



Associations Among Childhood Adversity, Family Proximity, Hope, and Psychological Well-being in Helping Professionals

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Introduction

Background

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are associated with long-term psychological and relational outcomes across the lifespan (Felitti et al., 1998)
- Emerging research suggests that many helping professionals report a history of childhood adversity, which may shape their professional and psychological functioning (Milne et al., 2024).
- ACEs have been linked to secondary traumatic stress among early-career clinicians, highlighting the potential impact of early adversity on professional well-being (Lacey, 2025).
- Psychological resources such as hope and family relationships may play a role in shaping well-being among helping professionals. There is limited research examining how these factors are interrelated within helping professional populations.
- The present study examines the associations among ACEs, proximity to extended family during childhood, hope, and psychological well-being in helping professionals.

Research Question & Hypotheses

Research Question. What are the associations among adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), Hope, Proximity to Extended Family, and Psychological Well-being among helping professionals?

Hypothesis 1. Higher ACEs total scores will be negatively associated with lower hope among helping professionals

Hypothesis 2. Close proximity to extended family will be positively associated with lower total ACEs scores in helping professionals

Hypothesis 3. Higher ACEs total scores will be negatively associated with Psychological Well-being among helping professionals

Methods

Participants

- 398 participants with an age range from 22 to 70 years old, 87% females, 80% White, and well educated (see table below). Participants were workers in helping professions in the child welfare sector, such as adoption and foster care (37%), clinical and counseling services (29%), education (16%), and the juvenile justice system (9%).
- Approximately 66.2% of participants reported growing up with extended family living within a 30-minute drive.

Education	n	%
High School Degree	7	1.8
Associate Degree	10	2.5
Bachelor's	106	26.6
Master's	235	59.0
Doctoral	22	5.5
Other	17	4.3

Procedure

- This study uses secondary data from a larger study on helping professionals in child welfare.
- Participants were emailed a link to a voluntary Qualtrics survey with sociodemographic questionnaire (included general sociodemographic questions, such as gender, age, race, education, and services provided) and the following measures:

Measure	Number of Items	Reliability (Cronbach alpha)
The Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (ACE; Felitti et al., 1998)	10	.76
Dispositional Hope Scale (DHS; Snyder et al., 1991)	12	.86
Psychological Well-being Scale (SPWB; Ryff et al., 2010; Ryff & Keyes, 1995)	18	.83

Results

- Pearson Correlation shows a negative correlation between ACEs and Psychological Well-being ($r = -.153, p = .003$). The correlation between Hope and ACEs was not statistically significant ($r = -.093, p = .071$).
- No statistically significant correlation was found between ACEs scores and proximity to extended family ($r = -.050, p = .335$).

Variables	ACEs	Psych. Well-being	Hope	Family Proximity
ACEs	1			
Psych. Well-being	-.153**	1		
Hope	-.093	.706**	1	
Family Proximity	-.050	.561	.525	1

** Correlation is significant at the $p < .01$ level

Discussion

- Findings from this study indicate that higher levels of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are associated with lower psychological well-being among helping professionals, although the magnitude of this relationship was small. This suggests that while childhood adversity may have lasting effects, it is likely one of multiple factors influencing well-being in this population.
- No significant associations were found between ACEs and hope or between ACEs and proximity to extended family during childhood. These findings suggest that the presence of extended family alone may not reflect the quality or protective nature of those relationships.

Limitations

- All measures were based on self-report, which introduces the possibility of recall bias and social desirability bias.
- The sample was predominantly female and White, which may limit the generalizability of findings to more diverse populations.
- The cross-sectional and correlational design does not allow for causal conclusions.

Future Research

- Future research should examine additional protective and resilience-related factors (e.g., social support, meaning-making, or post-traumatic growth) that may buffer the impact of ACEs on well-being.
- Longitudinal research would also help clarify how childhood adversity and psychological resources interact over time among helping professionals.

References

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