



## ACE issue brief 5: absent parents

Findings of the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study  
Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook, 2006-2007 Issue Brief 5 of 5

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## the ACE study

The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study is a large-scale, ongoing evaluation of the link between negative childhood experiences and the origins of risk behaviors that evolve into the leading causes of disease and disability in adulthood. The study is a collaborative effort between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente’s Department of Preventive Medicine.

The study conducted detailed biomedical and psychological evaluations of over 17,000 middle-aged, middle-class Kaiser patients. The study was designed to simultaneously assess childhood exposure to multiple types of abuse, neglect, parental substance abuse, domestic violence, and other types of serious household dysfunction. A scoring system was used to analyze the findings: a person exposed to none of the 10 factors had an ACE score of 0; a person exposed to any four factors had an ACE score of 4, and so on. The scores were then compared with the health status of these individuals.

## explaining the connection

The ACE Study provides insight into how our experiences as children evolve into risky behaviors, which, in turn, evolve into disease and death. Child abuse and household trauma leave a child vulnerable, actually disrupting the normal development of the brain. The study suggests that children and adolescents adopt risky behaviors as a means of coping or covering their pain. The more trauma they experience, i.e. the higher

their ACE score, the greater the likelihood of adopting multiple risk behaviors, such as alcohol or drug abuse, smoking, overeating and promiscuity.

This series of issue briefs will explore the implications of the ACE Study in Oklahoma, and provide a basis for discussion among parents and other child advocates, health and social service professionals, policy makers and community leaders.

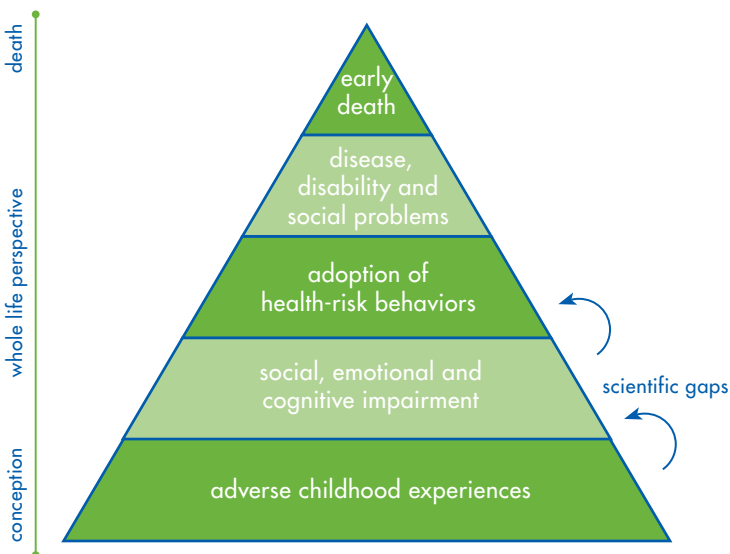
## findings

The results were startling. Adverse childhood experiences are vastly more common than generally recognized. Almost three-quarters of the participants reported having experienced at least one ACE. More than one in five reported three or more, indicating that risk factors rarely occur in isolation. For example, many cases of child abuse also involve drug abuse, domestic violence and divorce. The study showed a powerful and compelling correlation between harmful experiences in childhood and adult health status decades later.

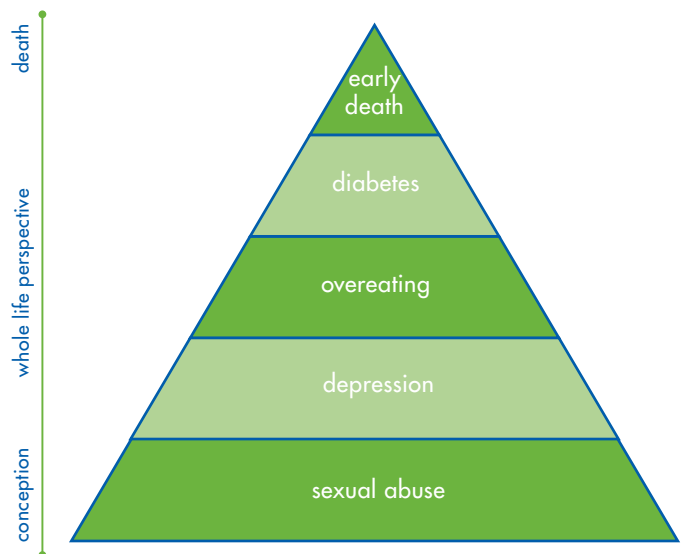
number of adverse childhood experiences (ACE score)	total
0	33%
1	26%
2	16%
3	10%
4 or more (up to 10)	12.5%

Compared to persons with an ACE score of 0, those with an ACE score of 4 or more were twice as likely to be smokers, 12 times more likely to have attempted suicide, 7 times more likely to be alcoholic, and 10 times more likely to have injected street drugs.

