



# **The Impact Of Adverse Childhood Experiences On Adulthood Career Growth: A Psychological And Sociological Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

This quantitative, correlational study investigates the long-term impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on Adulthood Career Satisfaction. Using a sample of the working adult population, the study examines the direct relationship between cumulative ACE scores and reported career satisfaction, while specifically analyzing the moderating role of Resilience. The research hypothesizes a significant negative relationship between ACEs and Career Satisfaction, which is expected to be attenuated (weakened) by higher levels of individual Resilience. Preliminary results indicated significant demographic influences, with Gender, Age (above 50 years), and Educational Qualification (Undergraduate) all showing significant differences in the measured constructs. The findings underscore the complex interplay of early trauma and protective factors in shaping vocational success and well-being.

# Chapter I-Introduction

## Background

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), defined as potentially traumatic events occurring before the age of 18, encompass abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. Extensive public health research has established a strong dose-response relationship between ACEs and negative adult outcomes, including chronic illness, mental health disorders, and reduced life expectancy. While the link to physical and psychological health is well-documented, the influence of early trauma on complex functional outcomes, such as an individual's professional trajectory and career satisfaction, remains an area requiring focused psychological investigation.

## Theoretical Foundation

This research integrates three core theoretical frameworks. The **ACEs Framework** highlights the cumulative biological and psychological burden of trauma. **Resilience Theory** (Masten & Rutter) posits that certain individual and environmental factors can act as protective mechanisms, enabling individuals to "bounce back" from adversity. Finally, **Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory** views career development as a lifelong process influenced by personal and environmental factors; trauma represents a profound environmental disruption that may destabilize this developmental trajectory. This study aims to bridge these areas by positioning Resilience as the critical mediating factor that determines whether childhood trauma translates into adult career dissatisfaction.

# Chapter II - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

## 2.1. The Traumatic Legacy of ACEs

Research consistently confirms that exposure to ACEs leads to long-term neurobiological and psychological deregulation, impacting executive function, emotional regulation, and attachment styles. These impairments directly affect adult capabilities necessary for career success, such as sustained focus, teamwork, and dealing with workplace stress. Studies by Felitti et al. (1998) established the foundational link between high ACE scores and diminished socio-economic opportunity, suggesting a vocational cost to early trauma. Subsequent work has connected ACEs to lower educational attainment, unemployment, and chronic financial instability, all of which directly preclude high career satisfaction.

## 2.2. Resilience as a Protective Factor

Resilience is defined as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress. The **Transactional Model of Stress and Coping** (Lazarus & Folkman) provides a framework for understanding how individuals appraise and respond to stressors. In the context

of ACEs, high personal resilience—whether innate or acquired—functions as a protective factor. It minimizes the psychological and emotional dysregulation caused by trauma, allowing the individual to maintain goal orientation, adaptability, and positive self-esteem necessary for pursuing and achieving career milestones despite a history of adversity. Research utilizing the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) has shown that resilience is strongly associated with positive mental health outcomes and successful adaptation in adulthood.

### 2.3. Career Development and Vocational Outcomes

**Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory** is highly relevant, as it emphasizes that career choice and success are an expression of self-concept developed over a lifetime. The stability and security needed for successful career exploration and establishment (Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Disengagement stages) can be severely compromised by the instability and threat inherent in ACEs. Trauma-affected individuals may struggle with the psychosocial tasks of forming a stable identity and developing interpersonal trust, which are prerequisite skills for workplace collaboration and leadership. This study aims to extend this theory by empirically demonstrating how early-life disruption (ACEs) moderates vocational achievement through the lens of psychological resilience.

## Chapter III – Objective and Methodology

### 3.1. Problem Statement

While the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and negative health and social outcomes is clear, there is a critical need for psychological research to specifically map the pathway from early trauma to adult **Career Satisfaction and Growth**. Many studies focus on clinical endpoints, neglecting functional, vocational outcomes. Furthermore, few studies adequately account for the influence of psychological protective factors. This research addresses the problem of understanding *why* some ACE survivors achieve satisfactory professional lives while others struggle, by statistically isolating the role of individual Resilience.

### 3.2. Specific Research Objectives

The study aimed to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To determine the strength and direction of the correlation between the severity of ACEs and adult Career Satisfaction.
2. To analyse the **moderating role** of Resilience in the relationship between ACEs and Career Satisfaction.
3. To examine the influence of key demographic factors (Gender, Age, Educational Qualification) on ACE scores, Career Satisfaction, and Resilience levels.

### 3.3. Research Hypotheses

- **H1:** There will be a significant **negative relationship** between the severity of Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adult Career Satisfaction.
- **H2: Resilience** will significantly **moderate** the relationship between ACEs and Career Satisfaction, such that the negative relationship will be weaker for individuals with higher Resilience scores.
- **H3:** There will be significant demographic differences (Gender, Age, Education) in the scores of ACEs, Career Satisfaction, and Resilience.

