

AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACTS OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND HOW ART-BASED INTERVENTIONS CAN HELP

BY ISSABELL POPE



Artwork by Tamsin Rees, commissioned by Changing Relations as part of their Rabbits in Headlights project, 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an overarching analysis of the long-term impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on society and how art can be leveraged in interventions to mitigate or avoid such impacts. This was done by looking at the negative effects of ACEs, focusing on the wider economic and social implications. In addition to ACE interventions, there are significant benefits to using art in interventions, including in relationship and sex education (RSE) in schools. The negative long-term impact of ACEs has been well-documented in research for many years, with close connections to poor health, education output as well as increased contact with the criminal justice system. Accessing interventions and support can mitigate against such impacts in the future, providing significant savings to society. The introduction of creative projects and art into RSE has resulted in greater engagement from students as well as a space for them to share personal experiences. Art has been found to reduce the barriers to disclosure and allow children to be able to access interventions at an earlier stage.

Key Findings

The estimated overall costs attributed to ACEs in the UK is thought to be £61.3 billion annually

Avoidable ACE costs are thought to be around ¾ of the UK government health care expenditures

Lifetime costs per victim of child maltreatment (non-fatal) in the UK is around £90,000

8/10 prisoners in the UK suffer from 4 or more ACEs

It takes children 7.5 years on average to disclose abuse

Early interventions decrease the risk of developing mental health conditions in the future

52% of students agreed their RSE classes gave them a good understanding of toxic & healthy relationships

Art has been found to provide children with a safe and comfortable space to confide in others

Art increases a person's emotional social skills; linked to mitigating the long-term mental health impacts of ACEs

The report was conducted over three months with funding to undertake it granted through the Durham University Careers Service Social Enterprise Live project.

Issabell Pope, a recent law graduate from the University of Durham, worked closely with the Changing Relations team to identify key areas of interest for the report, but the research itself was conducted independently to gather a general picture of the impacts of ACEs and art-based interventions.

A desk-based digital review of existing research on ACE impact, invention and art-based intervention was undertaken. The research included studies that produced both quantitative and qualitative data. All the research regarding arts-based interventions and benefits were studies involving students and children producing qualitative data on the benefits of art. The vast majority of research on ACE impacts and interventions were studies, literature reviews and reports that referenced and produced numerical data. ACE and intervention studies involved both adults and children with ACEs as well as people with no ACEs as a control group.

INTRODUCTION

ACEs are traumatic or stressful experiences that a person faces during their childhood. Often these experiences harm the person's life, either in childhood or later in life, which can have a knock-on effect on wider society. However, such negative impacts are not set in stone and can be mitigated through intervention. Art-based interventions offer a unique benefit to those suffering from ACEs both through increasing mental health and resilience and also encouraging disclosure in children. This paper discusses how art can be used within ACE interventions and education as a whole, to mitigate the long-term impacts of ACEs on people's lives as well as wider society. Here the focus is on art itself as an intervention as well as creative methods within relationship and sex education. Both have proven to be successful interventions for mitigating some of the negative impacts of ACEs as well as encouraging children to speak out against ACEs. This paper also complements the work being done by Changing Relations, showing the long-term and wider benefits of arts-based intervention and education. This will be done by first explaining the negative impacts that ACEs have both on the individual themselves and wider society, then looking to ACE interventions generally before explaining the benefits of Art and finally using creative methods in relationship and sex education.

SECTION ONE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES) AND THEIR NEGATIVE IMPACT

The experiences that we face as children, both positive and negative, have a significant impact on our development and later life. ACEs are traumatic or high-stress experiences that a child faces, often by a family member or trusted adult¹. The most common ACEs are physical, emotional or sexual abuse, interpersonal violence in the household, parental separation, incarceration of family members, severe parental mental health, and substance abuse. Experiencing trauma or chronic stress during childhood can negatively impact a child's neurological, social, mental, and physical development. As a result, ACEs have been strongly linked to long-term negative impacts on individual's lives, increasing a person's chance of developing complex mental health conditions, inflicting violent behaviour, having behavioural and concentration issues at school, and underperforming in their education. This is not an extensive list of the negative associations with ACE. While ACEs have been found in all demographics in society, research has found individuals who live in poverty are at an increased risk of experiencing ACEs due to deprivation being linked to several stresses that can cause ACEs.

