

# ACEs in Wales and preliminary findings from a review into routine enquiry



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# The Public Health Research, Evaluation and Development Hot House



- Funded by Public Health Wales
- Dedicated resource to respond to emerging research needs in line with PHWs strategic objectives;
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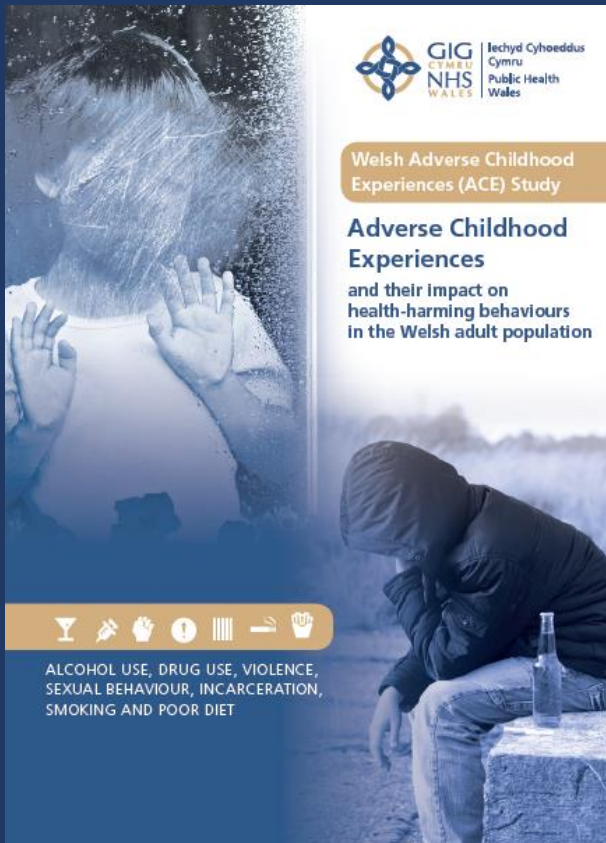
# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)


Stressful events occurring in childhood that affect a child directly (e.g. child maltreatment) or affect the environment in which they grow up (e.g. family substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence)

- Among the strongest predictors of poor outcomes across the life course
- ACEs are preventable
- Impacts can be avoided
- Multi-agency framework for action

# Welsh ACE Survey 2015


Nationally representative household survey  
2,000 adult residents aged 18-69  
Exposure to 9 ACEs



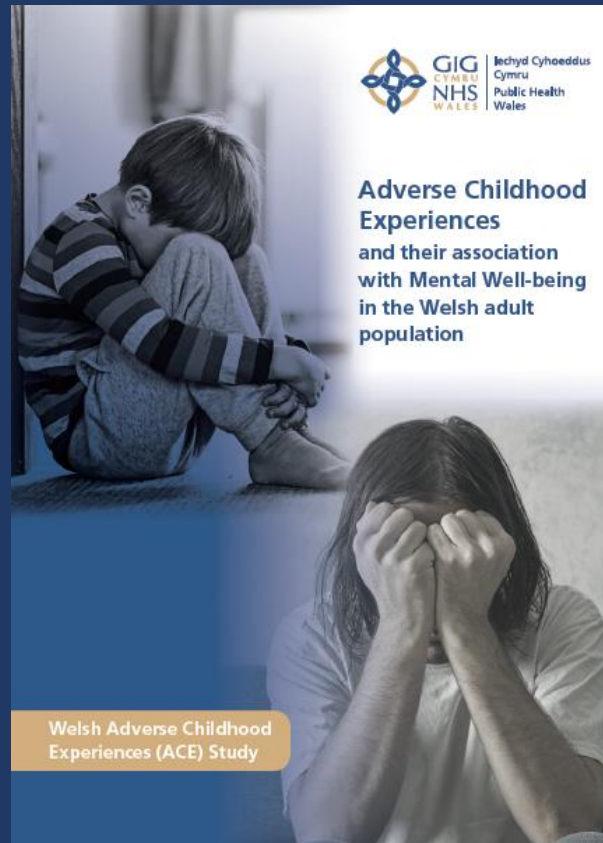
 **GIG** | Iechyd Cyhoeddus  
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**Wales** | Public Health  
**Wales**


**Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study**

**Adverse Childhood Experiences**  
and their impact on  
health-harming behaviours  
in the Welsh adult population



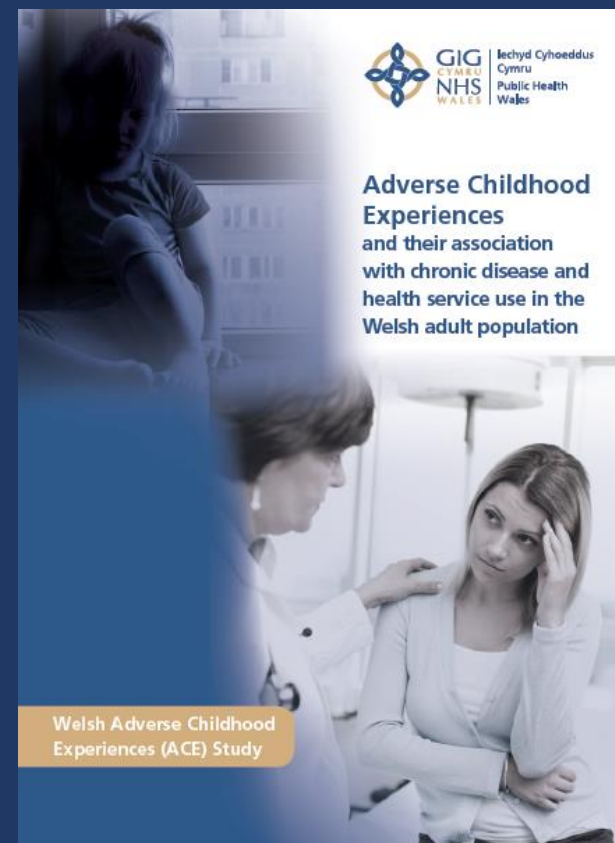
ALCOHOL USE, DRUG USE, VIOLENCE,  
SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, INCARCERATION,  
SMOKING AND POOR DIET




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**Adverse Childhood Experiences**  
and their association  
with Mental Well-being  
in the Welsh adult  
population

**Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study**



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**Wales**

**Adverse Childhood Experiences**  
and their association  
with chronic disease and  
health service use in the  
Welsh adult population

**Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study**

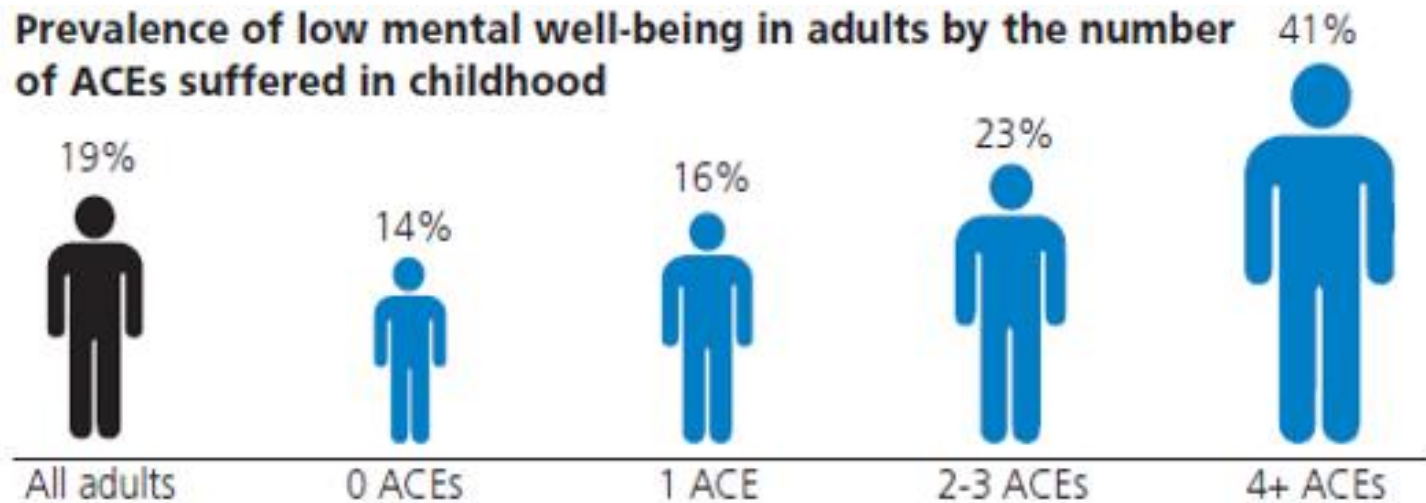
# Welsh ACE Survey 2015

**Compared with people with no ACEs, those with 4+ ACEs are:**

- 4 times more likely** to be a high-risk drinker
- 6 times more likely** to have had or caused unintended teenage pregnancy
- 6 times more likely** to smoke e-cigarettes or tobacco
- 6 times more likely** to have had sex under the age of 16 years
- 11 times more likely** to have smoked cannabis
- 14 times more likely** to have been a victim of violence over the last 12 months
- 15 times more likely** to have committed violence against another person in the last 12 months
- 16 times more likely** to have used crack cocaine or heroin
- 20 times more likely** to have been incarcerated at any point in their lifetime

# Welsh ACE Survey 2015

Prevalence of low mental well-being in adults by the number of ACEs suffered in childhood



Over the past two weeks, compared to people with no ACEs, those with 4+ ACEs were also:

- 3 times more likely to have never or rarely felt relaxed
- 3 times more likely to have never or rarely felt close to other people
- 4 times more likely to have never or rarely been thinking clearly
- 5 times more likely to have never or rarely to have dealt with problems well
- 5 times more likely to have never or rarely been able to make up their own mind about things
- 6 times more likely to have never or rarely felt optimistic about the future
- 6 times more likely to have never or rarely felt useful

**Up to the age of 69 years, those with four or more ACEs were 2x more likely than those with no ACEs to be diagnosed with a chronic disease\*<sup>§</sup>**

***For specific diseases they were:***



**4x**  
more likely to develop  
**Diabetes (Type 2)**



**3x**  
more likely to develop  
**Heart Disease**



**3x**  
more likely to develop a  
**Respiratory Disease**

**Levels of health service use were higher in adults who experienced more ACEs\*<sup>#</sup>**

**Over a 12 month period, compared to people with no ACEs, those with four or more ACEs were:**



**2x**  
more likely to have  
frequently visited a GP\*<sup>\*\*</sup>



**3x**  
more likely to have  
attended A&E



**3x**  
more likely to have stayed  
overnight in hospital

\*After taking age, sex, ethnicity and residential deprivation into account. All data was self-reported.; <sup>§</sup>Includes Type 2 Diabetes, Stroke, Cancer, Coronary Heart Disease, Liver or Digestive Disease and Respiratory Disease; <sup>\*</sup>Excluding reasons relating to pregnancy; <sup>\*\*</sup>Visited a GP six or more times over the past 12 months.

