



System-involved Youths & Mental Illness

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Introduction

Most youth involved in the juvenile justice system have histories of abuse and neglect (Negriff, 2020). In many instances, these forms of trauma result in negative coping skills (e.g., substance usage and running away) by the traumatized youth, which results in system contact (Espinosa et al., 2013). For many justice-involved youths, they have extensive abuse histories, including experiencing multiple forms of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2024). ACEs represent childhood abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. ACEs have negative effects across the lifespan, including physical and mental health-related issues, school attainment concerns, and increased contact with the juvenile and criminal legal systems (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2024). This poster outlines the literature on childhood trauma, juvenile justice-system involvement, and suggestions for preventing and reducing the prevalence of the abuse-to-prison pipeline for youth.

Trauma & Mental Illness

Role of Trauma

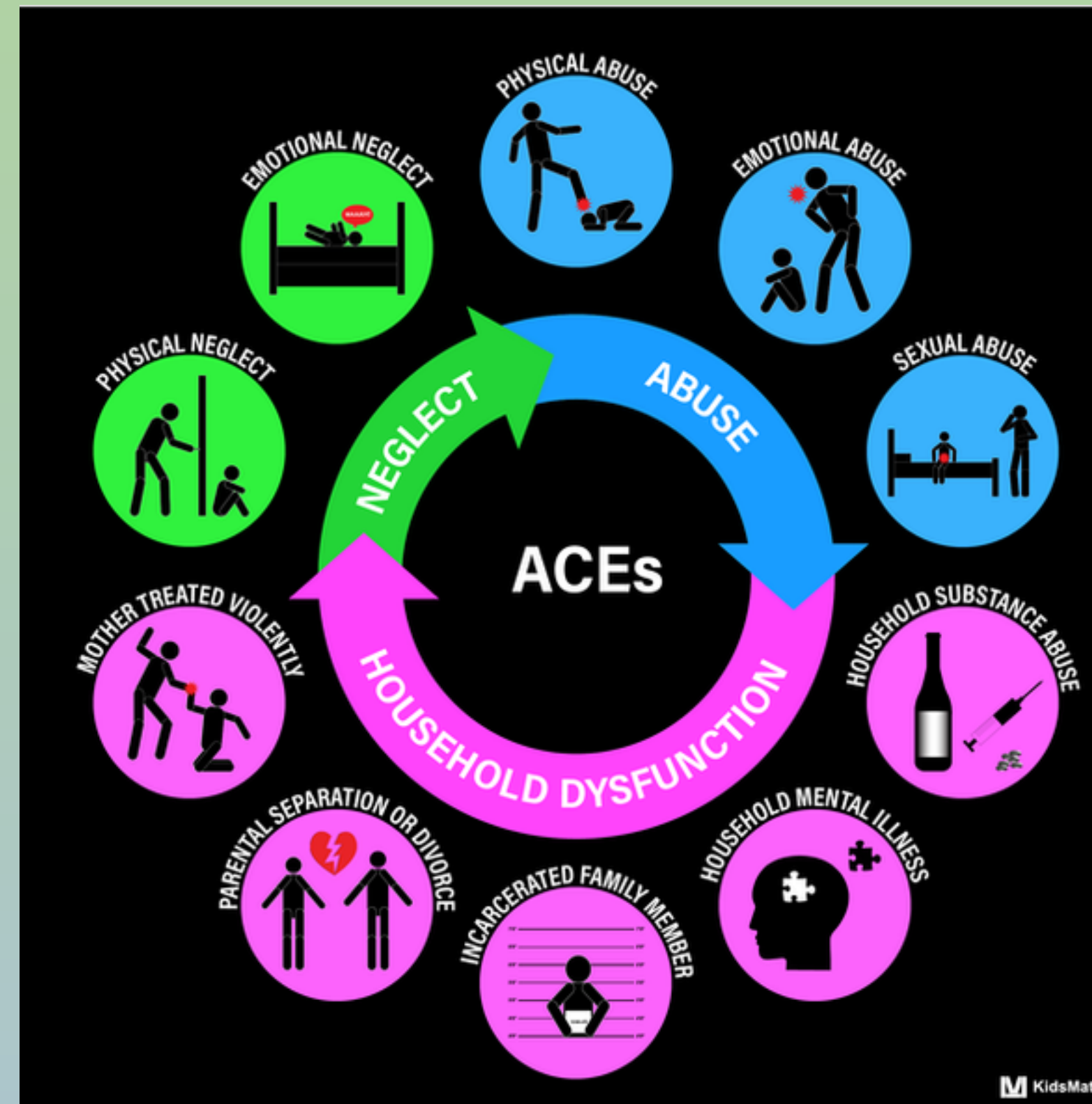
- Juvenile justice involved youth are disproportionately impacted by trauma (Miler et al., 2011).
- Justice-involved youth have higher prevalence rates of adversity and trauma compared to the general population (Dierkhising et al., 2013).
- Around 70-90% of justice-involved youth have experienced multiple types of trauma (Ford et al., 2008).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- ACEs are associated with substance use, offending behavior, and arrest (Fagan & Novak, 2018).
- Far more justice-involved youth (75%–93%) have experienced trauma and ACEs compared to the general population (25%–34%) (Rosenberg et al., 2014).
- Justice-involved girls report higher incidents of sexual abuse and the witnessing of violence (Dierkhising et al., 2013)

Mental Health Prevalence

- Higher ACE score has been associated with poorer physical and mental health (Cicchetti, 2013).
- Youth experiencing emotional abuse and neglect are more likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety (Negriff, 2020).
- Incarcerated youth have substantially higher rates of mental illness and substance use disorders than those in general population (Crick et al., 2023).



Correctional System Responses

“Trauma experienced during childhood may result in profound and long-lasting negative effects that extend well into adulthood” (Wyrick & Atkinson, 2021, p. 1).

System Abuse

- Studies find that incarcerated youth with mental health issues are more vulnerable and likely to be assaulted (Cebulla, 2016).
- Youth with prior victimization experiences are more likely to be victimized when incarcerated (Wolff et al., 2009).

Worsening Mental Health

- Studies show that for all youth, incarceration can have a negative impact on their mental well-being (Dannerbeck Janku & Yan, 2009).
- Incarcerated youth report higher rates of self-harming behaviors and suicidal ideation (Lambie & Randell, 2013).

Correctional Facility Resources

- Early interventions should provide victimized youth with resources to increase resilience and teach positive and proactive coping strategies (Wylie & Rufino, 2018).
- Youth mental health is best suited by offering a myriad of mental health services (Caldwell et al., 2006).

Suggestions and Implications

Community-based Suggestions

- Evidence-based community programs are effective in reducing further system involvement for justice-involved youth with high ACEs (Wolff et al., 2017).
- For youth leaving a correctional facility, reentry efforts must help make connections with community-based services (Lambie & Randell, 2013).

School-based Suggestions

- Schools should provide more opportunities for students to seek mental health care (Espinosa et al., 2013).
- Schools should actively seek to promote school connectedness as research shows these protective factor helps reduce system involvement for youth with high ACEs (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2024).

System-based Suggestions

- Rather than a punitive approach, the juvenile justice system should focus on a treatment-oriented philosophy (Walker et al., 2022).
- Implementing evidence-based programs such as Anger Replacement Training has been shown to reduce reoffending for youth with high ACE scores (Kowalski, 2019).

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