The impacts of ACEs have also been found to be intergenerational, with ACEs being passed on to children where parents have not received intervention or support for ACEs suffered. The negative impacts of ACEs can impact individuals' ability to create stable and safe households for children to develop, research has found that parents with high ACE scores have been associated with higher levels of distress and trauma within with child's upbringing².

ACE attributed costs in the UK have been estimated to be around \$78.6 billion annually

Hughes et al (No.1)

¹ Hughes, K., Ford, K et al. 2021. Health and financial costs of adverse childhood experiences in 28 European countries: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Public Health*, 6(11)

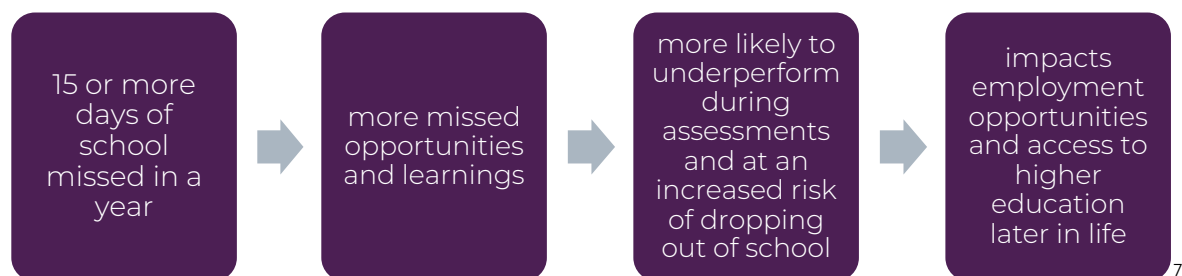
² Swords, L., et al. 2024. Pathways explaining the intergenerational effects of ACEs: The mediating roles of mothers' mental health and the quality of their relationships with their children. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 92

The negative impacts of ACEs are not only felt by the individual but also by society as a whole. The impacts of ACEs come with both social and economic costs to different sectors of society including the economy and labour market, healthcare, education, and criminal justice.

EDUCATION:

The impact of ACEs on education is widespread, with a child's overall education attainment and level being hindered by the presence of ACEs as well as time spent at school. It has been well documented that children who perform better at school and stay in school have increased opportunities when it comes to employment and later life, they are less likely to engage in less risky behaviour and be involved with the criminal justice system. As well, education increases a child's self-esteem to allow them to think they can succeed in the future³. Education provides children with both academic and social development. But when ACEs are present within a child's life, the chance of such outcomes occurring is decreased. A history of childhood adversity almost doubles the chance of a child receiving no qualifications from school. ACEs are associated with socio-emotional welling of children, negatively impacting a child's social skills and mental wellbeing⁴. Both of these factors have been linked to educational attainment, negative well-being such as depression and chronic stress are more likely to result in a child dropping out of school or not furthering their education. Emotional distress has been linked to children underperforming academically⁵. Research has found that ACEs are intrinsically linked to poor mental health and well-being in children, suggesting that they are at an increased risk of not achieving their education goals. Children who are consistently living in fearful and high-stress environments are unable to dedicate time and effort to their education compared to children who grow up in stable non-ACE households⁶.

ACEs have also impacted the amount of time spent at school with children with ACEs having more absences from school than those with no ACEs. Children with ACEs are more likely to suffer from injuries, bad mental health and have caregiving responses that prevent them from going to school. One study found **40% OF CHILDREN WITH ACEs MISSED OVER 15 DAYS OF SCHOOL** in a year.



Students who are more absent from school miss out on key learning opportunities as well as other important opportunities schools provide to children such as social development with peers and

³ Crouch, E., et al. 2019. Challenges to school success and the role of adverse childhood experiences. *Academic pediatrics*, 19(8)

⁴ Otero, C., 2021. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and timely bachelor's degree attainment. *Social Sciences*, 10(2)

⁵ Needham, B. L, et al 2004. Academic failure in secondary school: The inter-related role of health problems and educational context. *Social problems*, 51(4).

