

Drug Endangered Children: New Research Findings to Enhance Community Response



Deirdre Colburn and Kimberly Mitchell
March 13, 2026
Strafford County Addiction Summit
Rochester, NH

1

About Us



Deirdre Colburn, PhD
Research Scientist



Kimberly J. Mitchell, PhD
Research Professor



2

About Us

- **Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC)** at the University of New Hampshire, originally founded in 1998 to study child victimization
- Has since expanded to include research on topics such as self-directed violence and bystander behavior, commercial sexual exploitation of children, hate crimes, gun violence, substance use/exposure, help-seeking, technology
- Conduct several large national studies including *National Juvenile Online Victimization Study (N-JOV)*, *National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV)*, *Youth Internet Safety Survey*, *Project Lift Up*
- Funders include National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Justice, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



3

GrowingOp: Growing Up with Opioids Study

- Online survey of adults ages 18-60 recruited through ads on FB and IG
- Data collected between March 24, 2025 – July 23, 2025
- Across the US
- Asked about experiences with victimization, adversity and whether they lived with someone who struggled with drugs or alcohol while they were growing up
 - Detailed questions about the experience for those who did



4

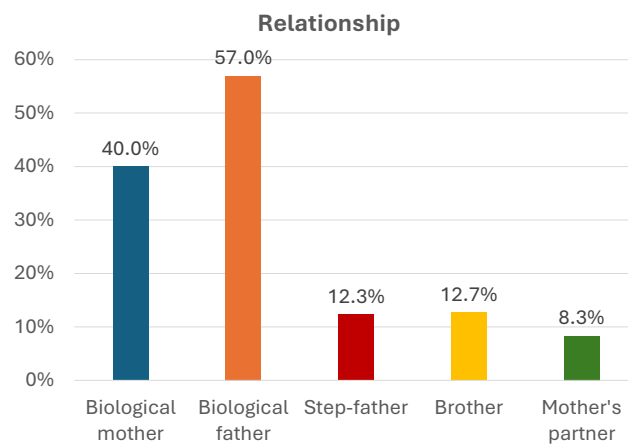
Who did we talk to?

- 1,571 respondents
- Our sample was mostly White (88.5%), cisgender women (68.1%)
- Mean age of 33
- 20% identified as gender minority, 49% sexual minority
- 30% currently live in rural area
- 32% are parents

5

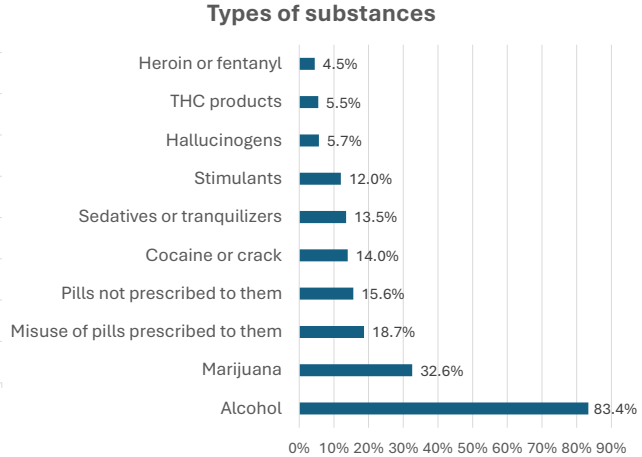
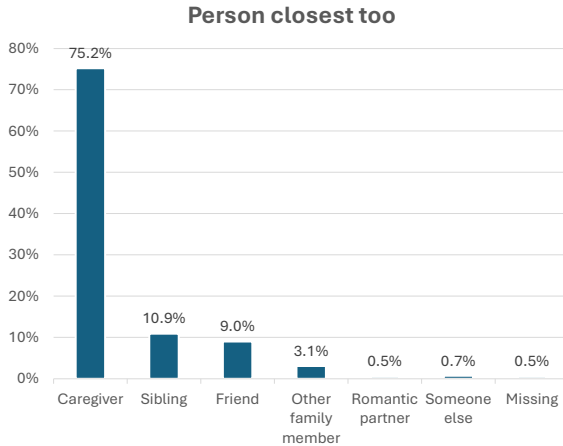
DEC