### ACE Pyramid: Conceptual Framework



### ACE Pyramid: Real Life Scenario



## major findings of the ACE study

Many studies have examined the impact of a single type of maltreatment on children. Yet the ACE Study found that co-occurrence of multiple forms of childhood abuse and household dysfunction is common, and their effects are cumulative.

In Oklahoma, there is no data to track co-occurrence of abuse or dysfunction on individual children and families, i.e. whether a single child is victimized in multiple ways. Oklahoma KIDS COUNT has gathered county-by-county data to determine which counties report high incidents of adverse childhood experiences.



## absent parents: state level findings

Oklahoma has one of the highest rates of marital failure in the nation, with 32% of marriages ending in dissolution. This translates to 5.2 divorces or annulments for every 1000 state residents, or almost 19,000 per year. The national average is 3.7 per 1000 residents.

Oklahoma's incarceration rate is the 4th largest in the nation, with over 650 prisoners per 100,000 residents. The national average is 482 per 100,000. Of special note, Oklahoma's female incarceration rate leads the nation, and is 143% higher than the national average. There are well over 60,000 children in the state of Oklahoma who are affected by their parents being incarcerated.

## implications of ACE study

The ACE Study joins other studies to confirm that the traumatic effects of divorce or parental incarceration can emerge most powerfully in the lives of children decades after the events. When a separation occurs, children may lose out on the protection and nurturance that a stable marriage can provide, and can experience the deprivation of parental attention. In many cases, fear of loss and disaster shape the choices of these children as they grow, leading to fewer marriages, fewer offspring, more divorces, and greater use of drugs and alcohol.

In 2004, the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) conducted an in-depth study of incarcerated

Oklahoma women and their children, yielding a rich and detailed picture of this population. The study affirmed the findings of the ACE Study with regard to the co-occurrence of multiple exposures to abuse and household dysfunction.

Of the women surveyed:

- 76% reported that they had been victims of both child abuse and domestic violence
- 36% reported that their children were currently placed in the home with the same relative who had abused them
- Nearly half the women were incarcerated for drug offenses, and 76% reported having used drugs more than once a week prior to their incarceration

ACE Category	Definition for Inquiry into Childhood Experience
Household or Family Dysfunction	
Parental Separation or Divorce	Parents were ever separated or divorced
Incarcerated Household Member	A household member went to prison.



-There is clear evidence of intergenerational imprisonment

The mothers surveyed in the OCCY Study reported that their children were experiencing serious problems since their incarceration, including trouble in school, with many either dropping out or being expelled, trouble with their friends and guardians, running away, being arrested

and incarcerated, and drug and alcohol problems. The problem most often reported was depression, for which there was no treatment or counseling.

Oklahoma continues to pay a high price for our approach to dealing with these issues. Incarceration costs over \$16,000 per person per year, compared to \$5,000 for diversion and substance abuse treatment through the Drug Court

system, or \$8,000 for the Mental Health Court system. These two approaches are the most intensive, inpatient treatment services available for this population, yet they are still less costly than incarceration, and are clearly more effective in helping families through lower rates of recidivism, and higher rates of finding employment, increasing income and being able to be reunited with their children.

## policy opportunities

Despite the high numbers of both divorce and incarceration in Oklahoma, very few children in these situations are receiving counseling or guidance to help them cope, thus perpetuating a cycle of questionable outcomes. The findings of the ACE Study are echoed by other professionals, whose recommendations fall into two broad categories: prevention services for parents, and intervention services for their children.

### parents

#### Relationship counseling

Children can thrive only when their parents are emotionally healthy and present for them. Providing education, counseling and support for young couples as they begin their lives together can help build a foundation for a strong and healthy family.

#### Parenting education

Even in the best of circumstances, having children can be stressful. Research has documented the benefits of working with families of newborns and young children to help them understand child development and good communication and relationship-building skills.

#### Substance abuse and mental health treatment

Many cases of child neglect are attributable to parental substance abuse, depression, and the chaos surrounding domestic violence. Oklahoma is in great need of treatment in these areas.