⁶ Otero (No.4)

⁷ Ibid

extracurricular activities⁸. This suggests a link between ACEs and school absenteeism that then negatively affects the learning and overall education of the child.

One study found the rate of unemployment among those with ACEs was 15% compared to 3% for those without ACEs

Hardcastle, K., et al., 2018. Measuring the relationships between adverse childhood experiences and educational and employment success in England and Wales: findings from a retrospective study. Public health, 165.

Moreover, children suffering from ACEs display behavioural problems and conduct at a higher rate than those without ACEs. Behaviour problems presented in early childhood are more likely to develop into behavioural problems in adolescents when ACEs are present. Behavioural problems included lack of concentration, aggression and problems socialising with other children and classmates⁹. Consequently children with ACEs are often deemed 'problem or troublesome children', and there is an increased chance of them being expelled or excluded for their behaviour. This limits the time spent in school learning as well as the relationship students have with teachers and other school staff, instead of helping the child they are demonised.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME:

Employment opportunities and the amount of income a person makes are impacted by their educational attainment. Education opens up opportunities for people to access higher education and as a result employment with greater income attached to it. As such, ACEs' negative impact on education also impacts the individual's later employment and economic opportunities.

Research has found a strong connection between people with ACEs and unemployment; Hansen *et al* found that participants with ACEs spend on average around one and a half years in the labour market. Most of the participants stated their employment history had been unstable since leaving education. The instability has been put down to a lack of support through a child's key development age, they are unable to function correctly within the labour market¹⁰. This link has been often seen to be the result of ACEs impacting people during their education and career development, times when a person is making decisions about their future are often the most stressful for those with ACEs¹¹. As previously stated, ACEs can impact a person's education resulting in a lack of qualifications. This means that people are not always meeting their employment potential, there are a lack of opportunities for them due to their education attainment. This unmet potential means there is a body of people in society who are capable of working and achieving more but are unable to due to ACEs. The sectors employing the largest amount of people with ACEs jobs are those requiring no formal qualifications¹². This has an impact on the individual's economic situation, with them earning less over time compared to those without ACEs. It has also been found that people with ACEs have less job stratification and performance than those without ACEs. All of this has a wider impact on a person's mental and emotional health, financial anxiety and low mood and self-esteem. For people with ACEs, the mental and emotional impacts surrounding employment are highest due to a lack of positive coping mechanisms and stress

Each additional ACE increases the risk of a person being dependent on welfare by 25%

Schurer, S., et al., 2019. Understanding the mechanisms through which adverse childhood experiences affect lifetime economic outcomes. Labour Economics, 61.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Choi, J.K., Wang, D. and Jackson, A.P., 2019. Adverse experiences in early childhood and their longitudinal impact on later behavioral problems of children living in poverty. *Child abuse & neglect*, 98.

¹⁰ Hansen, C.D., et al. 2021. The importance of adverse childhood experiences for labour market trajectories over the life course: a longitudinal study. *BMC public health*, 21.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

management. This has a wider implication for the economy; people with ACEs are more likely to take sick leave due to the negative health-related impacts of ACEs¹³, resulting in a loss of productivity and increased costs to businesses.

Other wider economic impacts also include less money going into the economy due to the lack of spending power people with ACEs have. People with ACEs are more likely to be unable to afford necessary expenses such as food and housing compared to those who don't have ACEs¹⁴.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE:

ACEs can result in a lack of both cognitive and social development which means that people with ACEs are more likely to engage in risky behaviour in adolescence and adulthood, and project anti-social and violent behaviour both in wider society and intimate relationships¹⁵. A lack of qualifications or underperforming at school has also been found to increase the risk of a child being involved with the criminal justice system at a younger age. Those with ACEs are introduced to the criminal justice system earlier through frequent contact with the police as well as spending time in Young Offenders Institutions¹⁶.

It costs £51,108 annually to house an inmate in prison

Ministry of Justice, 2024. Costs per place and costs per prisoner by individual prison HM Prison & Probation Service Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 Management Information Addendum.

