

# I HAVE ALREADY BEEN THROUGH A LOT

Adverse childhood experiences of 11/12-year-old children in The Netherlands

Research by the Youth Taskforce and TNO-2016



## THE REASONS BEHIND THIS STUDY

Over the past twenty years, both international and Dutch studies have shown how common adverse childhood experiences are, and which relationship these experiences have with various health factors. Even though these studies have all been very important in establishing the frequency of adverse childhood experiences, very few questions have been asked to the children themselves. Also, never before a link has been made between what children say they have experienced in their childhoods, and how fit and healthy they feel.

This study by the Augeo Youth Taskforce in cooperation with TNO is an attempt to change this, and has resulted in this report. It is a report based on a study that reflects what children think, and answers two questions. Firstly: To what extent have 11/12-year-old children in normal primary schools had to deal with, or are still dealing with, issues such as emotional abuse, divorce, or suicide of a parent? The second question is; what are the effects of these adverse experiences on the quality of lives of children?

## ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Almost 50% of 11/12-year-old children in normal primary schools said that they had already suffered from one or more adverse experiences. Nearly one in nine children had actually experienced three or more such events.

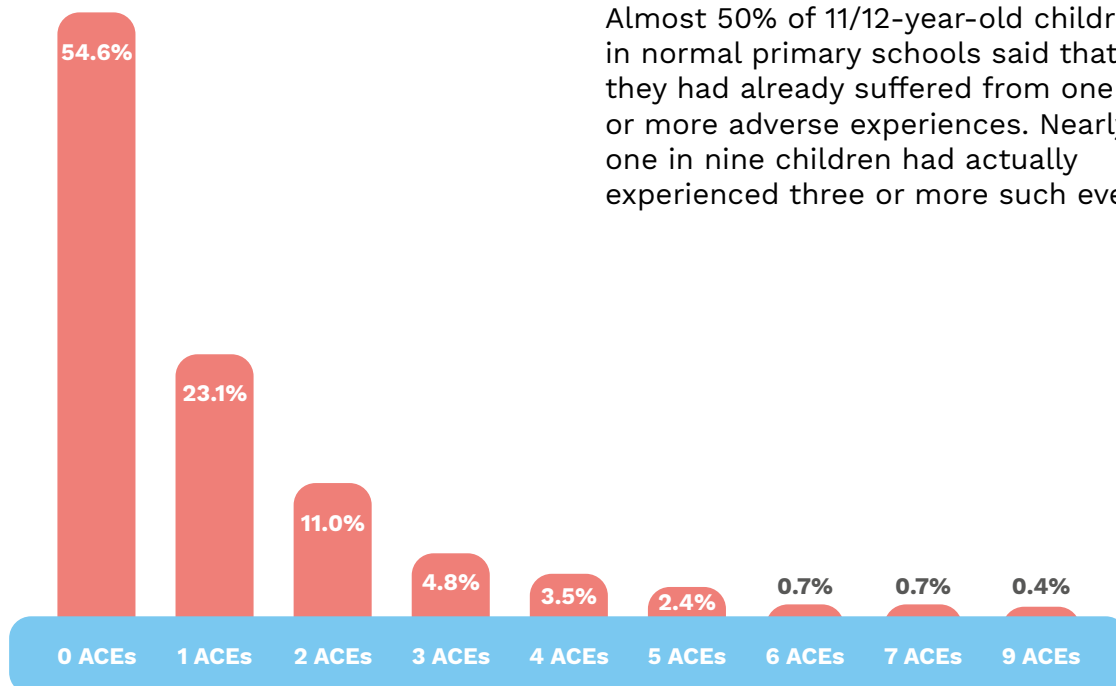


Chart 1: Percentage of children with one or more adverse childhood experiences



## 'TOP 5' ADVERSE EXPERIENCES

- 1 Children whose parents are divorced (more than a quarter)
- 2 Children who have suffered from emotional neglect (more than an eighth)
- 3 Children who have suffered from emotional abuse (almost one eighth)
- 4 Children who have suffered from physical abuse (about one twelfth)
- 5 Children who have witnessed violence between parents/guardians (also about one twelfth)

In total, more than a quarter of the children said they had experienced one or more types of child abuse.

## CO-OCCURRENCE OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

With the exception of divorce, more than three quarters of the children who had experienced an ACE had experienced more than one type.

## EFFECT ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE

There is a clear link between any adverse childhood experience that children say they have suffered from, and how fit and healthy they feel. This relationship appears to be strongest in children who have been emotionally neglected, emotionally abused, or physically abused. When focusing on the number of adverse childhood experiences instead of the type of adverse experience, a clear negative link was established. The higher the number of adverse childhood experiences that children say they have gone through, the less fit and healthy they feel.

ACE	Co-occurrence of ACEs	In % terms	% > 2 ACEs
Physical neglect	21 times	96% (of the 22 children)	14.1%
Witnessed violence against parent	46 times	92% (of 50 children)	30.9%
Emotional abuse	73 times	90.1% (of 81 children)	49.0%
Alcohol/drug abuse by parent	33 times	86.8% (of 38 children)	22.2%
Emotional neglect	71 times	84% (of the 86 children)	47.7%
Someone from the home in prison	37 times	82.6% (of 45 children)	24.8%
Depression/suicide of someone in the home	34 times	80% (of the 42 children)	22.8%
Physical abuse	44 times	77.2% (of 57 children)	29.5%
Sexual abuse	15 times	75% (of 20 children)	10.1%
Divorced parents	84 times	48.8% (out of 172 children)	56.4%

Table 1: What traumatic events often co-occur with another adverse event?



