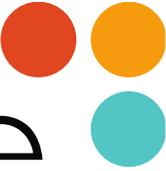


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# The Power of Relationships

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# Learning Objectives

- As a result of this training, participants will be able to:
  - Understand the significance of relationships in experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences
  - Understand the impact of relationships on young children's development as well as their mental and physical health
  - Describe how relationships can act as a protective factor for young children

# Significance of Relationships

- Relationships are a fundamental aspect of human development and a protective factor in resilience (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; National Council on the Developing Child, 2009).
- Very young children are immensely vulnerable because they are completely dependent upon adults for their very survival and their development is in a particularly sensitive state (Marini, et al, 2020).



# Relationships and Development

- Very young children's developmental status makes them particularly vulnerable to adverse childhood experiences.
  - “The same miraculous plasticity that allows young brains to quickly learn love and language, unfortunately, also makes them highly susceptible to negative experiences as well” (Perry, 2006).
- The structure and function of the developing brain is dependent upon connection with caregivers (Center for the Developing Child, 2012; Kolb & Gibb, 2011).



# Relationships and Development (cont'd.)

- Relationships are essential for development, for well-being and for resilience (Bronfenbrenner, 1991; Perry, 2005).
- Attachment relationships (the close and loving relationship to a trusted caregiver) are significant to children's social and emotional development (Ainsworth, 1964; Ainsworth, Bleher, Waters & Wall, 1978; Fraiberg, 1977; Perry, 2006; George, C, 2014).
- This attachment relationship is also fundamental to the child's development of self-regulation, which is involved in a number of life skills like toilet training, taking turns, impulse control, and appropriate expression of strong emotions (Hornstein, 2014).

# Supportive Relationships Buffer Toxic Stress

## Neurologic and HPA Axis

- Improved cortisol reactivity

## ANS and Cardiovascular Reactivity

- Lowered blood pressure
- Lowered catecholamines

## Oxytocin

- Oxytocin receptors on the amygdala allow oxytocin to inhibit ANS and HPA response

## Immune Function

- Decreased inflammation
- Protects against the common cold
- Decreased asthma symptoms

# Pediatric Interventions that Improve Social Relationships can Improve Stress Hormones and Health

## Slopen 2014

- Interventions designed to improve social relationships, environments or psychosocial functioning in children associated with improved cortisol activity.

## Marie-Mitchell 2018

- Multicomponent interventions including parenting education, mental health support, and social service referrals were associated with improvements in parent–child relationship and behavioral and mental health problems.

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## Purewal Boparai 2018

- Three key intervention elements – a focus on strong parenting skills, earlier intervention placement, and greater intervention engagement – improved or even normalized stress hormone profiles and decreased the impact of toxic stress on brain development and epigenetic regulation.

# Relationships and Development (cont'd.)



- Responsive, consistent, loving care is essential for healthy brain development.

Harvard Center on the Developing Child. (2019). *5 Steps for Brain-Building Serve and Return*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/>.

# Evidence-Based Strategies for Toxic Stress Mitigation



Sources: Bhushan D, et al. The Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health. Office of the California Surgeon General, 2020 DOI:10.48019/PEAM8812; Gilgoff et al. Adverse Childhood Experiences, Outcomes, and Interventions. *Pediatric Clinics* 2020; **67**(2): 259-73.

