

Tackling the prevalence of ACEs to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children

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Supporting Disadvantaged Families

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Lifelong skills created very early

(Nobel Laureate James Heckman)

- Skills needed for success in life multiple in nature
- Soft skills very important
 - conscientiousness
 - sociability
 - attention
 - self-esteem
 - sociability (the ability to work with and cooperate with others)
 - perseverance
 - motivation
 - self-regulation
 - ability to defer gratification
- These crucial skills mostly created in early years
- Largely neglected in devising policies to reduce inequality

Lifelong skills created very early

- Families play essential role in shaping skills of their children:
- Large gaps in abilities between advantaged and disadvantaged open up early before children enter school,
- and persist
- Skill formation a dynamic process: skills beget skills
- A child who perseveres and is open to experience learns more

The Heckman Equation

Invest in educational and developmental resources for disadvantaged families to provide equal access to successful early human development

+ Nurture early development of cognitive and social skills in children from birth to age 5

+ Sustain early development with effective education throughout childhood

= Gain a more capable, productive and valuable workforce that pays dividends to society for generations to come

Pathways to crime - laid down by age 3?

Dunedin study of all children born in 1972

At age 3, an 'at risk' group identified by nurses

- At age 21, 'at risk' males, compared with others:
 - 2.5 times as many with 2+ criminal convictions
 - 55% of their offences violent (18% others)
 - 47% abused their partners (9.5%)

Pathways to crime - laid down by age 3?

Dunedin study of all children born in 1972

- Fewer females conduct disordered, but those who were:
 - 30% of 'at risk' group had teenage births (vs. 0%)
 - 43% were in violent, abusive relationships
- “Immature mothers, with no strong parenting skills and violent partners have already borne the next generation of 'at risk' children”

Hawaii – the Kauai Longitudinal Study

- 698 children followed from birth to age 40
 - 30% born and raised in poverty
 - Pre- or perinatal complications
 - Lived in families with chronic discord, divorce or parental psychopathology
 - Reared by mothers with less than 8 grades of education
- Two thirds of children with four or more such risk factors by age 2 developed learning or behaviour problems by age 10
- And / or had delinquency records and / or mental health problems by age 18

Hawaii – the Kauai Longitudinal Study

- Yet – one in three of these children grew into competent, caring and confident adults
 - They did not develop behaviour or learning problems during childhood or adolescence
 - Succeeded in school
 - Managed home and social life well
 - Set realistic educational and vocational goals
- By age 40, not one of this group was unemployed, had been in trouble with the law, or had to rely on social services
- Rates of divorce, mortality, chronic health problems in midlife significantly lower than those of same sex peers

Hawaii – the Kauai Longitudinal Study

- Educational and vocational accomplishments equal to or exceeded those of children who grew up in more economically secure and stable homes
- Three clusters of protective factors distinguished these resilient children
 - **Protective factors in the individual**
 - Active, affectionate, more responsive children. Advanced in language, motor skills and problem solving. Pride in achievement. Assisted others needing help
 - **Protective factors in the family**
 - Early, close bond with at least one competent, emotionally stable person, who was sensitive to their needs. Often these were ‘substitute’ caregivers. Good same sex role models in the family helped significantly.
 - **Protective factors in the community**
 - Teachers, neighbours, parents of friends, youth leaders, church groups



Age 2 to 18 –
Systems to protect children
from severe disadvantage
Ita Walsh, June 2018

WAVE 4-YEAR STUDY OF PATHWAYS TO SEVERE DISADVANTAGE

- Homelessness
- Drug & alcohol addiction
- Mental health problems
- Long-term unemployment
- Aggression
- Criminality

- Resilience develops in the most unpromising circumstances when children accepted unconditionally by a reliable, always available, trusting adult
- When, during our **Age 2 to 18** study, we asked our ‘experts by experience’ the single thing that could have helped them deal better with their harrowing early experiences, the consistent answer was:

‘Someone who believed in me’