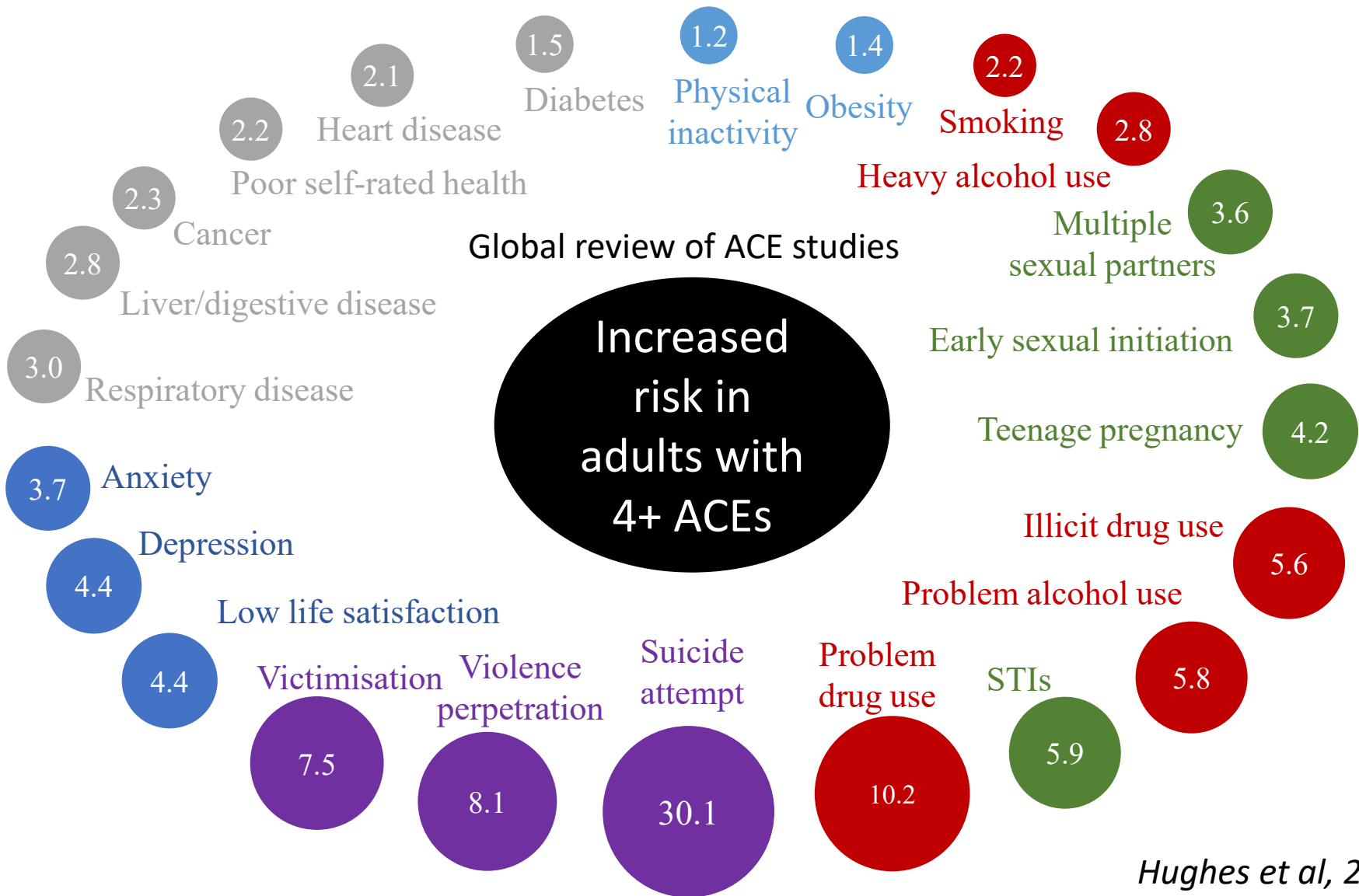
PHYSICAL HEALTH

WEIGHT & EXERCISE

SEXUAL HEALTH

Global review of ACE studies

Increased risk in adults with 4+ ACEs



Hughes et al, 2017

MENTAL ILLNESS

VIOLENCE

SUBSTANCE USE



# Resilience: the ability to overcome serious hardship

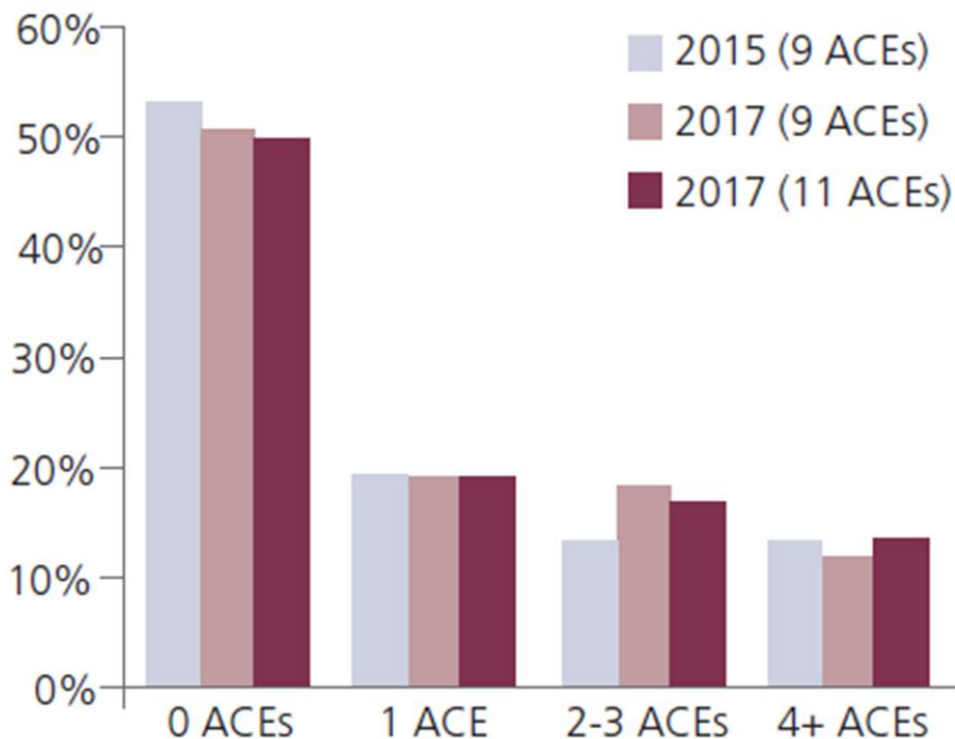
## What factors may protect against impacts of ACEs in Wales?

### Factors building resilience:

- Feel you can guide own destiny
- Equipped to manage behaviour and emotions
- Socially connected, grounded in cultural traditions
- Having at least one stable, caring child-adult relationship

# ACE Resilience Study 2017

- National household survey
- 2,497 18-69 year olds
  - 2,005 general population
  - 492 boost in Welsh speaking communities
- Exposure to 11 ACEs



# Proportion of adults reporting each ACE in 2017



Verbal abuse  
**20%**



Physical abuse  
**16%**



Sexual abuse  
**7%**



Parental separation  
**25%**



Mental illness  
**18%**



Domestic violence  
**17%**

Neglect was measured for the first time in 2017. Most people who reported neglect had multiple ACEs.



Emotional neglect  
**7%**



Physical neglect  
**4%**



Alcohol abuse  
**13%**



Drug abuse  
**6%**



Incarceration  
**4%**

## Mental Illness

- **Lifetime mental illness**  
Ever treated for depression, anxiety or other mental illness
- **Current mental illness**  
Currently treated for depression, anxiety or other mental illness
- **Felt suicidal or self-harmed**  
Ever having felt suicidal or self-harmed



Sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood experiences



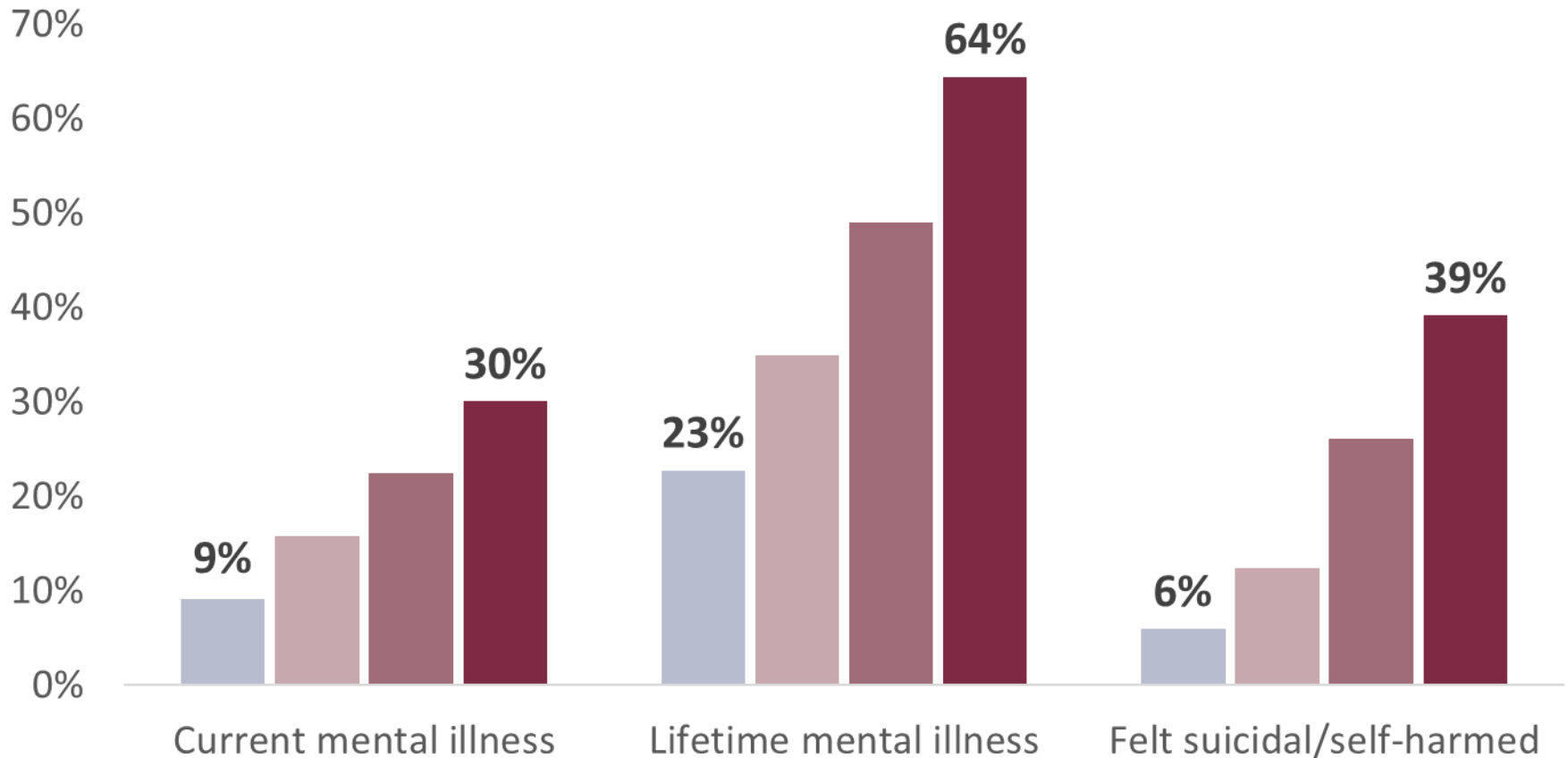
Report 1: Mental illness

Welsh Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and Resilience Study

Karen Hughes, Kat Ford, Alitha R. Davies, Lucia Homolova, Mark A. Bellis  
[www.publichealthwales.org](http://www.publichealthwales.org)

# Relationship between ACEs and mental illness

■ 0 ACEs ■ 1 ACE ■ 2-3 ACEs ■ 4+ ACEs



Increased risk  
with 4+ ACEs  
(v 0 ACEs)

