

MSS + ACES: FAQs

MINNESOTA
STUDENT
SURVEY

ADVERSE
CHILDHOOD
EXPERIENCES

FREQUENTLY
ASKED
QUESTIONS

Q WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES)?

The original study (performed by CDC/Kaiser-Permanente in CA, 1995-1997) found that **specific stressful or traumatic experiences**, including abuse, neglect and a range of household dysfunction, **were associated with negative health and well-being outcomes**.

THE ACES INCLUDED IN THE ORIGINAL STUDY WERE:

1. Emotional abuse by an adult at home
2. Physical abuse by an adult at home
3. Sexual abuse
4. Domestic abuse of mother or stepmother
5. Household substance abuse
6. Household mental illness
7. Parental separation/divorce
8. Incarceration of a household member
9. Emotional neglect by caregivers
10. Physical neglect by caregivers

Q WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA STUDENT SURVEY (MSS)?

- The MSS was first administered in 1989, as a coordinated effort by the Department of Health, Department of Human Services, Department of Education, and Department of Public Safety.
- The survey is administered every 3 years.
- The survey is available to all Minnesota schools; the publicly available data are from public schools.
- Prior to 2013, 6th, 9th, and 11th graders were surveyed. In 2013, 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th graders were surveyed to allow elementary school representation, to allow cohort comparisons, and to preserve at least one grade for trend purposes (9th grade).
- The survey is a census sample (where every available student can be surveyed, rather than a randomly-selected sample population).
- Students can opt out of taking the survey and refuse to answer any question(s).
- Student anonymity is guaranteed through data governance protocols.
- The survey covers many topics, including basic demographic information, health, nutrition, relationships, and substance use.
- In 2019, 81% of public school districts participated, and over 170,000 students completed the survey.

THE MSS ACES MODULE INCLUDES:

1. Verbal abuse by a household adult
2. Physical abuse by a household adult
3. Sexual abuse
 - By a family member
 - By someone outside the family
4. Household domestic abuse between adults
5. Household substance abuse: drugs
6. Household substance abuse: alcohol
7. Household mental illness
8. Incarceration of a caregiver

Q HOW DOES THE MSS USE ACES?

- Some ACES (such as sexual abuse) have been on the survey since the beginning.
- The MSS ACES module began in 2013, with inclusion of physical and verbal abuse.
- Household mental illness was added in 2019.
- The MSS ACES scale currently has 8 or 9 indicators (depending on whether the sexual abuse questions are combined).
- Only 8th, 9th, and 11th graders complete the ACES module; 5th graders are not asked.

BECAUSE EACH SURVEY OR STUDY USES ITS OWN ACES SCALE, ACE SCORE COMPARISONS CANNOT BE MADE BETWEEN SURVEYS

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Q WHY DO WE USE THE MSS ACEs MODULE?

- To bring attention to the way **common** traumas can affect health.
- To **compare** across populations: the predictive value is strong.
- To acknowledge **shared adversity**: to acknowledge that traumas have a real effect on our lives, but that other people have experienced these, too, and have **overcome** them.
- The MSS ACEs module is the only long-term, census-based survey tracking ACEs in Minnesota.

Q WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OF THE ACEs DATA AND HOW DOES THE MSS ADDRESS THEM?

The core ACEs questions don't specifically ask about racial or historical trauma, negative experiences based on sexual orientation or gender identity, or socioeconomic class. Nor do they measure frequency or intensity of experiences. However, the MSS addresses some of these issues through other questions. These include:

- Bullying for reasons of race or ethnicity, religion, or sexual identity (among other reasons)
- Experiencing homelessness or having skipped meals because the family couldn't afford food
- Living in an unsafe neighborhood
- Missing school for work, lack of transportation, or family obligations (among other reasons)

The ACEs scale also doesn't address the positive experiences and strengths in students' lives that are associated with positive outcomes; however, the MSS measures many indicators of resilience.

In addition, the survey has expanded the demographic questions in the past couple administrations, with more than 35 specific race/ethnicity categories, and expanded sexual orientation and gender identity responses. This allows for analysis both on the prevalence of various risk and protective factors, and the ways different student communities are affected by those factors.

OTHER ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES ON THE MSS:

These are experiences that are not included in the ACEs module, but may also be associated with adverse outcomes:

- Sexual violence
 - Dating violence
 - Trafficking
- Bullying
- Physical and mental illness
- Feeling unsafe
- Not having an adult to talk to
- Insufficient dental or medical care
- Being in foster care
- Missing school
- School disciplinary action

PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND INDICATORS OF RESILIENCE ON THE MSS:

- Caring relationships with adults and peers
- Trusting relationships with adults and peers
- Involvement in activities that give joy and energy
- Feeling valued and appreciated
- Positive school climate
- Higher levels of educational engagement
- Family inclusion
- Feeling safe
- Developmental Assets*
 - Positive Identity
 - Social Competence
 - Empowerment

*Items used and adapted with permission from Search Institute (2004). The Developmental Assets Profile. Minneapolis: Author. Copyright © 2004 by Search Institute (www.search-institute.org). All rights reserved.

WHERE TO FIND YOUR MSS DATA (ON ACES AND EVERYTHING ELSE)

1. The Minnesota Department of Education website has links to static reports and interactive tables at

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/mss/>

- Data can be searched by district or county; year, question category; grade; and demographic category
- Responses from all question categories can be found
- All response options are available
- Data separated by gender and grade, where allowable
- Timeframe is limited

2. The Center for Health Statistics at MDH has PDFs of static tables that include all questions and response options, at the county, region, and state levels, and by racial and ethnic group. Reports are available by geographical area and demographic group, as well as special topics.

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/mchs/surveys/mss/index.html>

3. The MDE website also has an online data request form to request files for individual school districts and

counties that can be analyzed with statistical software. This method allows a community to have all their data, which can then be analyzed however they like.

Requesters who want data from individual school districts must have superintendent permission. This link is found on both the sites listed above (MDE and CHS).

<https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5250891/MSS-Data-Request-Form-2019>

4. The Substance Use in Minnesota (SUMN) website, run in conjunction with the State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup, and funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, has interactive tables and static reports.

<https://sumn.org>

- Data can be searched by county and region; year; substance; gender; grade; and demographic category
- SUMN only includes data related to substance use, risk and protective factors, mental health, gambling, and adverse childhood experiences
- Data are available from 1995 to present
- Fact sheets on MSS topics, such as ACES or mental health, are also available
- For help using the site or accessing data, email info@sumn.org