### 3.4. Significance of the Study

#### Academic Significance

This study provides empirical evidence to validate the theoretical intersection of trauma psychology, resilience theory, and vocational development. By confirming the moderating effect of resilience, it refines models of long-term trauma recovery and provides a nuanced view beyond a simple deficit model.

#### Practical Significance

The findings are critical for organizational psychology, human resources, and clinical practice:

- **Workplace Policy:** Informs the need for **trauma-informed workplaces** and targeted Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).
- **Intervention:** Supports the development of resilience-building and coping-focused interventions for adults with histories of childhood trauma to improve functional professional outcomes.

## Chapter VI - Methodology

### 4.1. Research Design

The study utilized a **Quantitative, Correlational Research Design**. This design was chosen to systematically investigate the strength and direction of the statistical relationships between the three measured variables—ACEs (Independent Variable), Career Satisfaction (Dependent Variable), and Resilience (Moderating Variable)—within the existing adult working population without intervention or manipulation.

### 4.2. Sample and Participants

The target population for the study was the general working adult population.

- **Inclusion Criteria:** Participants were required to be 18 years of age or older and currently employed or actively engaged in a vocational career.
- **Sampling Technique:** Convenience sampling (non-probability) was employed due to the reliance on online survey distribution.
- **Sample Size:** N=100

### 4.3. Data Collection Procedure

1. **Ethical Clearance and Informed Consent:** The research protocol received ethical approval from the institutional review board. Before participation, all subjects were presented with a digital informed consent form detailing the study's purpose, voluntary nature, the right to withdraw, and the strict confidentiality of their responses. Given the sensitive nature of the ACE questionnaire, explicit consent was mandatory.
2. **Online Administration:** Data was collected via a secure, standardized online survey platform to ensure anonymity and wide geographical reach.
3. **Survey Sequence:** The questionnaire was administered in the following order to minimize potential order effects: Demographics, followed by the ACE Questionnaire (measuring the independent variable), the Career Satisfaction Scale (measuring the dependent variable), and finally the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (measuring the moderator).



#### 4.4. Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive and potentially distressing nature of questions related to childhood trauma, significant ethical considerations were implemented:

- **Anonymity:** No personally identifiable information (PII) was collected.
- **Confidentiality:** Data was stored and analyzed in aggregated, anonymized form.
- **Resources:** Participants who indicated distress or high ACE scores were provided with contact information for national and local mental health resources and crisis hotlines at the conclusion of the survey.

#### 4.5. Variables

Variable	Type	Definition	Measurement Tool
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	Independent	Cumulative exposure to 10 types of childhood trauma (abuse, neglect, dysfunction).	ACE Questionnaire
Career Satisfaction	Dependent	Subjective evaluation of success, progress toward goals (income, advancement, skills development).	Career Satisfaction Scale
Resilience	Moderator	The capacity to adapt well in the face of adversity and 'bounce back' from hardship.	Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-2)

#### 4.6. Data Analysis

The collected data was coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis proceeded in three primary phases:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** Calculation of means, standard deviations, and frequencies for all demographic and scale variables to characterize the sample.
2. **Hypothesis (Demographics):**
  - **Independent Samples t-tests** were used to compare the means of the scale scores across the two Gender groups (Male/Female) and the two Educational Qualification groups (UG/PG).
  - **One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)** was used to compare the means of the scale scores across the multiple Age groups.
3. **Hypothesis and (Core Relationship and Moderation):**

- **Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation ()** was used to test (the direct relationship between ACEs and Career Satisfaction).
- **Multiple Regression Analysis (Specifically Moderation Analysis)** was employed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2018) to test . This statistical technique assesses whether the relationship between the independent variable (ACEs) and the dependent variable (Career Satisfaction) is significantly altered by the third variable (Resilience).

## Chapter V: Scales and Instrumentation

The study utilized three validated instruments to measure the core variables, all administered in English.

### 5.1. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Questionnaire

- **Construct Measured:** Cumulative exposure to 10 specific categories of childhood trauma or household dysfunction.
- **Format:** 10 self-report, dichotomous (Yes/No) items.
- **Scoring:** The total ACE Score is the sum of "Yes" responses, ranging from 0 to 10. Higher scores indicate a greater dose of childhood adversity.
- **Sample Items:**
  1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?
  2. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
  3. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
  4. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
  5. Did a household member go to prison?

### 5.2. Career Satisfaction Scale (Greenhaus et al., 1990)

- **Construct Measured:** Subjective evaluation of satisfaction with one's career trajectory, success, and goal achievement.
- **Format:** 5 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale.
- **Response Scale:** to .
- **Scoring:** The overall score is typically the average of the 5 items. Higher scores indicate greater career satisfaction.
- **Sample Items:**
  1. I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.
  2. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.
  3. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills.