### children

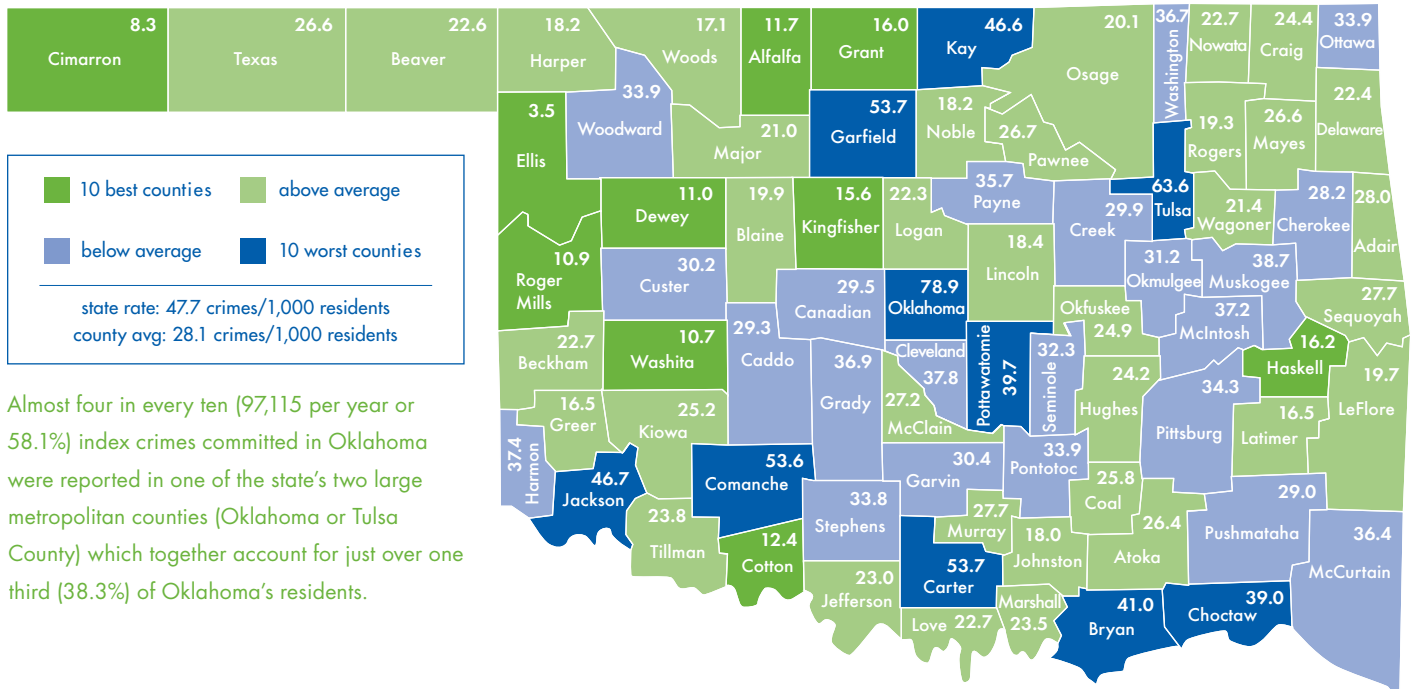
#### Diagnosis

Physicians may not be comfortable asking children about matters regarding adverse childhood experiences. New diagnostic tools have been developed by Kaiser Permanente that might prove helpful. Medical schools should consider alternative training for health professionals to consider psychological issues in the management of diseases.