- 37% grew up living with someone who struggled with drugs or alcohol
- 55.7% lived with 1 person
- 28.6% with 2 people
- 5.4% with 3+ people



6

DEC

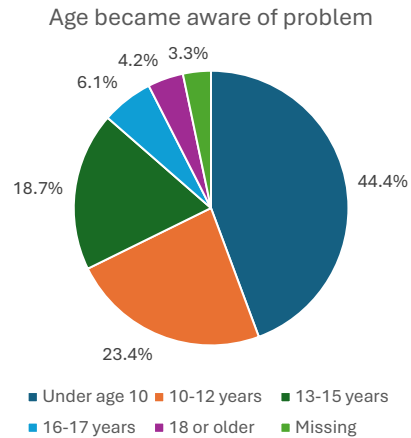


7

How became aware

How became aware:

- Witnessed the substance use
- Someone else told them about it
- Used with the person
- Abnormal non-aggressive behavior (drunk or high)
- Aggressive behavior (violence, fighting, abuse)
- Absent from home/their life
- Person was emotionally abusive / neglectful
- Financial issues
- Person overdosed
- Outside institutions involved (police, medical, rehab, school, social services)



8

How became aware

Went to rehab when i was 7 after trying to overdose in front of me on benzos and blaming me and my sister

Watching my 70yo father bawl in desperation because the prescription for oxycodone ran out four days before the pharmacy was allowed to refill it

They were a different, unhappy, snappy person in the evenings. She only spanked me once, and it was when she was drunk, and she doesn't remember it.

The SWAT team kicked down our front door and arrested my parents for drug possession and the intent to distribute.

9

How became aware

Started learning about alcohol in school and realized he was abusing it

She overdosed and died. I had no idea there was a problem.

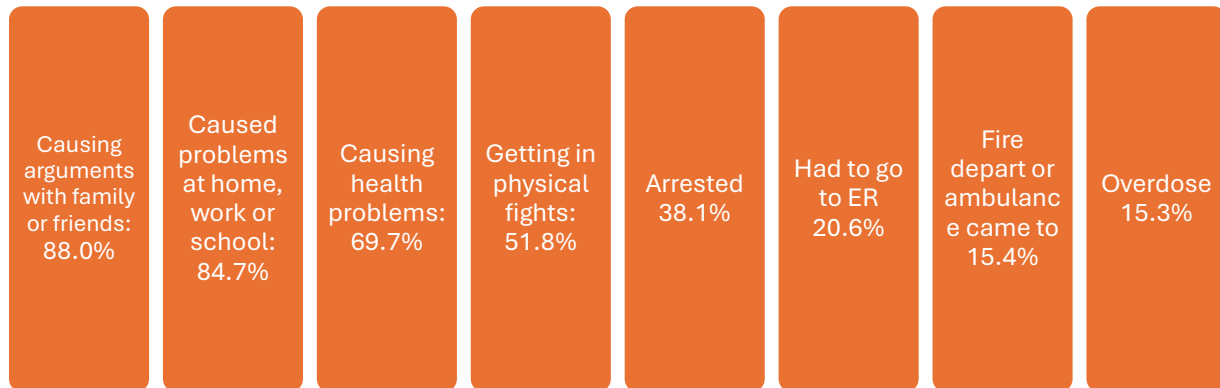
Passed out. Dirty house. No food.

Excessive fighting between my parents, getting a DUI, driving me while drunk, not going places because they didn't sell alcohol or were too far to drink and drive without getting caught.

10

Indicators of Problematic Use

Continued to use even when...



CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN RESEARCH CENTER

11

How tried to help

Attended AA meetings. Drove to appointments. Packed and unpacked for 6 different rehabs.

My mom often said she wanted to quit, and I tried to be her support person for that.

Tried to speak up and went to local counselors but I was told this doesn't happen here so I quit speaking up.

Once when I was little and I was on a camping trip with my father I poured out all of his beers.

12

How tried to help

I tried talking to her, gave her DARE pamphlets, prayed for her. As I grew older, I attended some addiction recovery groups in support of her and drove her to an inpatient detox when her alcoholism was causing seizures and extreme emotional upheavals

I told him how I felt and wrote him a letter explaining the harms he did

I tried to do things they couldn't when in that state so they wouldn't get hurt. Such as preparing meals. I didn't try to help them, but another adult spoke to them and they realized they were getting addicted.

