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**Relationship Between
Adverse Childhood Experiences
and
Risk Behaviors
Wayne County High School Students
Evalumetrics Youth Survey 2023
March 2024**

Research Brief EYS-23-02

Summary –

- Nearly four in 10 (39.1%) Wayne County high school students reported two or more adverse childhood experiences.
- One in ten (10.1%) high school students said they had made a plan to commit suicide, i.e., suicide ideation, at least once in the past year.

Students with an ACE score of two or more were:

- 1.9 times more likely to report feeling sad or depressed most days,
- 4.0 times more likely to have made a plan to commit suicide,
- 5.2 times more likely to report making one or more suicide attempts,
- 3.1 times more likely to report injuring themselves when upset,
- 1.6 times more likely to report that their life lacks clear direction or purpose,
- 2.1 times more likely to bully others.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) have been shown to be a major influence on every aspect of children’s lives. ACEs are a significant source of trauma and can disrupt social emotional development, academic performance, and can lead to destructive behaviors such as depression, suicide ideation, and self-injury as well as delinquency and substance abuse. An ACE score of two or more has been shown to predict problematic behaviors.

In February of 2023, 1,090 10th and 12th grade students in 11 school districts in Wayne County completed the Evalumetrics Youth Survey (EYS). The EYS includes questions asking about selected risk behaviors and asks students to report the number of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) they have experienced. The question was as follows:

The following are common challenges that youth commonly encounter:

- *death of a parent;*
- *parental divorce or separation;*
- *incarceration of a parent;*
- *someone in your family or in your home has/had a drug or alcohol abuse problem;*
- *someone in your family or in your home has/had a mental health problem;*
- *domestic violence;*
- *physical neglect;*
- *physical abuse;*
- *emotional neglect;*
- *emotional abuse or*
- *sexual abuse.*

How many of these experiences have happened to you in your lifetime?

Students responded with a number from 0 to 11.

Results-

Table 1 shows the proportion of students who reported two or more adverse childhood experiences and the prevalence of selected risk behaviors. Nearly four in 10 (39.1%) high school students reported two or more adverse childhood experiences. This included 40.1% of 10th graders and 37.7% of 12th graders. More than one in three (34.4%) said that their life lacked clear direction or purpose and nearly half (47.7%) reported feeling sad most days. One in 10 (10.1%) high school students said they had made a plan to commit suicide, i.e., ideation, at least once in the past year.

Table 1.
Wayne County High School
Students
Evalumetrics Youth Survey -
2019

	10th Grade N=603	12th Grade N=487	Total High School N=1,090
ACE 2 or more	40.2%	37.7%	39.1%
My life does not have clear direction or purpose.	36.8%	31.4%	34.4%
Felt sad most days	49.8%	45.0%	47.7%
Suicide ideation	11.9%	7.9%	10.1%
Injured self (cut or burn) when upset	23.5%	22.7%	23.1%
Bullied another student more than twice.	11.5%	8.1%	10.0%

