

The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Educational Outcomes in Adolescents

Ruimengyuan Zheng

School of Education and Human Development, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia,
United States

kdk8ny@virginia.edu

Abstract. This paper's purpose is to review past literature on the effect of adverse childhood experiences on the educational outcomes of adolescent learners. Over the past few years, literature pieces through various researchers and writers have identified the great need to sensitize the reasons for the outcomes that adolescents get when they go through school. Most researchers have also focused on the possible solutions that could be used in addressing adolescents' different needs and challenges. One of the challenges that most researchers still need to identify is the early childhood experiences that adolescents go through even before they get to school. In this study, the researcher discussed academic effects related to early childhood adverse experiences. The family background and the different environmental issues that affect the mental state of adolescents as they grow up have been identified in this study as contributing factors to the adverse effects that lead to poor educational outcomes among adolescent learners. In addition, this study has found that adverse childhood experiences affect the students' learning outcomes by impacting different elements of the academic life of the learners. It influences the academic engagement of the learners, their level of achievement, and attendance to their studies in schools.

Keywords: Academic achievement, Adverse Childhood Experiences, adolescents, academic engagement.

1. Introduction

Adolescence stands as a critical and iconic stage in human development, marked by profound shifts in the realms of physical, psychological, and emotional experiences. In this phase, young individuals often go through substantial alterations as they ready themselves to navigate a world that is growing progressively intricate and demanding. Yet, even before these challenges surface, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as family violence, sexual abuse, and racial discrimination can potentially compound the difficulties they are destined to encounter. The consequences of these issues, encompassing their adverse impact on emotions and mental well-being, have been comprehensively unveiled [1]. Nevertheless, to this day, there has been a dearth of discourse regarding the manner in which ACEs influence the learning aptitudes and academic achievements of young individuals.

Education assumes an indispensable role in determining the future trajectories of adolescents, with their scholastic accomplishments serving as pivotal benchmarks for their growth and learning [2]. This paper endeavors to delve into the impact of ACEs on the academic performance of young individuals. Through this endeavor, the researcher aspires to unearth additional insights germane to ACEs and discern avenues for extending support and intervention. This research bears profound significance for students, parents, and educators alike, accentuating and elucidating the imperative nature of recognizing and addressing ACEs within the realm of adolescent development.

In the forthcoming sections, the researcher shall embark on an examination of the extant ACE literature, encapsulating salient discoveries while delineating the issues that persist within contemporary research. The aspiration is to offer perspectives that may guide forthcoming research endeavors and educational practices, with an overarching objective of fostering a more equitable and nurturing scholastic milieu for these young individuals, irrespective of the tribulations they may have endured in the past.

2. The Effect of ACE(s) on Academic Engagement, Achievement, and Attendance

Several studies have highlighted the link between the two variables and drawn possible conclusions useful to this current research. In this study section, the researcher seeks to evaluate the findings and conclusions the past researchers have established and then link them to the current problem. By linking past researchers and present studies, the researcher will be able to find the necessary gaps that the past researcher has left in the field of education and the experiences that the learners have had during their childhood.

Researchers have discussed the role of ACE on learners' achievement, attendance and engagement levels. In a study conducted by Stewart-Tufescu et al., the researchers investigated the profound impact of ACEs on the educational outcomes of adolescents in Manitoba, Canada [3]. The researchers began by emphasizing the well-established connection between adverse childhood experiences and mental health outcomes in adulthood. They also found that the provincial education assessments among adolescents in Manitoba indicated a strong correlation between self-reported educational outcomes and the experiences children endured during their early years. The research revealed a notable connection between challenges during childhood and unfavorable educational results in adolescence. Adolescents who had experienced difficult childhoods faced an increased likelihood of experiencing school suspensions, achieving lower grades, and struggling with chronic absenteeism. These adverse experiences substantially hindered their academic achievements and limited their opportunities to grasp the necessary concepts for success in school. Interestingly, the study also suggested that the impact of ACEs on educational outcomes might not be immediately evident, as it could manifest gradually over time, making it crucial to consider the long-term effects of childhood adversity on adolescent education.