Wasn't my idea. My mom would make me beg him to stop trying to guilt trip.. he'd agree. Never follow through. I blame my mom for putting me in that position.

13

How tried to help

I opened and poured bottles of alcohol down the kitchen drain, I was about 10 years old.

When I was older, I tried to talk to him about his problems and that he was not going to get to a better place mentally if he didn't stop. When I was younger, I tried to pour out bottles and in second grade I remember talking about my dad to my teacher and drawing the family dog on a DARE assignment about drug and alcohol issues

Called the police, had him sent to a substance abuse facility, poured out his alcohol, threw away his pills, told his doctor about him abusing prescription meds, told other adults whom i thought could help (school counselor, etc).

Call the authorities for help when he wouldn't wake up. He would always punishable me afterward.

14

How tried to help

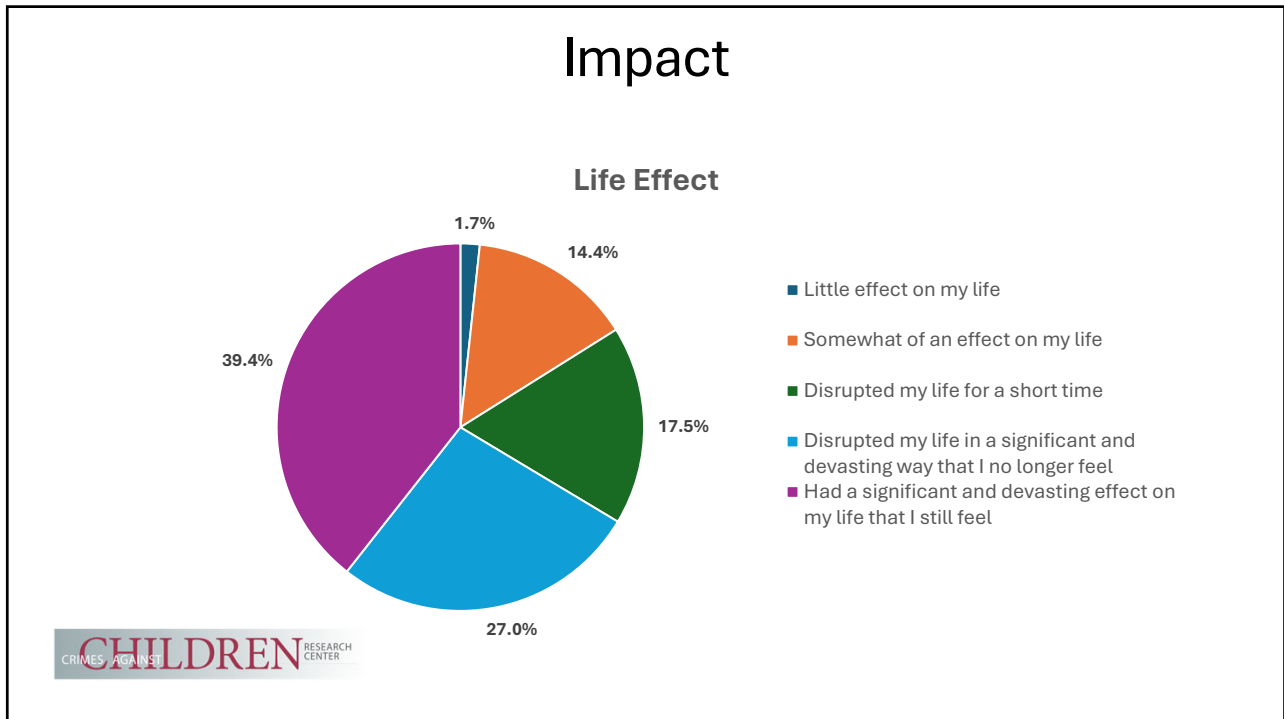
Being supportive, talking to her when she was sober, yelling, begging, trying to remove her triggers. Nothing worked.

I was 13. I asked my dad to help, but he refused. I asked my parents' pastor for help, and he refused, too. No one helped me. So from age 13 onwards, I had no help for her drinking and physical abuse.