8 in 10 prisoners have reported at least one ACE, with around half reporting having four or more ACEs

Ford, K., Barton, E, et al. 2019. Understanding the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in a male offender population in Wales: the prisoner ACE survey

There is an association between more serious and violent offending and ACEs; those with four or more ACEs are three times more likely to commit violent crimes. Growing up in violent and abusive households can alter a child's development. The lack of optimal development means that such children are more susceptible to violent behaviour in the future. The combination of poor mental health and the normalisation of violence and abuse growing up can lead to violent and criminal behaviour in the future¹⁷.

This feeds into the wider impact of people with ACEs often not meeting their potential in life, as such criminal behaviour becomes more appealing to a person who may be living in deprivation and with few opportunities open to them. This results in more anti-social behaviour being committed in local communities as well as an increase in the prison population.

HEALTH:

One of the areas where ACEs have the biggest impact is on health, there is a significant body of research that has found that those with ACEs struggle in both their physical and mental health in adulthood. Those with ACEs are at an increased risk of developing depression, anxiety other stress-related disorders, psychosis, and bipolar disorder¹⁸.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Otero et al (No.4)

¹⁵ Crouch et al (No.3)

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Duke, N.N., et al, 2010. Adolescent violence perpetration: Associations with multiple types of adverse childhood experiences. *Pediatrics*, 125(4).

¹⁸ Hughes et al (No.1)

Alongside this, the risk of substance abuse of all types – drugs, alcohol and smoking – were all increased in individuals with ACEs, with the highest risk being drug addiction. Poor mental and physical health has a knock-on impact on a person’s ability to succeed at school as well as in their career¹⁹.

Long-term health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease and chronic illnesses have been attributed to ACEs. This attribution can be seen to be partly the result of health-risky behaviours that are often adopted by those with ACEs, as well as a risk of living in deprivation, one of the biggest risks to a person's health²⁰.

The lifetime costs per victim of child maltreatment (non-fatal) in the UK is around £90,000

Conti, G., Melnychuk, M., Morris, S. and Pizzo, E., 2017. The economic costs of child maltreatment in the UK

ACE related mental health costs are estimated to be around £11.2 billion annually

Hughes et al (No.1)

The overall costs of ill health attributed to ACEs is around £33.9 Billion annually

Hughes et al (No.1)

SECTION TWO ACE INTERVENTIONS

The negative impacts of ACEs in later life are not a guarantee and not every person who suffers from ACEs will end up developing some of the negative impacts set out in the section above. Often this is down to whether a child received intervention for the ACE as well as their resilience level. Intervention is the most effective way of diminishing the negative long-term impacts that ACEs can bring. Many different ACE interventions exist, all aiming either to decrease the chance of an ACE occurring or secondary prevention of the long-term negative impacts ACEs can bring.

Interventions are key for mitigating the long-term secondary impacts of ACEs on the individuals themselves but also to relieve the wider financial and social burden that ACEs have on society. ACEs can impose major costs on a range of services and systems with the most impacted being health services due to the strong connection between ACEs and poor mental and physical health.

It has been estimated that around 1/3 of all mental illnesses caused by ACEs are avoidable if the individual was able to receive help and intervention during their childhood

Hughes et al (No.1)

The avoidable costs from ACEs have been estimated to be more than a ¼ of the UK governments healthcare expenditure

Hughes et al (No.1)

The cost-benefit analysis of interventions suggests that the benefits attached to intervention both in the short and long term significantly outweigh the initial costs associated with intervention²¹. There are significant financial savings associated with ACE interventions regarding healthcare and criminal justice. Interventions in school can help ensure children suffering from ACEs stay in school and perform at a level that matches their capabilities²². This creates better employment prospects for children, likely

¹⁹ Hughes, K., Ford, K., et al., 2020. Health and financial burden of adverse childhood experiences in England and Wales: a combined primary data study of five surveys. *BMJ open*, 10(6).

²⁰ Hughes et al (No.1)

²¹ Vos, Theo, et al. 2010. Assessing cost-effectiveness in prevention: ACE-prevention. September 2010 final report, [University of Queensland], [Brisbane, Qld.].