There are more determining factors lurking between ACEs and the dropout rates. Morrow and Villodas conducted a comprehensive study examining the intricate relationship between ACEs and high school dropout rates among adolescents [4]. They underscored the significant connection between ACEs and an increased likelihood of adolescents dropping out of high school. The study unveiled both direct and indirect pathways linking ACEs to high school dropout rates. Directly, the research established a clear association between the adverse experiences children faced during their formative years and their subsequent dropout rates when they reached high school. Many of these adolescents had experienced factors like neglect from their parents, which hindered their academic concentration during their early years. Furthermore, the investigation brought into focus the concealed consequences of ACEs on rates of high school dropout. Among these concealed consequences were linked to the inadequate reading habits that students cultivated during their early years, frequently stemming from the difficult circumstances of their upbringing. These environments often deprive them of the necessary time and support to focus on their schoolwork. Additionally, external problems emanating from their home environments further compromised their ability to concentrate on their studies. Importantly, these external problems contributed to heightened internalizing problems among the students. Interestingly, the study found a negative relationship between the internalizing problems experienced by the students and their likelihood of dropping out of school. This intricate web of factors illustrated the multifaceted impact of ACEs on adolescent education and dropout rates. Surprisingly, ACEs were not identified as a significant factor in peer influences related to dropout.

The consistent correlation between ACEs and adolescents' physical and mental states suggests a robust relationship. Myat Zaw et al. conducted a comprehensive study to investigate the complex interplay between ACEs, resilience among adolescents, and their impact on mental and behavioral health. The research unveiled significant findings that shed light on the challenges faced by adolescents who had experienced ACEs and highlighted the potential mitigating role of resilience. Teenagers who have encountered ACEs face an increased likelihood of grappling with issues such as sleep disturbances, emotional distress, suicide attempts, depressive episodes, and excessive alcohol consumption. These challenging experiences hinder their ability to concentrate on their academic

responsibilities, creating obstacles to their academic achievement. For instance, learners who had faced ACEs leading to suicidal attempts often withdrew from their educational pursuits, impeding their access to the benefits of the school's educational programs. Similarly, those who had experienced adverse childhood experiences linked to increased alcohol consumption struggled to maintain the academic focus required to achieve good grades. Crucially, the research findings also indicated that adolescents with a history of four or more ACEs displayed even more severe consequences, including worse mental health effects, lower academic achievements, and a higher prevalence of undesirable behaviors. These challenges posed a significant barrier to their educational success and increased the likelihood of school dropout.

Coming from a disadvantaged family can make it harder for children to thrive in school, but supporting their families and resources can enhance resilience. The research by Houtepen and colleagues makes an important addition to the ongoing discussion of resilience and mental health in youth [5]. Their work highlights the complex relationships between childhood adversity, success in school, and teen well-being. The longitudinal dataset from the ALSPAC project allowed the researchers to analyze how different factors interact over time. A key finding was that positive school experiences can act as a buffer against the impacts of ACEs on adolescent mental health. This points to the potential of education-based interventions as a source of support for at-risk teens. Overall, this nuanced investigation and its implications further researchers' understanding of resilience and the factors that can promote healthy development despite early life challenges [5-6]. Their research uncovered a compelling relationship that underscores the profound impact of ACEs on adolescents, affecting both their educational outcomes and health. The study highlighted a significant and independent association between ACEs and reduced educational attainment among adolescents. This association persisted even when considering influential family and socioeconomic factors, emphasizing the enduring and standalone impact of ACEs on educational achievement. The study's results revealed that ACEs had a substantial impact on adverse health outcomes in adolescence. Notably, ACEs were strongly linked to depression, substance abuse, smoking, and obesity. Importantly, these connections remained significant even after thorough consideration of potential influencing factors. The study also examined how social and economic circumstances along with family relationships impacted these trajectories. It showed that while adverse childhood events increased vulnerability, the influences of socioeconomic status and family dynamics also shaped how much students were able to focus and engage in their education. This multifaceted relationship emphasized the complexity of addressing ACEs and their consequences, as interventions targeting either ACEs or socioeconomic disparities alone might not fully address the most adverse health and educational outcomes faced by adolescents. In conclusion, Houtepen et al.'s research provides valuable insights into the pervasive impact of ACEs on adolescents' educational achievement and health, highlighting the need for comprehensive approaches that consider both ACEs and the broader context of socioeconomic and family factors to effectively address these challenges.