#### Intervention

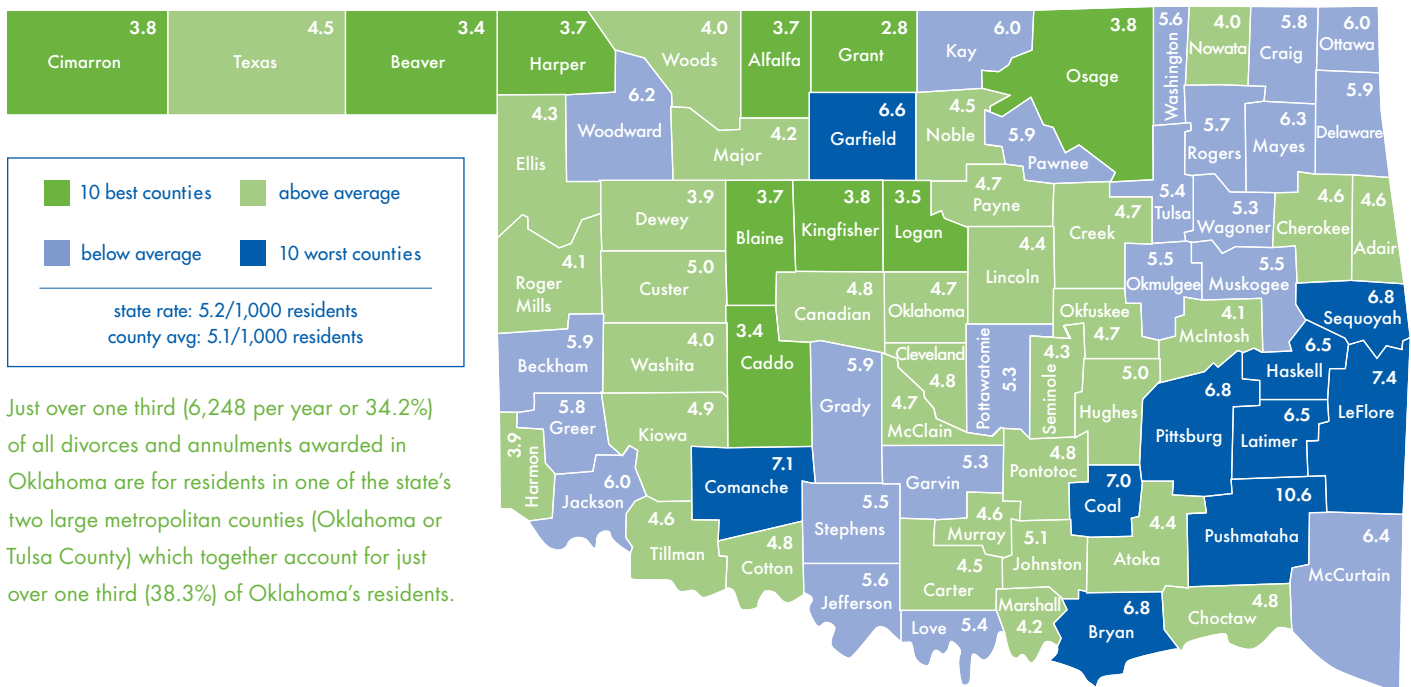
Children need help dealing with the pain and confusion of parental separation or divorce. Certainly, children whose parent is incarcerated may suffer a more intense response and require more intense intervention.

## incarcerated household member (2002–2004)



Almost four in every ten (97,115 per year or 58.1%) index crimes committed in Oklahoma were reported in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together account for just over one third (38.3%) of Oklahoma's residents.

## divorces and annulments (2003–2005)



Just over one third (6,248 per year or 34.2%) of all divorces and annulments awarded in Oklahoma are for residents in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together account for just over one third (38.3%) of Oklahoma's residents.

