychological disorders such as anxiety,

depression, and stress, and how these might influence criminal behaviour later in life. Previous studies have shown that compared to their non-maltreated peers, maltreated children have a markedly increased chance of engaging in criminal activity as young adults. This risk may increase by up to six times. Through a critical examination of numerous academic sources and an investigation of the psychological perspective, I discovered that children who experience trauma in their early years frequently display a wide range of issues, including mental health disorders, impulsivity, propensities for criminal activity, and antisocial behaviour as adults.

It is evident from taking into account the neurobiological perspective provided in the research report that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have a significant impact on brain development and functioning, in particular when it comes to adult criminal conduct. This perspective draws attention towards the significant impact that childhood trauma has on an individual's neurobiological functioning, that may increase their likelihood to indulge in activities that are frequently associated with criminal conduct. The research report emphasises how early-life adversities may alter the structure and function of the brain, which can ultimately result in a rise in impulsivity, aggressiveness, and other negative behaviours. Upon reviewing the report evaluating the perspective, I am amazed by the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and brain maturation. The results indicate that childhood trauma can have a lasting impact on the brain potentially shaping individuals decision making and emotional regulation as they age. I find it difficult to ignore how much the economic factors covered in the research report affect people's susceptibility to childhood trauma and its aftereffects. The research report demonstrates how socioeconomic disparities and a lack of resources can create conditions that increase the likelihood of adverse childhood experiences, perpetuating cycles of adversity from one generation to the next. Those involved in childhood trauma can concentrate on addressing the fundamental problems of early experiences and creating supportive conditions for individuals to heal and thrive by recognizing the social components underlying the trauma.

My research report's strong foundation in evidence is one of its strengths. Utilising evidence-based research is crucial because it guarantees the methodical and open use of confidential research. I have analysed reputable academic publications pertinent to the research topic throughout the process of articulating the perspectives, and I have included significant evidence to support its claims. To begin with, I have carefully examined the psychological perspective using actual data from a variety of studies, including those by Eun Young Kim, Jiung Park & Bongseog Kim, Müge Cantürk, Haydeh Faraji, and Ahmet Ertan Tezcan. The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) and the Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI) are two examples of the many self-report measures that are frequently used in this research to examine the connection between criminal behaviour and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Furthermore, in order to present research that is reliable when analysing the neurobiological perspective, I have included the evidence by citing research from other reputable websites, including the Harvard University Center On Developing Child. Additionally, my report included evidence for analysing the socioeconomic perspective. It cited research, including studies by Olalekan Taoreed Kazeem, that looked into how socioeconomic status and adverse childhood experiences affect criminal behaviour. This empirical evidence supports the idea that socioeconomic factors play a significant role in determining an individual's propensity to commit crimes. Through the utilisation of credible, pertinent, and academic studies, my research report has established a strong foundation of evidence to back up its assertions, arguments, and conclusion. While using data from a wide range of empirical research and academic studies, the incorporation of several views further enhances the report's credibility and demonstrates the validity of evidence-based research.

One drawback of the research report was the absence of direct data collection via primary research. While gathering this information first hand could have offered valuable insights and a genuine research experience in psychology, its absence does not diminish the credibility of the arguments presented. The report is supported by scholarly work that includes carefully conducted experiments, effectively countering any weaknesses. These studies have been carried out by experts with the necessary knowledge to reach a well-rounded conclusion.

The conclusion was reached after gathering and evaluating a considerable amount of material and observations from various perspectives. Even though I am a student, I made every attempt to use my experience gained in the Psychology class to reach a fair decision. However, after weighing the psychological, neurological, and socioeconomic perspectives, it became evident that the conclusions from each perspective balanced each other out. Each perspective is equally significant in evaluating how much ACEs influence adult criminal conduct. I believe that the more general findings taken from studies presented in publications might not be applicable to every person, exposing gaps and paving the way for future study to present a more conclusive perspective.

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