



Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE 2005 CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

Although it is well known that child abuse is associated with both physical and mental health consequences,¹ less attention has been focused on other adverse childhood experiences such as familial substance abuse, mental illness and domestic violence. Research suggests that adverse childhood experiences are common and are associated with a variety of physical and mental health problems in adulthood,² including alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, sexually transmitted disease, physical inactivity, obesity, ischemic heart disease, and cancer.

The 2005 California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) assessed both child abuse and childhood household dysfunction among California women.

CHILD ABUSE

To assess **physical abuse during childhood**, women were asked: "Before the age of 18, did anyone ever beat you up, such as slap, punch, or kick you, or attack you?"

To assess **sexual abuse during childhood**, women were asked: "Before the age of 18, did anyone ever force you into unwanted sexual activity by using force or threatening to harm you?"

To assess **emotional abuse during childhood**, women were asked: "Before the age of 18, did a parent or other adult in your household often or very often swear at, insult, or put you down, or make you afraid that you would be physically hurt?"

Women who reported experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse as a child were considered to be exposed to child abuse.

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION

To assess household dysfunction during childhood, women were asked: "Before the age of 18, did you live with someone who was a problem drinker or someone who used street drugs, or someone who was depressed or mentally ill, or someone who went to prison or jail?"

"Before your 18th birthday, did you see anyone treat your mother (or stepmother) violently, such as beat her up, hit, punch, throw something at her, threaten or attack her?"

Women who answered "Yes" to any of the above items were coded positive for childhood household dysfunction.

The CWHS also assessed factors that may be associated with adverse childhood events such as whether the family received public assistance. Information about receiving public assistance in the past was gathered by asking the following question: "Before the age of 18, did your family receive public assistance sometimes called Welfare, Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs), or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)?"

Highlights of this survey are as follows:

- At least one type of **household dysfunction** was reported as having been experienced during childhood by 34.7 percent of respondents.
- 21.0 percent reported having a household member who was a problem drinker or someone that used street drugs.

History of Adverse Childhood Experiences and Household Dysfunction Among California Women, 2005

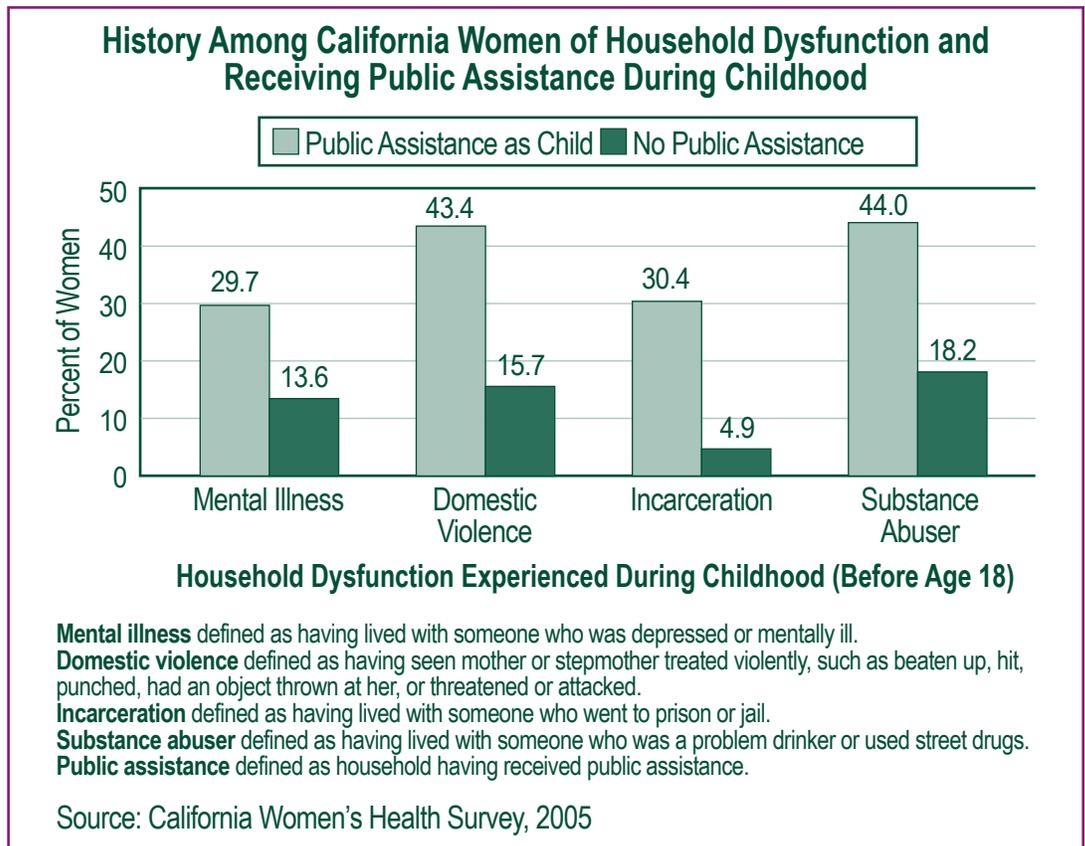
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Public Health Message: Significant household dysfunction is associated with child abuse and is more prevalent among women whose families participated in public assistance programs when they were children. Services to assist families with household dysfunction, including those to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect, could be especially targeted to families that receive public assistance.

History of Adverse Childhood Experiences and Household Dysfunction Among California Women, 2005

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- 18.6 percent reported seeing their mother or stepmother treated violently.
- 15.3 percent reported having a household member who was depressed or mentally ill.
- 7.6 percent reported having a household member who went to prison or jail.
- Women who grew up in dysfunctional households were more likely to have experienced **child abuse** than women who did not grow up in dysfunctional homes (57.0 percent vs. 12.8 percent).
- Women who grew up in dysfunctional households were more likely to have **received public assistance** compared to women who did not grow up in dysfunctional households (20.4 percent vs. 5.6 percent).



- 1 Arias I. The legacy of child maltreatment: Long-term health consequences for women. *J Womens Health (Larchmt)* 2004;13(5):468-473.
- 2 Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, et al. Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *Am J Prev Med* 1998;14(4):245-258.

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