



UNIVERSITY of
STIRLING



ADVERSITY: GENDER, POWER AND AGENCY

Prof Jane Callaghan

Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection

University of Stirling

Jane.Callaghan@stir.ac.uk

[@jane.emcallaghan](#) (twitter)

BE THE DIFFERENCE

WHAT ARE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACEs)? (ANDA AND FELLITI)

Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Emotional abuse	Physical neglect	Emotional neglect
Mother treated violently	Household substance abuse	Household mental illness	Single Parent home	Household member goes to prison

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF ACES?

- Recognises the importance of trauma and adversity in children's lives, health and mental health outcomes.
- Emphasises prevention

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH ACES?

The measure

Medicalisation
and
individualisation

Resilience,
resistance,
recovery

Obscures
meaning making

agency and
capacity for
recovery

Risk and
consequences

Obscures the
material / spatia

Inconsistent with a
rights based
approach to
childhood

ACES AND GENDER?

Growing up in a single parent household is an ACE
Most single parents are women

BUT

This model was developed in 1999
Control for poverty...
Five years later
Better than staying in conflict

EXAMPLE - ACES AND DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Gender analysis neutralised – failure to engage with an analytic of power in abusive dynamics

Emphasis on impact on victim and children

Implications for adult and child victims, and for perpetrators

The return of the amazing invisible perpetrator...!

ADVERSITY IS NOT GENDER NEUTRAL...

Alcala (et al 2017)
ACEs and risk of
cancer



Girls' childhood ACEs
were associated with
higher odds of
cancer.



Boys - only emotional
abuse was associated
increased risk

Zettler et al
2017 ACEs
and residential
placement



ACEs
significantly
increased the
odds of
residential
placement



Race played a
significant role
in predicting
residential
placement,
intersected
with gender



ACEs were
Stronger
predictor for
boys



Stronger
predictor for
black boys
and girls (not
for white girls)

DOES THE 'PAIR OF ACES' FIX THESE ISSUES?

The Pair of ACES

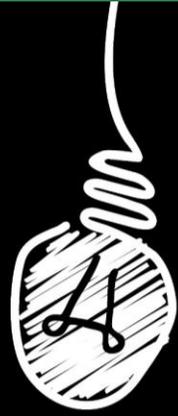
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES



ADVERSE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS



What about
POWER?
Exerted and resisted



SILENCE

**VIOLENCE IS A LESSON IN
LEARNING TO BE QUIET**

Lucy: I'd always hesitate of what I would say...even if I said "Hello", I'd always think before like, is he just going to shut me out? Is he going to respond in a nice way, or be angry or anything like that? I'd always think ahead of what I was saying

I have worries about my daughter now he's taken me to court for contact. He's emotionally and psychologically abusive and treats women appallingly. He's not interested in our daughter it's all about control over me still. He's demonstrated that by reluctantly paying cms and her birthday was 3 weeks ago she was 2 he never even got her a card after kicking up a stink in court about being able to at the contact centre.



DETERMINISM — CHILDREN AS PASSIVE RECIPIENTS OF INEVITABLE DAMAGE

Children's agency, participation, voice?



MEANING MAKING

What counts / doesn't count as 'ACE'?
Implications of this for lived experience of survivor.

Consequence of substituting professional meaning making for lived meaning making.

Epistemic injustices (Fricker)

RESISTANCE - RE- MAKING THE WORLD

I would go to my room with my siblings, but we did not have the key (to lock it). We were scared, and we'd push a couch in front of the door to block it. We looked through the keyhole and listen to them shouting. The worst times I would hide in the closet with my siblings. We had large wardrobes and we all moved them to the door. First the couch then the closet, we wanted to lock the door. And I would hide on the top bunk bed... where I made a kind of fortress: I put some cushions –the ones from the couch that were more firm and I hid myself there with my siblings and we would play with Lego, because it (bed) was big enough, so we could all three fit up there. I suggest creating an environment that is in your favour. Like we sometimes put blankets between the bed above and below and we went in there with an electric torch. And we'd play music....

And I was trying to be OK with my siblings. Ever since I was little I always tried ... I've got things I understood even if I was young, but still older than my siblings, and I always tried to make them understand in the form of a game, like Benigni in 'Life is beautiful'.
(Paulo, Italy, 15 years)

BE THE DIFFERENCE

ROUTINE ENQUIRY... SKILLS AND SERVICES?

If professionals asked people routinely about adversity & abuse it would be an invitation many would take and support could be made available. Professionals have a duty to protect & support people they see & that includes taking about the difficult stuff. You deserve to be heard!

Yes all of my children are still deeply affected and eldest has PTSD from the dv
We all have hyper vigilance too.
They struggle with emotions and many other things and are now all under a CIN plan but again they have no clue how to help them as apparently there are no speacilists for children of dv with counselling under ten

Yes. He is traumatised. I asked for counselling and nothing's available. I'm told government cut backs are to blame. So, despite my limited financial resources, I've had to pay for some private therapy myself.

Being 'at home' involves a sense of belonging and control.

OR being unhomed at home – marginalization, estrangement

Adults' power and control is often enacted and lived in the control and regulation of the home space (Wilson 2013)

Independent, unregulated use of space important for children's wellbeing (Jack 2010)

Living in communities with low quality, dangerous and degraded housing stock... NOT AN ACE.

SAFE SPACES, MY SPACES



My room. That is, the one I have at my mom's home. Everyone tells me that it is too confused, but I feel it is very much mine. Maybe I am so confused too, but everything there is right for me, although sometimes it is in the wrong place. In the room I still have so many things of my childhood; my mom says I should put them away in a box, but they remind me of the times when I was very young, when I played with my sister, when we were at home all together.

Relational and
contextual

Located and Embodied

Resilience is...

Agentic and resistant

Paradoxical



A TRAUMA FOCUSED APPROACH

The importance of emotion and
relationship in context

Complexity of lived experience

Belonging

Meaning-making

Children's rights – agency and
capacity

Capacity for resistance and resilience,
not **just** damage

Twitter @janeemcallaghan
Jane.Callaghan@stir.ac.uk