# Caregiver health is child health

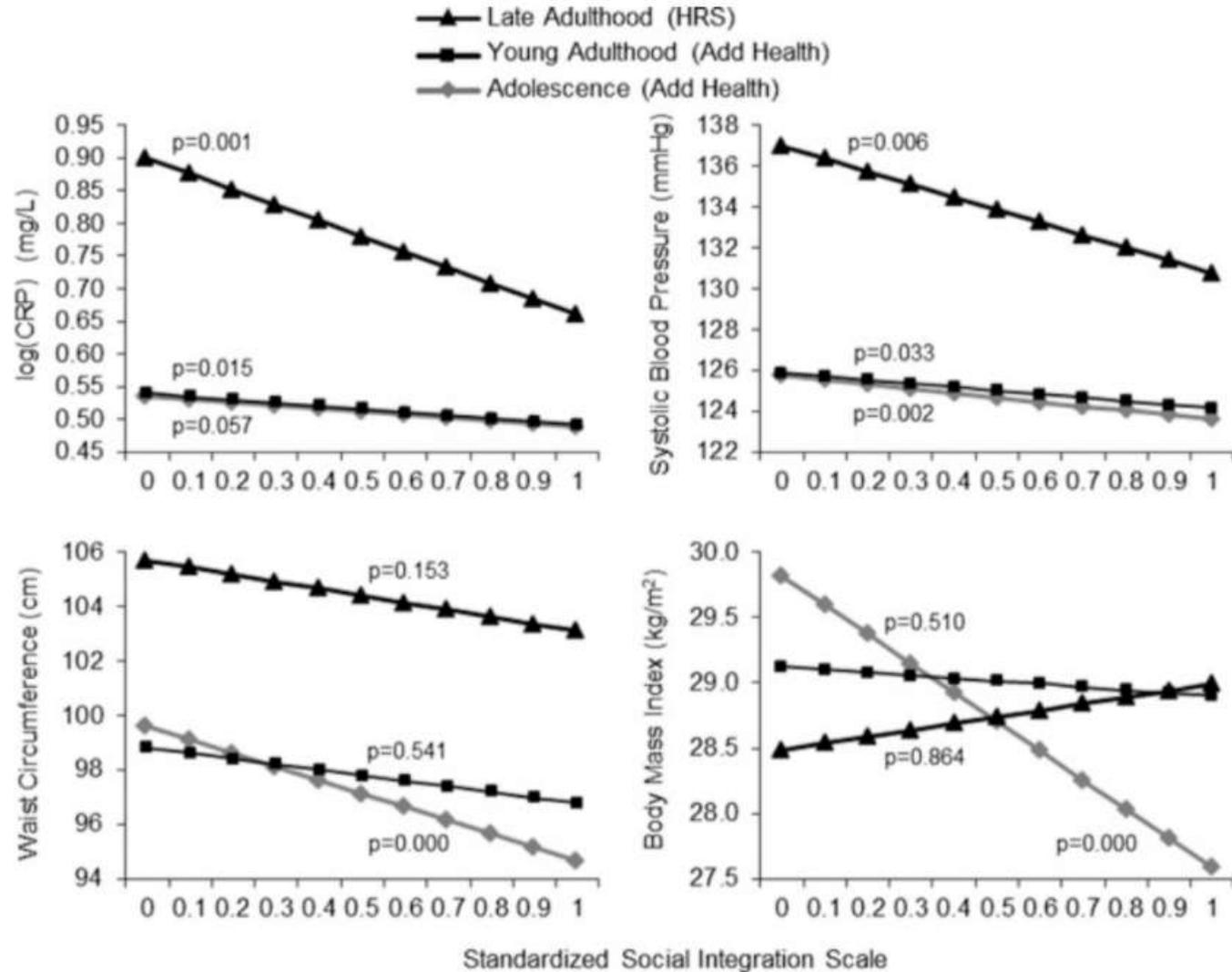
- Since very young children cannot survive without caregivers, their well-being is inextricably connected with caregivers' well-being. "Caregiver health is child health." (Harvard Center for the Developing Child, 2020).
- The CDC's recommendations for preventing ACEs include supporting parents with family friendly workplace policies and by promoting household financial security as well as teaching skills like parenting education and family relationship approaches.