3. Potential Prevention and Intervention Directions

Researchers have also established that the ACE problems among adolescents can be prevented. Pan et al. conducted a comprehensive examination, exploring the intricate interplay involving social support, academic self-efficacy, and academic engagement among reconnected youth, individuals who have re-entered the educational system after prior disengagement [7]. Their research delved into the moderating role of ACEs in these relationships. The study's discoveries shed light on several noteworthy aspects. Firstly, academic self-efficacy emerged as a pivotal mediating factor between the support from parents and teachers and the level of academic engagement demonstrated by reconnected youth. This suggests that one's belief in their academic capabilities has a considerable impact on their academic engagement, and this belief is influenced by the support provided by parents and teachers. Furthermore, the research illuminated the moderating effect of ACEs on the relationships between perceived parental support, academic self-efficacy, and academic engagement.

ACEs, which encompass various adverse experiences including emotional, sexual, and physical challenges, as well as exposure to community violence, significantly influenced the scope and direction of the social support accessible to these students within their educational environments. ACEs had the potential to interrupt the development of socioemotional skills in these individuals, ultimately impacting their physical and psychological well-being. Pan et al. emphasized the significance of comprehending how social support uniquely influences academic engagement in reconnected youth, distinguishing them from their counterparts in conventional high schools. While previous evidence had established the impact of parental and teacher support on academic engagement among continuously enrolled students, this study was pioneering in investigating how these forms of support influence academic engagement within the demographic of reconnected youth. Regarding academic engagement itself, Pan et al. stressed its multifaceted nature, encompassing emotional, cognitive, and behavioral facets. The study's outcomes indicated that these elements collectively determined the degree to which learners would engage in their academic pursuits. This insight held particular relevance for reconnected youth who had previously disengaged from the learning process. Additionally, the study highlighted the significant effects of ACEs on the support systems accessible to these students, underscoring the necessity of addressing the emotional well-being of reconnected youth as they navigate their educational path.

School intervention can also result in improvements in the adolescents' academic achievement and performance. Duke investigated the relationship between ACEs and high school students' educational outcomes [8]. The study, involving a substantial sample of 81,885 students, highlights a significant correlation between ACEs (abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, food insecurity, housing instability) and unfavorable academic results. These negative effects, such as poor academic performance, absence of graduation plans, and unexcused absences, persist even after accounting for demographic and individual factors. The study delves into the potential of school connections to alleviate the impact of ACEs on educational achievements. Although the impact of school connection is limited and varies by the degree of connection and students' gender, the research emphasizes that schools can still play a critical role in supporting academically challenged students facing adversity. By offering resources, creating safe environments, and fostering nurturing relationships, schools can enhance academic outcomes for these students.

Strategies to boost school connections, including increased adult support, catering to diverse learning styles, implementing positive classroom management methods, involving students, families, and the community in curriculum development, and revising disciplinary policies to ensure fairness are also being discussed in the studies. While recognizing data limitations and the challenge of generalizing findings, the study emphasizes the crucial importance of school connections in nurturing resilience and fostering academic success for students facing adversity. This article presents the prospect of addressing ACE issues at the school level. The research conducted by Qu and colleagues importantly demonstrated connections between adverse experiences in childhood and later challenges for school-aged youth [9]. Their work showed that greater exposure to difficult events and circumstances early in life correlated with a range of issues, including problematic sleep patterns during school, higher levels of behavioral and emotional difficulties, and poorer academic performance. The study brought attention to the enduring repercussions of difficult childhood experiences, which can cast a shadow over a child's health, well-being, and educational achievements as they mature. These results underscore the significance of establishing mechanisms to aid young individuals who have confronted adversity, with the aim of mitigating or preventing the persistent effects of those early challenges. This underscores the necessity for enhanced availability of services and assets dedicated to assisting children and adolescents who have encountered trauma, instability, or other trying circumstances. By intervening and offering help, it may be possible to improve outcomes for adolescents and enable them to thrive despite facing adversity earlier in childhood. The study's results revealed that ACE exposure exhibited an odds-response relationship, indicating that as ACE exposure levels increased, so did the severity of adverse consequences. Notably, emotional abuse during early years emerged as the most influential factor contributing to emotional and

behavioral challenges, as well as sleep quality problems among learners. Furthermore, the quality of sleep and the presence of behavioral and emotional issues in learners mediated the impact of ACEs, particularly on specific subjects they studied in school. This highlights the intricate relationship between early adverse experiences and the difficulties faced by adolescents in their academic endeavors. In response to these findings, strategies to enhance school connections have been discussed in the research. These strategies encompass increased adult support, tailored approaches to accommodate diverse learning styles, the implementation of positive classroom management techniques, engagement of students, families, and the community in curriculum development, and revisions to disciplinary policies to ensure fairness. Despite acknowledging data limitations and the challenge of generalizing findings, the study underscores the vital role of school connections in nurturing resilience and promoting academic success among students facing adversity.