# absent parent index

county name	Household or Family Dysfunction Absent Family ACES Parental Separation or Divorce				Household or Family Dysfunction Absent Family ACES Incarcerated Household Member				county name	Household or Family Dysfunction Absent Family ACES Parental Separation or Divorce				Household or Family Dysfunction Absent Family ACES Incarcerated Household Member			
	three year number 2003-2005 Div/Annul	average annual number 2003-2005 Div/Annul	three year rate per 1000 residents 2003-2005 Div/Annul	three year Div/Annul rank	three year number 2002-2004 index crimes	average annual number 2002-2004 index crimes	three year index crime rate per 1000 residents 2002-2004	three year index crime rank		three year number 2003-2005 Div/Annul	average annual number 2003-2005 Div/Annul	three year rate per 1000 residents 2003-2005 Div/Annul	three year Div/Annul rank	three year number 2002-2004 index crimes	average annual number 2002-2004 index crimes	three year index crime rate per 1000 residents 2002-2004	three year index crime rank
STATE TOTALS	54,774	18,258	5.2		501,790	167,263	47.7		Latimer County	207	69	6.5	69	527	176	16.5	11
Adair County	301	100	4.6	30	1,805	602	28.0	45	Le Flore County	1,087	362	7.4	76	2,887	962	19.7	19
Alfalfa County	65	22	3.7	7	211	70	11.7	6	Lincoln County	429	143	4.4	23	1,790	597	18.4	17
Atoka County	188	63	4.4	22	1,115	372	26.4	38	Logan County	384	128	3.5	4	2,329	776	22.3	24
Beaver County	56	19	3.4	2	387	129	22.6	26	Love County	148	49	5.4	48	608	203	22.7	27
Beckham County	340	113	5.9	58	1,363	454	22.7	29	McClain County	414	138	4.7	35	2,319	773	27.2	42
Blaine County	126	42	3.7	5	706	235	19.9	20	McCurtain County	658	219	6.4	67	3,757	1,252	36.4	61
Bryan County	765	255	6.8	71	4,583	1,528	41.0	70	McIntosh County	244	81	4.1	16	2,205	735	37.2	64
Caddo County	309	103	3.4	3	2,685	895	29.3	48	Major County	93	31	4.2	19	474	158	21.0	22
Canadian County	1,380	460	4.8	40	5,550	1,850	29.5	49	Marshall County	175	58	4.2	18	955	318	23.5	31
Carter County	633	211	4.5	25	7,476	2,492	53.7	74	Mayes County	738	246	6.3	66	3,110	1,037	26.6	40
Cherokee County	606	202	4.6	28	3,689	1,230	28.2	46	Murray County	174	58	4.6	27	1,059	353	27.7	44
Choctaw County	222	74	4.8	37	1,802	601	39.0	68	Muskogee County	1,171	390	5.5	52	8,178	2,726	38.7	67
Cimarron County	33	11	3.8	10	76	25	8.3	2	Noble County	151	50	4.5	24	621	207	18.2	15
Cleveland County	3,189	1,063	4.8	36	18,870	6,290	37.8	66	Nowata County	127	42	4.0	13	735	245	22.7	28
Coal County	124	41	7.0	74	464	155	25.8	37	Okfuskee County	164	55	4.7	34	883	294	24.9	35
Comanche County	2,340	780	7.1	75	18,462	6,154	53.6	73	Oklahoma County	9,501	3,167	4.7	32	178,211	59,404	78.9	77
Cotton County	94	31	4.8	39	246	82	12.4	7	Okmulgee County	658	219	5.5	50	3,743	1,248	31.2	53
Craig County	259	86	5.8	56	1,093	364	24.4	34	Osage County	513	171	3.8	9	2,126	709	20.1	21
Creek County	964	321	4.7	33	6,182	2,061	29.9	50	Ottawa County	588	196	6.0	62	3,379	1,126	33.9	57
Custer County	378	126	5.0	42	2,324	775	30.2	51	Pawnee County	296	99	5.9	59	1,352	451	26.7	41
Delaware County	694	231	5.9	60	2,562	854	22.4	25	Payne County	972	324	4.7	31	7,508	2,503	35.7	60
Dewey County	55	18	3.9	12	154	51	11.0	5	Pittsburg County	898	299	6.8	73	4,565	1,522	34.3	59
Ellis County	51	17	4.3	21	43	14	3.5	1	Pontotoc County	504	168	4.8	38	3,593	1,198	33.9	58
Garfield County	1,137	379	6.6	70	9,313	3,104	53.7	75	Pottawatomie County	1,076	359	5.3	47	7,989	2,663	39.7	69
Garvin County	430	143	5.3	45	2,496	832	30.4	52	Pushmataha County	372	124	10.6	77	1,025	342	29.0	47
Grady County	858	286	5.9	61	5,181	1,727	36.9	63	Roger Mills County	40	13	4.1	17	108	36	10.9	4
Grant County	40	13	2.8	1	244	81	16.0	9	Rogers County	1,340	447	5.7	55	4,439	1,480	19.3	18
Greer County	102	34	5.8	57	295	98	16.5	12	Seminole County	320	107	4.3	20	2,413	804	32.3	54
Harmon County	35	12	3.9	11	355	118	37.4	65	Sequoyah County	826	275	6.8	72	3,313	1,104	27.7	43
Harper County	38	13	3.7	6	191	64	18.2	16	Stephens County	709	236	5.5	51	4,373	1,458	33.8	55
Haskell County	235	78	6.5	68	579	193	16.2	10	Texas County	273	91	4.5	26	1,613	538	26.6	39
Hughes County	210	70	5.0	43	1,026	342	24.2	33	Tillman County	121	40	4.6	29	650	217	23.8	32
Jackson County	491	164	6.0	64	3,911	1,304	46.7	72	Tulsa County	9,243	3,081	5.4	49	113,135	37,712	63.6	76
Jefferson County	109	36	5.6	54	461	154	23.0	30	Wagoner County	1,004	335	5.3	46	3,068	1,023	21.4	23
Johnston County	159	53	5.1	44	571	190	18.0	14	Washington County	818	273	5.6	53	5,437	1,812	36.7	62
Kay County	840	280	6.0	63	6,705	2,235	46.6	71	Washita County	138	46	4.0	14	368	123	10.7	3
Kingfisher County	160	53	3.8	8	657	219	15.6	8	Woods County	104	35	4.0	15	457	152	17.1	13
Kiowa County	144	48	4.9	41	765	255	25.2	36	Woodward County	347	116	6.2	65	1,890	630	33.9	56

This issue brief is the fifth in a series describing the impact of adverse childhood experiences on adult health status. These briefs are made possible through Project ACT (All Children can Thrive), a project of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy funded by INTEGRIS Health, in partnership with Oklahoma KIDS COUNT. All five issue briefs and the Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook will be available online at [www.oica.org](http://www.oica.org) in January of 2007.

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