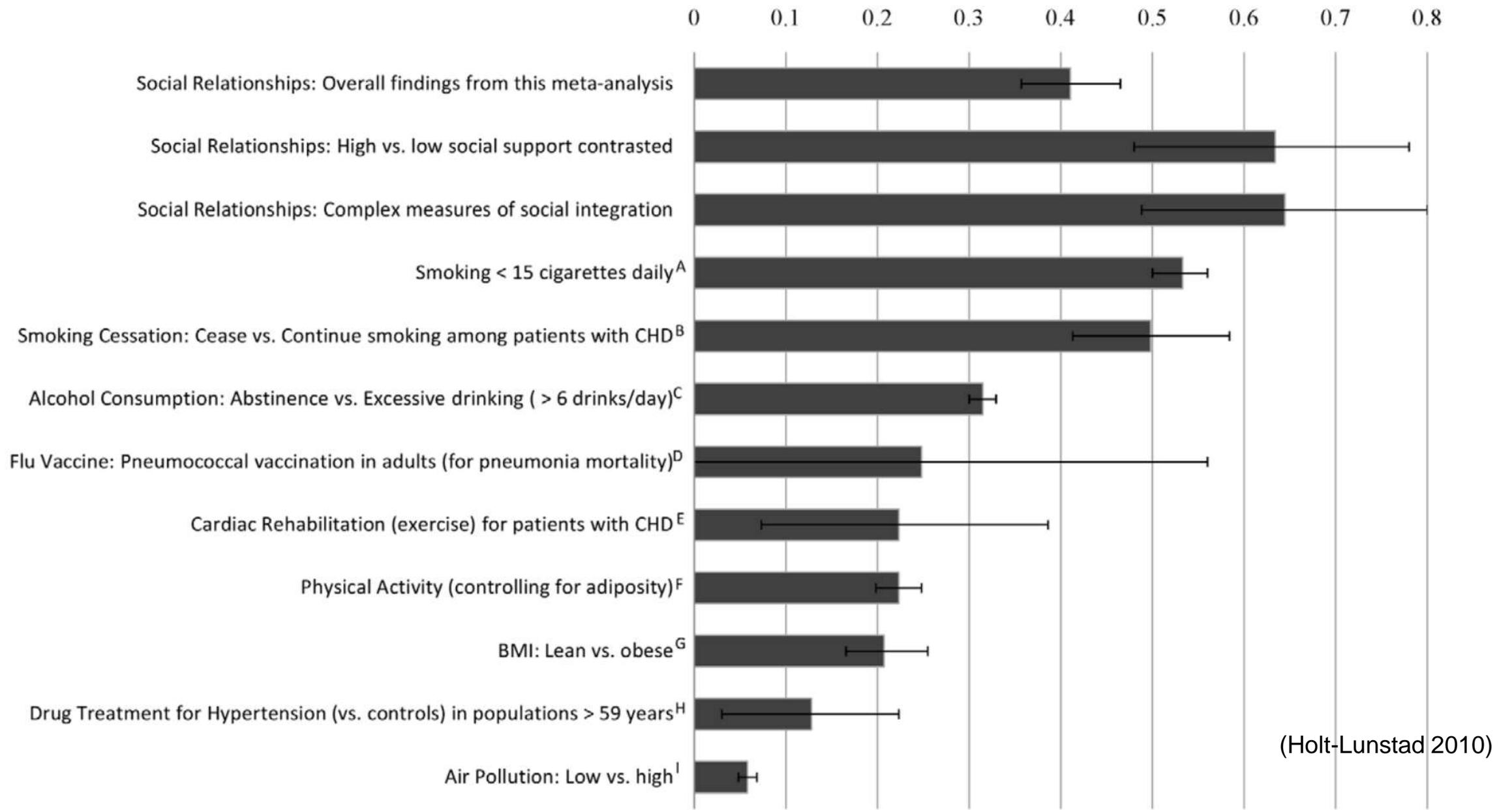


Social integration (parent contact, friend count, religious attendance and activities participation) is associated in a dose-dependent manner for adolescents and late adults with:

- Lower CRP
- Lower systolic blood pressure
- Lower Waist Circumference
- Lower BMI

(Yang 2016)





(Holt-Lunstad 2010)

**Figure 6. Comparison of odds (lnOR) of decreased mortality across several conditions associated with mortality.** Note: Effect size of

# Community resources can also support caregiver well-being

- Resources that offer support to caregivers, such as parent support groups, parent education, respite care, etc. can benefit parents/caregivers as well as children.
  - First Five Humboldt's play groups, Changing Tides parent support, and The Nurse Family Partnership are a few examples of such resources.



# Summary

- Children's development, physical health and well-being are largely dependent on the relationship with their caregivers.
- The well-being of caregivers is inextricably connected to the well-being of children. A healthy relationship with a caregiver can serve as a protective factor when toxic stress is experienced.
- Support for caregivers' well-being promotes the well-being of young children.

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