

CHILDHOOD STRESS

The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, noted that stress is a normal and necessary part of daily life and is related to the ways that individuals respond and manage daily demands. For children to develop the ability to manage and respond to stress requires assistance from adults as they develop coping skills that will help them to manage the stress in their lives. If stress in a child's life becomes overwhelming, it can negatively affect the child's brain development, nervous system and immune system. A child should be protected from extreme stress in order to avoid potential problems as an adult with alcoholism, depression, heart disease, cancer, eating disorders and other chronic diseases.

http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/pdf/childhood_stress.pdf

In *Over Stressed Kids* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, stress is described as any adverse situation that upsets a child or parent. It can be as minor as a homework assignment, or something major like the death of a family member. Other examples of stressful events for children could be an immunization, going to school for the first time, taking a test, falling off a bike, the death of a pet, or moving to a new home.

<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/Family%20Economic%20Success/O/OverStressedKids/OverStressedKids.pdf>

The following table describes and gives examples of the three major types of stress as identified by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child and research based:

Type	Description	Examples
Positive	Refers to moderate, short-lived stress responses, such as brief increases in heart rate or mild changes in the body's stress hormone levels. This kind of stress is a normal part of life, and learning to adjust to it is an essential part of healthy development.	The challenge of meeting new people, dealing with frustration, attending a new child care setting, going to the doctor, and overcoming a fear of animals all can be positive stressors if a child has the support needed.
Tolerable	Refers to stress responses that could affect the brain but usually last for short periods that allow the brain to recover and the stress to reverse. The child is then protected from the potentially harmful effects of stress.	Major adverse experiences such as the death or serious illness of a loved one, a frightening accident, or separation or divorce or parents, are tolerable for a child when the presence of supportive adults are available to ensure safe environments to help the child.

Toxic	Refers to strong, frequent or prolonged stress. Chronic and uncontrollable stressful events that children experience without the necessary support of supportive and caring adults.	Examples include prolonged poverty, homelessness, being raised by a parent with a mental illness, or not having adequate food/hunger, and child maltreatment that consist of abuse and neglect.
-------	---	---

<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/Family%20Economic%20Success/O/OverStressedKids/OverStressedKids.pdf>

http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/pdf/childhood_stress.pdf

Children’s experiences are defined through relationships with their parents, caregivers and others. Healthy relationships protect the child from traumatic childhood experiences. Such relationships are necessary to safeguard the child’s long-term physical and emotional well-being.

http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/pdf/Childhood_Stress.pdf



Children who experience difficulty with stress are sometimes overlooked by parents or caregivers. According to the American Psychological Association’s *Stress in America*, potential problems from stress in children may present as behavioral or emotional changes in children. Such changes may include withdrawal from activities that they may have enjoyed, being timid or fearful, crying, clinging to parent or caregiver, change from their usual sleeping or eating pattern, being irritable or moody. According to the report, these symptoms usually indicate that something is wrong. Continuing or recurring stomach aches, headaches, or other complaints for which the cause cannot be determined may indicate that the child could be experiencing stress.

<http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2009/signs-stress.pdf>

According to *Assessing Stress in Children and Youth* from Child Trends Research, children who are experiencing one or more of the following situations may be subjected and vulnerable to stress:

- Lack of economic resources
- Self-pity or blaming self
- Not enough sleep/ rest, nutrition/ hungry, or lack of exercise
- History of psychological or behavioral problems

- Lack of social and caring support from peers, parents or caring adult
- Multiple stressors such as: family conflict, living in a high crime rate neighborhood; or isolation from friends or family

It discussed the difference between acute stress (short-lived or events) and chronic stress (ongoing as part of daily life that continually taxes mental and physical resources). The report explains that coping with stress depends on the resources and skills in the individual.

http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Child_Trends-2010_10_05_RB_AssessingStress.pdf

Parental stress may contribute to stress in children, and the stress of parenting be very stressful to mothers. Young children of highly-stressed mothers (particularly if the mothers are also depressed) are at a high risk for developing stress-related problems. This may be particularly prevalent if the mothers were stressed during the child's infancy and preschool years.