²² Ibid

offering an economic benefit due to the increased number of people in work as well as better job performance and satisfaction²³. Targeted interventions aimed at reducing ACE-related trauma have been found to produce positive outcomes within children and their families, reducing the intergenerational impact of ACEs²⁴.

The effectiveness of the intervention increases the earlier it occurs, both in terms of the child's age as well as proximity to the ACE occurring. Research has found that children who were able to access intervention earlier were less at risk of developing the negative secondary impacts of ACEs²⁵. Early interventions have been found to reduce the risk of children developing mental health conditions in the future²⁶. Interventions must happen as early as possible to mitigate the negative secondary impacts of ACEs as much as possible.

TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS:

RESILIENCE TRAINING AND BUILDING:

One of the most important ways to mitigate the impact negative impacts of ACEs is to increase a child's resilience ability. ACEs often impact a child's mental and emotional wellbeing making it difficult for them to cope in difficult or stressful situations. Projects that aim to increase child's social and emotional skills, mentorship programmes, connection with the school and local communities and a sense of

Research found when children with ACEs have increased resilience the risk of them developing later mental health conditions is around 14% compared to 60% in children with low resilience

Hughes et al (No.29)

belonging all are ways to build resilience in children²⁷. Developing resilience in children would allow them to withstand, cope or recover from the effect of ACE more productively and healthily. Having high childhood resilience is related to a reduction of lifetime mental health condition²⁸.

ADDRESSING SOCIETAL NORMS AND VALUES:

Often there are negative connotations attached to people with ACEs or a lack of understanding about abuse and the secondary impacts it can have on a child in the future. Increasing public knowledge and attitudes towards ACEs can improve people's knowledge and attitudes so that the environment surrounding ACEs is riper for disclosure and children feel safe²⁹. This intervention is often targeted at professionals who work closely with children such as teachers and medical professionals, aimed at ensuring such groups have the adequate knowledge and understanding of ACEs to best provide

²³ Asmussen, K., McBride, T. and Waddell, S., 2019. The potential of early intervention for preventing and reducing ACE-related trauma. *Social policy and society*, 18(3).

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Di Lemma, L., Davies, A.R., Ford, K., Hughes, K., Homolova, L., Gray, B. and Richardson, G., 2019. *Responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences: An evidence review of interventions to prevent and address adversity across the life course*. Public Health Wales; Bangor University.

²⁶ Bhui, K. and Butcher, I., 2023. The trouble with trauma and triggering. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 10(7).

²⁷ Bellis, M.A., et al., 2023. Tackling adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): state of the art and options for action. *Wrexham: Public Health Wales*.

²⁸ Hughes, K., Ford, K., Davies, A., Homolova, L. and Bellis, M., 2018. Sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood experiences.: Report 1: Mental illness.

²⁹ Bellis et al (No.27)

support to children. This type of intervention often promotes debate around ACEs as well as allows for greater preventive action to be integrated into education and healthcare systems³⁰.

DISCLOSURE:

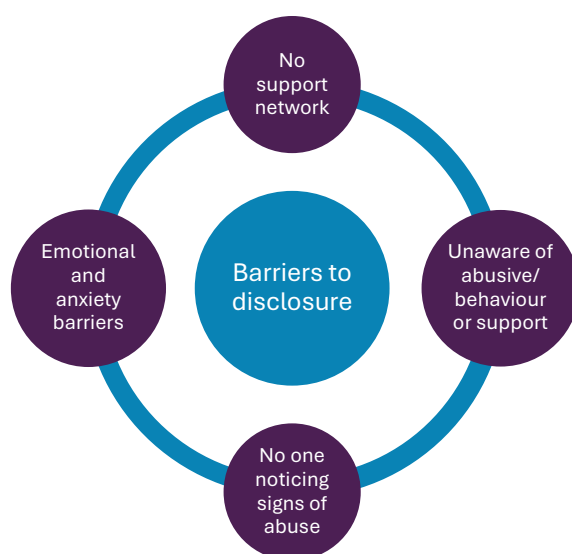
Before interventions can take place, someone needs to be aware of the ACE existing, often this will be done through a child disclosing the ACE to a trusted professional or adult. Teachers are the most common professionals that a child will disclose to initially as they are often the people children spend

On average it takes a child 7.5 years to disclose abuse to a person

Allnock et al (No.34)

the most time with outside of the home³¹. Disclosure is not a one-time thing but rather a journey as a child will often have to disclose to multiple people at different times of their life. It is not uncommon for a child not to be believed or taken seriously when they first disclose, meaning there is often a need for multiple disclosures to happen to different people³².