In essence, Qu et al.'s investigation, along with the additional research, underscores the significance of addressing ACEs-related issues at the school level. The synthesis of their discoveries underscores the requirement for a holistic strategy to aid students who have encountered adverse childhood experiences, recognizing the intricate influence of these encounters on different facets of their existence and welfare. These three investigations stress the significance of early detection and prevention of ACEs. It highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to address sleep disturbances and emotional and behavioral problems experienced by children and adolescents exposed to ACEs. The article's provided reference list adds valuable context, encompassing the importance of investing in adolescence, the impact of sleep on cognitive development, and the intricate connections between childhood adversity and various outcomes like sleep disruptions, mental health concerns, academic performance, and behavior issues. The research emphasizes the lasting implications of early life experiences on diverse well-being in children and adolescents, advocating for comprehensive approaches that integrate preventive measures and targeted support to mitigate the consequences of ACEs.

4. The Role of Ethnicity in this Relationship

Ethnicity plays a significant role in the relationship under investigation. Leban and Masterson's inquiry unearthed a troubling aspect of the consequences of childhood school suspensions –the disproportionate burden borne by minority students, particularly black youth [10]. This aspect of their research underscores the critical need to delve deeper into the complex intersection of race, ACEs, and the disciplinary issues that shape the educational trajectories of the most vulnerable students. Their investigation explored how school suspensions influenced dropout and arrest rates, with a particular focus on variations related to race and ACEs. The researchers utilized longitudinal data from at-risk youth and applied analytical techniques such as logistic regression and structural equation modeling to glean valuable insights. The study's outcomes indicated a notable link between suspensions and an increased probability of students leaving school prematurely and encountering legal issues, even after considering the presence of high ACEs. This pattern persisted across diverse racial backgrounds. Of particular note, the research underscored that the impact of suspensions on dropout rates was especially prominent among black youth who had experienced substantial ACEs. Leban and Masterson's investigation also brought attention to the added difficulties faced by black youth due to racial disparities, leading to diminished opportunities and resources that molded their life paths. When combined with elevated ACEs, the consequences of suspensions on black adolescents were even more profound. This highlights the need to take into account a variety of factors, especially race, when dealing with ACEs issues and derived disciplinary issues.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate adverse childhood experiences' impact on adolescent learners' learning outcomes. The study has found that the learning outcomes of adolescent learners are

impacted in three different ways. The adverse experiences of the learners in their childhood affect their level of academic engagement. The concentration needed for the learners to perform with the higher outcomes they need is affected by the traumatizing experiences they may be exposed to as they grow up.

Moreover, the adverse childhood experiences that the learners go through would impact their academic outcomes by influencing their level of achievement. The study has found that when adolescents grow up in an environment that does not foster the spirit of achievement, it becomes even harder for them to be motivated towards the needed achievement level when they get to school. The other effect that the study has found is that of the adverse childhood effects impacting the academic attendance of learners. Some of the adverse childhood experiences that adolescents go through would end up affecting the activeness and attendance of the school programs that are made available for them. For example, when the learners are expected to adapt to the rigorous school performance set for them to perform, they would have to have had the spirit of loving school right from childhood. The learners who do not have such a school spirit and attitude may fail to meet the expectations set before them. This study, therefore, concludes that the adverse childhood experiences that adolescents go through indeed affect their level of academic outcomes in schools.

Even though this study has presented enough evidence on the significant effects of the adverse childhood experiences that adolescents go through on their academic outcomes, there are still limitations to the research process. One major limitation of this study is that it mainly relies on past literature to make its arguments. The study mostly depends on the research literature that has been done in the past. More reliance on past findings may not bring the best results that can be used to make conclusions and generalizations since even the past researchers must have had some shortcomings that could have influenced their research process. Another limitation pertains to the limited availability of extensive research studies on the topic. While a handful of studies have provided valuable insights for researchers to draw conclusions, a more comprehensive body of literature would have greatly enhanced the quality of these conclusions.

This study recommends that future research focus on using primary data to generate results for such a subject of study. Future research should engage the participants directly, i.e., the adolescents that have faced adverse childhood experiences, and seek their views on the experiences that they have gone through. The other recommendation this study makes is to focus on the longitudinal effects of adverse childhood experiences on learning outcomes. Future studies would focus on the long-term effect of ACE on the learners' academic engagement, attendance, and academic achievement.

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