<http://umm.edu/health/medical/reports/articles/stress>

According to childstats.gov, *America's Children: Key Indicators of Well-Being, 2013*, information about parents and other adults in the household, such as unmarried partners, grandparents, and other relatives, is essential to understanding children's social, economic, and developmental well-being. It also stated that the family composition has changed with a decrease in the number of children living with two married parents, and single-parent households have become more common for children. In the U.S., there were 64% of children ages 0-17 that lived with two married parents in 2012, which decreased from 77% in 1980. In 2012, 24% of children lived with only their mothers, 4% lived with only their fathers, and 4% did not live with either of their parents. According to Childstats.gov, by reducing the stress and negative effects on children, social and emotional development in children can be enhanced as well as the functioning of the family through the reduction of families with low incomes.

http://childstats.gov/pdf/ac2013/ac_13.pdf

As described in Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Over Stressed Kids*, family dynamics may be complicated by the extent of parental stress, often related to employment status, household economics, family and household obligations, parental marital status, the quality of the marriage or partnership, and the competence of the parent in their role as parent. A family's lack of economic resources is detrimental to ability to provide consistent, ongoing material support of housing, food, utilities, clothing, and other needed provisions for the family. Such lack of resources was described as material hardship/well-being.

In *Over Stressed Kids* material hardship/well-being was defined as a family paying at least half its income for housing; more than two people per bedroom; lack of health insurance; food insecurity ; no telephone in the household; receipt of public assistance; or difficulty paying bills. It also noted that such hardship could often result in dislocation of family and disruption of routines, which can lead to harmful and stressful effects in children.

<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/Family%20Economic%20Success/O/OverStressedKids/OverStressedKids.pdf>

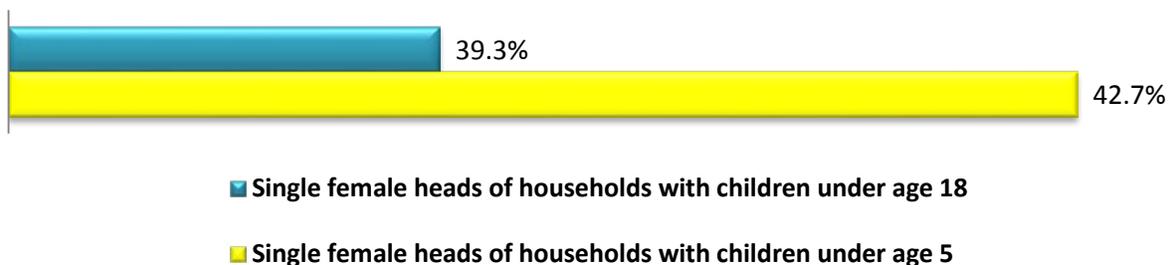
According to the *2013 Kids Count*, from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, growing up in poverty is a great threat to healthy child development. Poverty and financial stress can delay the learning capacity and cognitive development for children. It can also contribute to behavioral, social and emotional problems and poor health.

<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/KIDS%20COUNT/123/2013KIDSCOUNTDataBook/2013KIDSCOUNTDataBookr.pdf>

In 2012, Davidson County single female householders with children under age 5 more often lived in poverty, followed by single female householders with children under age 18, according to the 2012 American Community Surveys. In 2012, as shown in the Chart 1, there were 42.7% of Davidson County single female householders living below the poverty level with children under age 5, and 39.3% with children under 18.