Certain barriers prevent children from disclosing, such as having no one to turn to for support or being unaware of where to go for help, perpetrators' tactics, emotional and anxiety barriers, being unaware of the behaviour being abuse, no one noticing the abuse, and anxiety over confidentiality³³. This means for children to disclose these barriers need to be broken down and ensure the correct environment exists for disclosure to occur. Children are a lot more likely to disclose to an adult when they have a strong relationship and feel safe around them. Also, children are more likely to disclose when they have learnt about abuse and importantly that it is wrong³⁴. Those who have suffered abuse in their childhood report lacking the knowledge or language of abuse to be able to disclose and speak up³⁵.



³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Brown, S., Redmond, T., Rees, D., Ford, S. and King, S., 2020. Child sexual abuse in the context of schools.

³² Ibid

³³ Allnock, D. and Miller, P., 2013. No one noticed, no one heard: A study of disclosures of childhood abuse.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

SECTION THREE BENEFITS OF ART

The use of art in interventions has increased in recent years due to the significant body of research that has shown the benefits that art can provide to people. Art provides significant benefits to our daily lives with there being strong connections between participating in arts-based activities and increased mental wellbeing. The arts have played a significant role in helping people with mental health conditions, allowing individuals to increase their self-esteem and reduce stress levels. Art is now used by the NHS as a way of treating mental health conditions, arts on prescription has showcased the relationship between art and better mental and emotional health³⁶.

Increasing compassion among children, there is a considerable body of research that has found arts engagement during childhood increases a child's compassion and emotional intelligence. Research has found that children who read fiction often are more likely to be compassionate and empathetic children as they can indirectly experience what a character in a story is experiencing³⁷. Similar outcomes have also been found with children who participate in visual art in education with there being recorded increases in empathy levels as well as the inter-personal relationships children have with one another³⁸. This links to the resilience-increasing interventions that are often used for ACEs, the positive outcomes of art-based projects and engagement are similar to those found in resilience improvement programmes. Art increases a person's emotional and social skills and provides a means of forming relationships with others, these factors have been directly linked to mitigating and even avoiding the negative long-term impacts of ACEs on a person's mental health³⁹.

Art provides alternative ways to discuss the lived experiences of adolescents and gives a voice to the youth, allowing them to engage in wider discussions in society⁴⁰. The personal and emotional connection to art allows people to express themselves in ways they may not be able to with words.

SECTION FOUR ART-BASED EDUCATION IN RELATIONSHIP AND SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

RSE became mandatory for secondary schools in 2020; it teaches children about the social, physical and emotional aspects of life focusing on relationships and sex. This education is key for children's social development, as well as providing them with important knowledge on what unhealthy relationships look like as well as where to access help and support for abuse. RSE is an important intervention for ACEs, it gives children the ability to know what abuse looks like and the terminology needed to express as it teaches children about healthy relationships as well as what abuse looks like. This gives people the language and ability to talk about abuse and their own experiences which can often increase the chance of disclosure.

Despite its importance, there are often significant problems with how the subject is being taught, with there being a lack of engagement from students during class, teachers not having the confidence or

³⁶ Marmot, Sinclair et al 2017. Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing – 2017. *All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report*

³⁷ Roza, S.A. and Guimarães, S.R.K., 2022. The relationship between reading and empathy: An integrative literature review. *Psicologia: Teoria e Prática*, 24(2).

³⁸ Bradshaw, R.D., 2016. Art Integration Fosters Empathy in the Middle School Classroom. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 89 (4–5).