Correlates of ACE-

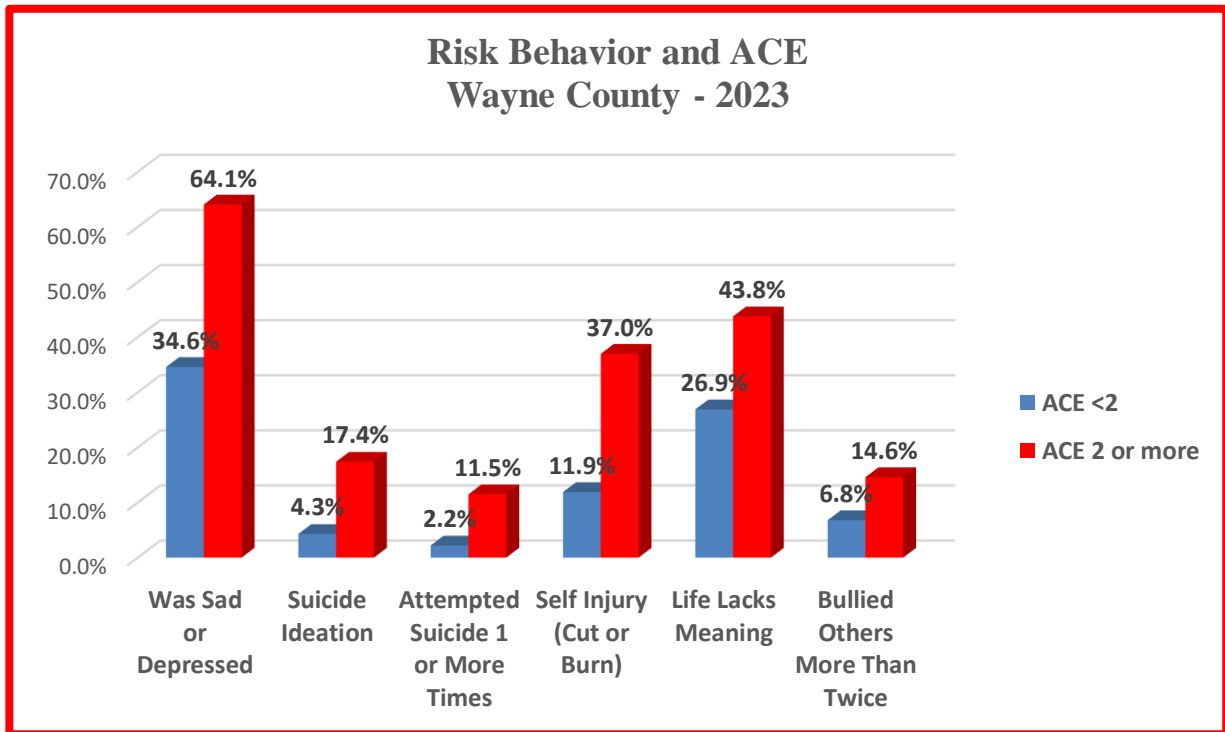
To determine the relationship between ACE scores and risk behaviors cross-tabulations were run and tests of proportions were calculated. Students reporting two or more adverse childhood experiences were compared to those with an ACE score of zero or one. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis. Students with an ACE score of two or more were statistically significantly more likely to report risk behaviors. Students with an ACE score of two or more were 1.9 times more likely to report feeling sad most day ($\chi^2=72.3$, $p<.001$); were 4.0 times more likely to report suicide ideation ($\chi^2=39.5$, $p<.001$); were 5.2 times more likely to report one or more suicide attempts in the past year ($\chi^2=31.2$, $p<.001$); 3.1 times more likely to report injuring themselves when upset ($\chi^2=74.8$, $p<.001$); 1.6 times more likely to report that their life lacks clear direction or purpose ($\chi^2=25.6$, $p<.001$); and 2.1 times more likely to report bullying another student more than twice ($\chi^2=12.8$, $p<.001$).

Table 2.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences
Wayne County High School
Students**

Evalumetrics Youth Survey - 2023

	ACE 2				
	ACE <2	or more	Ratio	chi²	p
Was Sad or Depressed	34.6%	64.1%	1.9	72.3	<.001
Suicide Ideation	4.3%	17.4%	4.0	39.5	<.001
Attempted Suicide 1 or More Times	2.2%	11.5%	5.2	31.2	<.001
Self-Injury (Cut or Burn)	11.9%	37.0%	3.1	74.8	<.001
Life Lacks Clear Direction	26.9%	43.8%	1.6	25.6	<.001
Bullied Others More Than Twice	6.8%	14.6%	2.1	12.8	<.001



Discussion –

Results from the 2023 Evalumetrics Youth Survey (EYS) in Wayne County indicate that nearly four in 10 (39.1%) Wayne County high school students have had two or more adverse childhood experiences. Results also demonstrate a significant relationship between students' adverse childhood experiences and serious health risk behaviors. Unlike some risk and protective factors that are underlying causes for health risk behaviors, adverse childhood experiences cannot be eliminated, rather, steps must be taken to mitigate the negative impact of the trauma associated with these experiences. These findings demonstrate the need for extensive trauma-informed education, intervention, and prevention programming.