### 5.3. Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-2)

- **Construct Measured:** The ability to cope with stress, adapt to change, and "bounce back" after illness or hardship. This is a highly concise, validated short form of the original CD-RISC.
- **Format:** 2 items rated on a 5-point frequency scale.
- **Response Scale:** to .
- **Scoring:** Total score is the sum of the two items (range 0–8). Higher scores indicate greater resilience.
- **Sample Items:**
  1. I am able to adapt to change.
  2. I tend to bounce back after illness or hardship.

## Chapter VI: Results

### 6.1. Key Findings on Demographic Differences ()

The analysis revealed statistically significant differences in all measured variables based on demographic groups:

- **Gender Differences:**
  - Independent samples t-tests showed a significant difference ( $t > 2.08$ ) in mean scores for **ACEs, Career Satisfaction, and Overall Score**.
  - **Observation:** Females reported significantly **higher mean scores** for ACEs, Career Satisfaction, and Overall Score compared to males. No significant difference was found for Resilience. This finding partially accepted H3.
- **Age Differences:**
  - One-Way ANOVA showed a significant impact ( $f > 3.03$ ) across all dimensions (**ACEs, Career Satisfaction, Resilience, and Overall Score**).
  - **Observation:** The subjects in the **above 50 years** age category consistently showed the highest mean scores across all four dimensions. H3 was accepted for Age.
- **Educational Differences:**
  - Independent samples t-tests showed a significant impact ( $t > 1.98$ ) across all dimensions.
  - **Observation:** The **Undergraduate (UG)** group had higher mean scores across all dimensions compared to the Postgraduate (PG) group. H3 was accepted for Education.

### 6.2. Core Relationship Findings (H1, H2)

- **Relationship between ACEs and Career Satisfaction (H1):** A significant negative correlation was found between the cumulative ACE Score and Career Satisfaction.
  - *Interpretation:* As exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences increases, reported Career Satisfaction in adulthood tends to decrease, confirming the hypothesized negative pathway.
- **Moderating Role of Resilience (H2):** The regression analysis demonstrated that Resilience significantly moderated the relationship between ACEs and Career Satisfaction.



- **Interpretation:** For individuals scoring high on the CD-RISC-2, the negative impact of high ACE scores on their Career Satisfaction was significantly reduced. Resilience acts as a powerful protective buffer, weakening the otherwise detrimental link between early trauma and vocational well-being.

## Chapter VII: Discussion and Conclusion

### 7.1. Discussion of Findings

The results largely confirm the theoretical framework. The direct negative correlation between ACEs and Career Satisfaction is consistent with the Life-Span Theory, showing how instability in the life-space disrupts vocational development. The confirmation of the **moderating effect of Resilience** is the most significant contribution, providing empirical support for Masten's and Rutter's resilience models in a vocational context. Resilience is clearly the key factor determining functional adult outcomes for trauma survivors.

However, the demographic findings introduce complexity. The observation that the **above 50 years** and **Undergraduate** groups scored highest on **ACEs, Career Satisfaction, AND Resilience** is counter-intuitive.

- **Interpretation:** The high ACE scores in these groups suggest greater exposure or higher recall of trauma. The simultaneous high scores on Career Satisfaction and Resilience, however, suggest that these groups, having navigated decades of life (Age 50+) or having overcome systemic barriers (UG status), may possess **exceptionally strong coping mechanisms**. Their high reported satisfaction may reflect a sense of achievement earned *despite* their histories, validating their high resilience scores. This demonstrates a transition from a deficit model (ACEs) to a strength-based model (Resilience).

### 7.2. Summary and Conclusion

The study successfully established that Adverse Childhood Experiences significantly predict lower adult Career Satisfaction, but this relationship is substantially mitigated by individual levels of Resilience. The research highlights the critical importance of resilience as a psychological factor that determines long-term functional success following early trauma. Furthermore, demographic variables were shown to significantly influence the distribution of ACEs and the corresponding adult outcomes.

### 7.3. Future Scope

Future research should focus on:

1. **Qualitative Investigation:** Conducting in-depth interviews with high-ACE, high-satisfaction individuals (particularly in the older and UG groups) to understand the specific coping strategies and meaning-making processes that underpin their resilience.
2. **Longitudinal Design:** Employing a longitudinal study to track changes in resilience and career satisfaction over time among ACE survivors.

3. **Specific Resilience Factors:** Examining sub-factors of resilience (e.g., self-efficacy, secure attachment, social support) to pinpoint the most effective protective mechanisms.

## Chapter VIII: References (APA Style - Abbreviated)

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**Note:** This list includes core theoretical and instrument sources mentioned or implied by the document's structure.