3.7

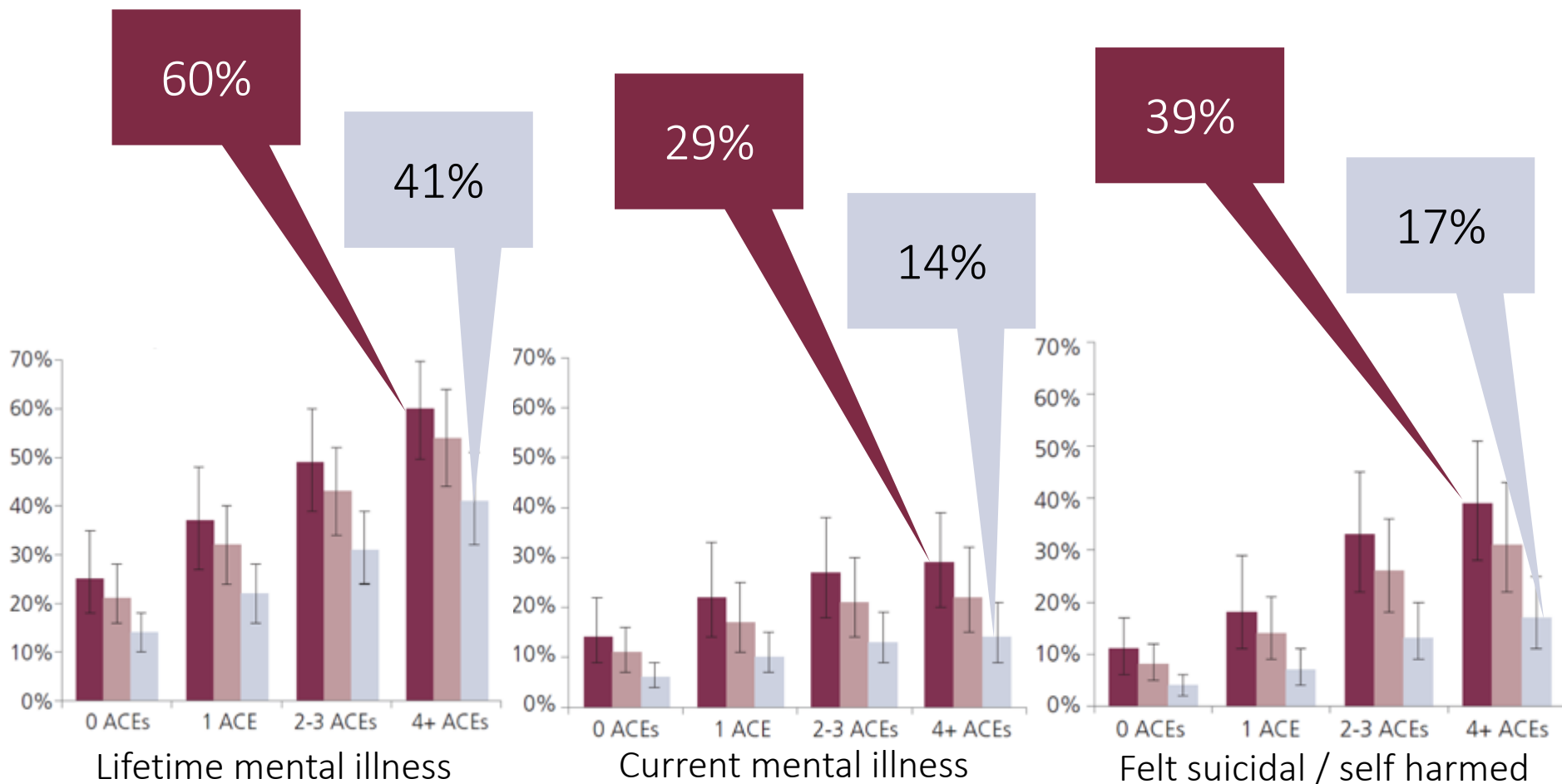
6.1

9.5



# Childhood resilience was associated with lower mental illness across all ACE levels

**Childhood resilience** ■ Low ■ Moderate ■ High



# An ACE-informed Wales

- Population 3 million
- Devolved Government
  - Education, health, housing, local government, social services...



*"We will create ACE-aware public services which take a more preventative approach to avoid ACEs and improve the resilience of children and young people"*

**Prosperity for All:  
the national  
strategy**

**Taking Wales Forward**

# Breaking the cycle

**Recognise and Support**

**Build resilience**

**Prevent ACEs**

# ACE-informed Policing

- Exploring police knowledge and practice relating to vulnerability
- Evaluating training to improve understanding of trauma and increase confidence in responding
- Evaluating the impact of changes in practice to identify and respond to vulnerability

## ACEs and Prisons

- Measuring the prevalence of ACEs in the offender population
- Exploring staff knowledge and perceptions of ACEs



# ACE-informed Health Services

## General Practice

- Evaluation of pilot study in England
  - Staff training
  - Routine enquiry via questionnaire waiting room
  - Discussion with GP
- Feasibility, acceptability and impact

## Health visitors

- Exploration of current practice
- Staff training
- Routine enquiry during initial assessment
- Feasibility, acceptability and impact

Routine enquiry for ACEs

What is the  
evidence?

# Thank you

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*with thanks to*

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Dr Lisa Di Lemma, Dr Alisha Davies, Sara Edwards.