³⁹ Hughes (No.19)

⁴⁰ Butcher, I., et al, 2023. A participatory action research study to explore adolescent's experiences of adverse childhood experiences through creative workshops: a protocol. *medRxiv*.

training to teach RSE as well as the feeling embarrassed when talking about often uncomfortable⁴¹. There is a need for RSE to be taught correctly as well as ensuring that students are paying attention to the content as they are more likely to remember the information and internalise it. As a result, the child's knowledge may be affected with them potentially not knowing where to seek help or what abusive and healthy relationships look like⁴².

Teachers who teach RSE are often not trained or educated on the subject but rather are chosen because of timetabling or convenience reasons. Non-specialist teachers for RSE means the information children are being taught is not comprehensive and often discourages children from asking questions during class⁴³.

Two arts-based RSE projects in Wales have tried to change how the subject is taught, focusing more on creative and artistic projects to teach children about relationships. Students were taught about domestic violence using creative and art-based methods to understand abuse as well as healthy

relationships. Researchers found that students were more engaged as a result of the creative projects used, which in turn allowed them to have a better understanding of abuse, the information learned during class also had a positive impact on the child's behaviour at school⁴⁴. There was also a growth in confidence in both teachers and students when engaging in difficult and uncomfortable topics, the art aspect took away some of the pressure to allow learning to be more engaging. Students reported being able to express themselves more through the art and allow a more personal connection to the content⁴⁵.

One report has found only 52% of students surveyed agreed their RSE classes gave them a good understanding of toxic and health relationships

Taylor-Gee et al (No.42)

relationships. Researchers found that students were more engaged as a result of the creative projects used, which in turn allowed them to have a better understanding of abuse, the information learned during class also had a positive impact on the child's behaviour at school⁴⁴. There was also a growth in confidence in both teachers and students when engaging in difficult and uncomfortable topics, the art aspect took away some of the pressure to allow learning to be more engaging. Students reported being able to express themselves more through the art and allow a more personal connection to the content⁴⁵.

Art can create safe spaces for young people to discuss topics and talk about issues in their personal lives that may not be possible in non-creative settings. This links into the factors needed for disclosure of abuse to happen, safe and welcoming spaces where the child can express themselves provide an environment for disclosure. After taking part in art-based RSE, children have reported feeling safe in capable of telling their teachers about their ACEs⁴⁶. This means that art can break down the barriers to disclosure and fuel disclosures from children, allowing them to receive intervention and support earlier, increasing the chance of the long-term impacts of ACEs being mitigated or avoided.

⁴¹ Taylor-Gee; Boyson 2022. "I LOVE IT - BUT WISH IT WERE TAKEN MORE SERIOUSLY" AN EXPLORATION OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX EDUCATION IN ENGLISH SECONDARY SCHOOL SETTINGS. Safelives

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Porter, J. and Standing, K., 2024, April. My Perfect Partner: Using Creative Methods to Address Gender Based Violence. In *International Conference on Gender Research* (Vol. 7, No. 1)

⁴⁵ Renold, E., 2018. Making our feelings matters: using creative methods to re-assemble the rules on healthy relationships education in Wales.

⁴⁶ Ibid

CONCLUSION

Overall, the impact that ACEs can have on a person's life is significant and often long-lasting, which results in large costs to the economy and society as a whole. The cost of ACEs both to the economy and society are staggering with ACEs being attributed to increased NHS spending and violent/criminal behaviour younger in lives. Through intervention, such impacts/costs can be mitigated or avoided altogether. Yet barriers to disclosure often prevent a child from receiving intervention for ACEs suffered. Art-based interventions provide compelling benefits to those suffering from ACEs due to the positive impact that art has on a person's mental health and resilience levels, as well as providing a space for disclosure to occur. The safe space that art can create makes it an appropriate method for educators to use to encourage disclosure of abuse in children as it can break down barriers to disclosure. As such art and creative methods should be incorporated into RSE to allow children to engage and understand the content more effectively, while also providing a safe environment for disclosure to occur. This should allow more children to access intervention at an earlier stage and potentially mitigate some of the long-term negative impacts that ACEs can have on later life.



Artwork by Bettie Hope, commissioned by Changing Relations as part of their Let's Talk about Sex project, 2022