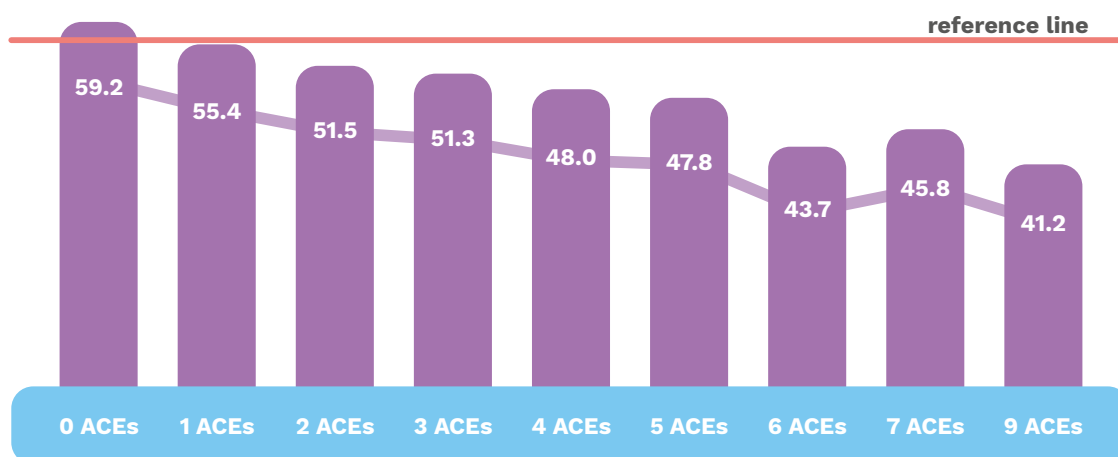


Chart 2: Quality of Life score compared to the number of adverse childhood experiences

## THE VISION OF TEACHERS

Compared to what children say themselves - almost half of them have faced at least one adverse childhood experience - at first glance there appears to be a major discrepancy with teachers' estimates. Teachers actually said that they thought that one in three children in their classes had experienced one or more adverse childhood events.

## WHAT NOW?

The Youth Taskforce (Jongerentaskforce) is shocked by the large number of children who indicate that they have suffered from one or more adverse childhood experiences. These results are particularly worrying given the fact that these children were still only 11 or 12 and still at primary school when they completed the questionnaires. This means that there are still about six years before they become adults, during which time they could be exposed to more adverse childhood experiences.

The Youth Taskforce is also worried about the clear effect of these adverse childhood experiences on the quality of life, because we know from other studies how major and serious the consequences of these

events can be in the long term. Now that we know the extent to which children in the Netherlands have been exposed to these adverse childhood experiences by the time they leave primary school, it demands new efforts to prevent such experiences wherever possible, and support for pupils for whom prevention is no longer possible. The Youth Taskforce, therefore, believes that the results of this study should be thoroughly assimilated by everyone involved in the care of these children, in particular anybody in the educational sector. Education should focus on dealing with children in a safe and stable manner, so that they can get the best out of themselves.

The children in our study and many other children in the Netherlands do not receive the security that they need in their private environment in order to feel fit and healthy, resulting in their development lagging behind. If a child does not get that security in his or her home environment, we believe that society and the education sector should step in to provide for a safe environment instead. Other studies have shown that the support of a trusted adult can help to limit the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences. It is also

perfectly fine for this trusted adult to be someone from outside the family. The Youth Taskforce believes that teachers and educational professionals can play an important role in the lives of children who have suffered adverse childhood experiences, because these children spend long periods at school, and are in a lot of contact with their teachers. If adults are asked to name a significant person in their childhood that made a difference to their lives, they will often mention a former teacher. It is important that contemporary teachers know that the children in their classes at school may have already experienced many such events, and be well aware about how adverse childhood experiences can affect children.

For example, teachers could talk about these adverse childhood experiences with children, or focus on specific topics during classes such as child abuse or what to do if parents get divorced. Teachers can help children by really making the school a safe place to be, and getting children to understand what is happening at home and the emotions it can evoke. In short, there are plenty of opportunities for these issues to be structurally addressed by teachers, schools, and the education system as a whole. The Augeo Youth Taskforce will be happy to talk with you about this in more detail.

## FULL REPORT, YOUTH VERSION (IN DUTCH)

Augeo Jongeren Taskforce (2016) Ik heb al veel meegemaakt. Ingrijpende jeugdervaringen (ACE) bij leerlingen in groep 7/8 van het regulier basisonderwijs. Driebergen. Augeo Foundation. [www.augeo.nl](http://www.augeo.nl)

## FULL REPORT, SCIENTIFIC VERSION (IN DUTCH)

Vink, R., Pal, S. van der, Eekhout, I., Pannebakker, F., Mulder, T., (2016) Ik heb al veel meegemaakt. Ingrijpende jeugdervaringen (ACE) bij leerlingen in groep 7/8 van het regulier basisonderwijs. TNO-rapport nr. CH 2016 R11157. Leiden/Driebergen. TNO/Augeo JongerenTaskforce. [www.tno.nl](http://www.tno.nl)