Chart 1: Single Female Head of Household with Children in Poverty

Davidson County, 2012



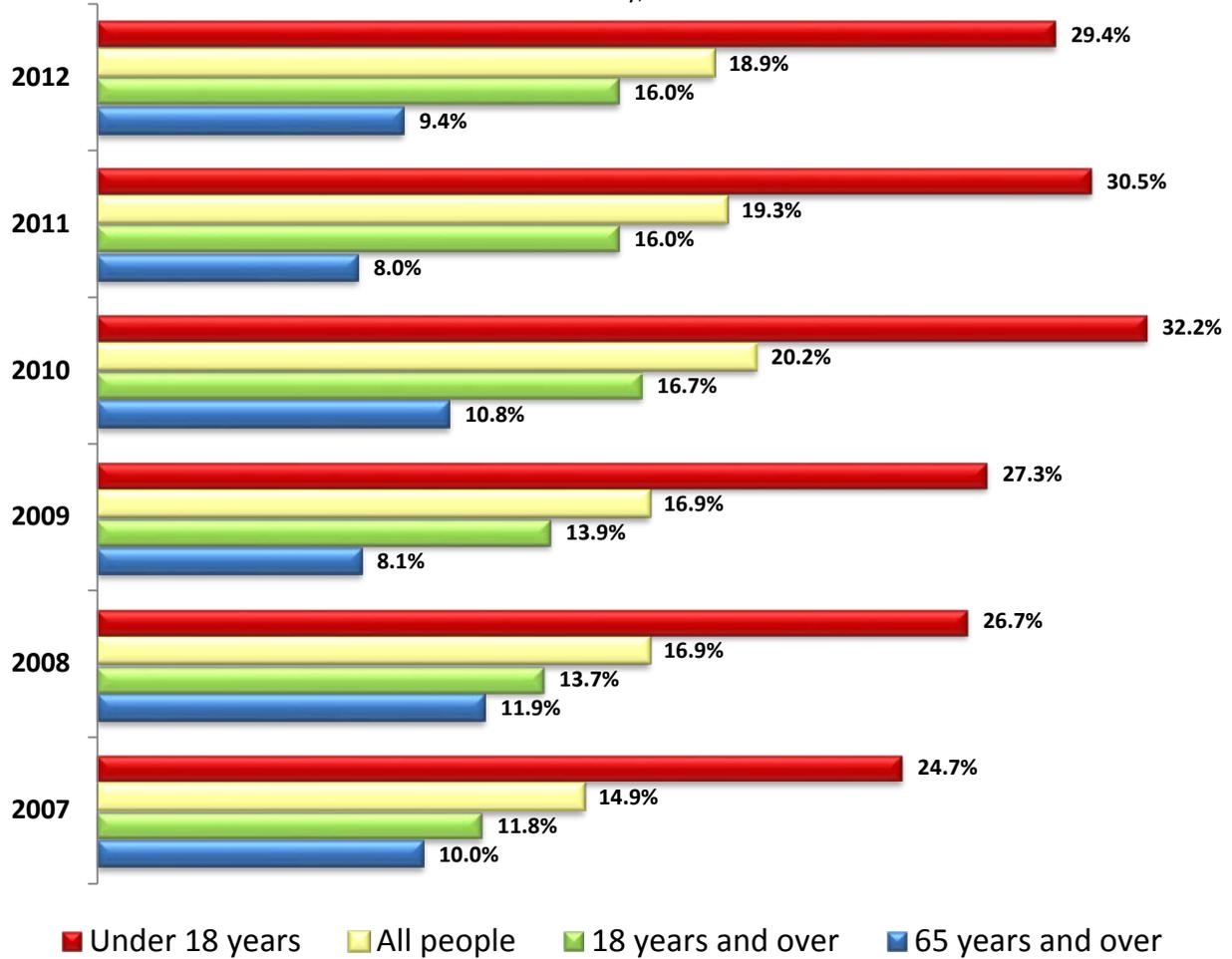
Source: 2012 American Community Survey

Stresses of poverty may impair learning ability in young children from the National Institutes of Health emphasized the importance of working to reduce harmful stressors of young children in order to improve their overall wellbeing and ability to learn. The stresses that come from poverty such as crowded conditions, financial problems, and inadequate child care can lead to impaired learning in children, according to the National Institute of Health (NIH). It also stated that high levels of stress hormones could influence a child's developing brain. These hormones may prevent higher cognitive functioning such as planning, emotional control, and attention that are directly related to a child's academic success.

<http://www.nih.gov/news/health/aug2012/nichd-28.htm>

The Metropolitan Social Services, 2013 Community Needs Evaluation (CNE) provided extensive data on the poverty trends and gaps in Nashville Davidson County, Tennessee. The following Chart 2 taken from the CNE data shows the percentage of people in the county that live in poverty by age category, from 2007 to 2011. It shows that there was a slight decrease in the percentage of all people in poverty in Davidson County from 2010 to 2011 and another slight decrease in 2010. However, the poverty rate continued to be higher than before the recession.

Chart 2: Percentage of People in Poverty by Age Category
Davidson County, 2007-2011



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2012 American Community Surveys

The Center for the Study of Social Policy's, *Concrete Support in Times of Need*, described the needs of parents when they have to deal with very stressful situations and the parent's need for help. It emphasized that even with such stress, parents may find it difficult to seek help. Some parents may not seek help because they may not know where to go for help, or what services are needed, and risk of embarrassment of a possible stigma associated with them because of seeking help.

http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/2013/SF_Concrete-Support-in-Times-of-Need.pdf

According to *The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan*, from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, healthy relationships protect against traumatic childhood experiences and are necessary to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of children.

http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/pdf/Childhood_Stress.pdf