

Children in care can recover from adversity with the right adoptive environment, research finds

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Research on adoptive family life in Wales has revealed the levels of adversity many children have experienced.

Academics from Cardiff University analysed social services records of a cohort of [children](#) in Wales who were adopted in the same year.

Adoptive parents also completed surveys about the children over a four-year period after the placement began, commenting annually on any difficulties the child was having and their parenting.

The study recorded the number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as abuse and neglect the children had faced before they were placed for adoption. More than half (54%) of the children had experienced neglect in their early lives, with 37% being exposed to [domestic violence](#) and 34% being exposed to a parent who abused drugs. Additionally, symptoms of emotional distress and behaviour problems were significantly higher in this group than the UK general population.

The results show a link between [adoptive parents](#) who expressed higher levels of 'warm parenting,' such as praise and affection, and lower levels of child emotional distress even when the child had experienced multiple adverse events.

Lead researcher Dr. Rebecca Anthony, of The Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health Improvement, said: "The mental health of children in our study was significantly worse than the UK [general population](#) at all time points, highlighting the need for [support services](#) for families who adopt children from care.

"The research also adds more evidence on the importance of a positive caregiving environment in protecting children from the effects of trauma earlier in life. We suggest that whilst policy, training and service design should be 'informed' by [adverse childhood experiences](#), other aspects of a child's history, such as length of exposure to adversity, time in care, number of moves, sibling relationship quality may provide a better understanding of children's mental health."

More information: Rebecca E. Anthony et al. Adverse Childhood Experiences of Children Adopted from Care: The Importance of Adoptive Parental Warmth for Future Child Adjustment, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph16122212](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16122212)

Provided by Cardiff University

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