I tried to be seen and not heard, tried to help pick up the pieces as best I could, tried to be the absolute best I could be so that my dad would be proud of me and my mom would not worry.



15



16

DEC report higher rates of abuse and neglect than those without this exposure:



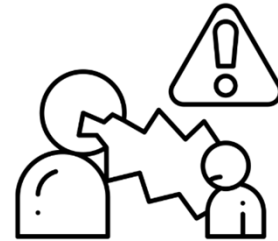
3x Emotional Abuse (90%)



2x Sexual Abuse (38%)



8x Neglect (80%)

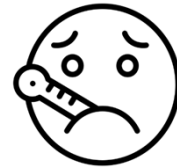


3x Physical Abuse (80%)



17

Other common childhood adversities include...



Bad illness or injury (56%)
1.4x



Caregivers always arguing (81%)
1.7x



Caregiver lost their job (45%)
1.7x



Suicide attempt by someone in the home (22%)
3.1x



18

Other experiences in their neighborhood or home...



Witnessed drug deal (45%)
1.8x



Saw an arrest (41%)
2x

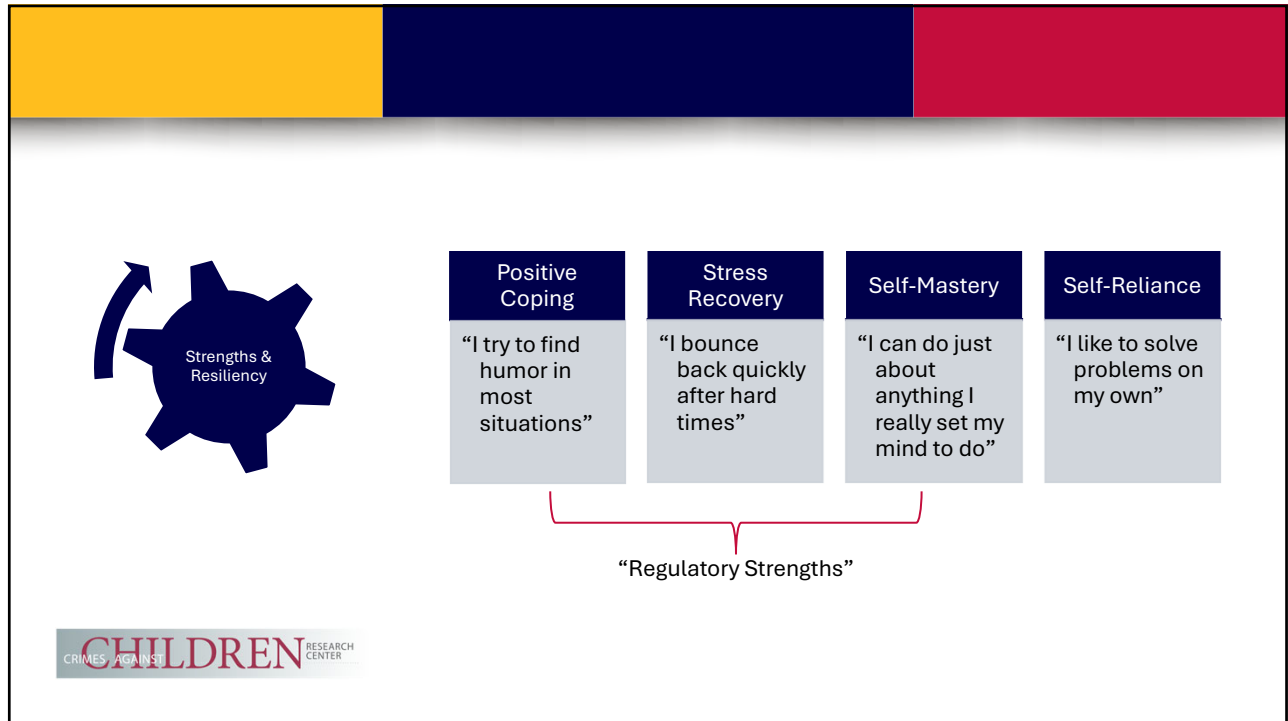


Saw police raid or
block off area (23%)
2.5x

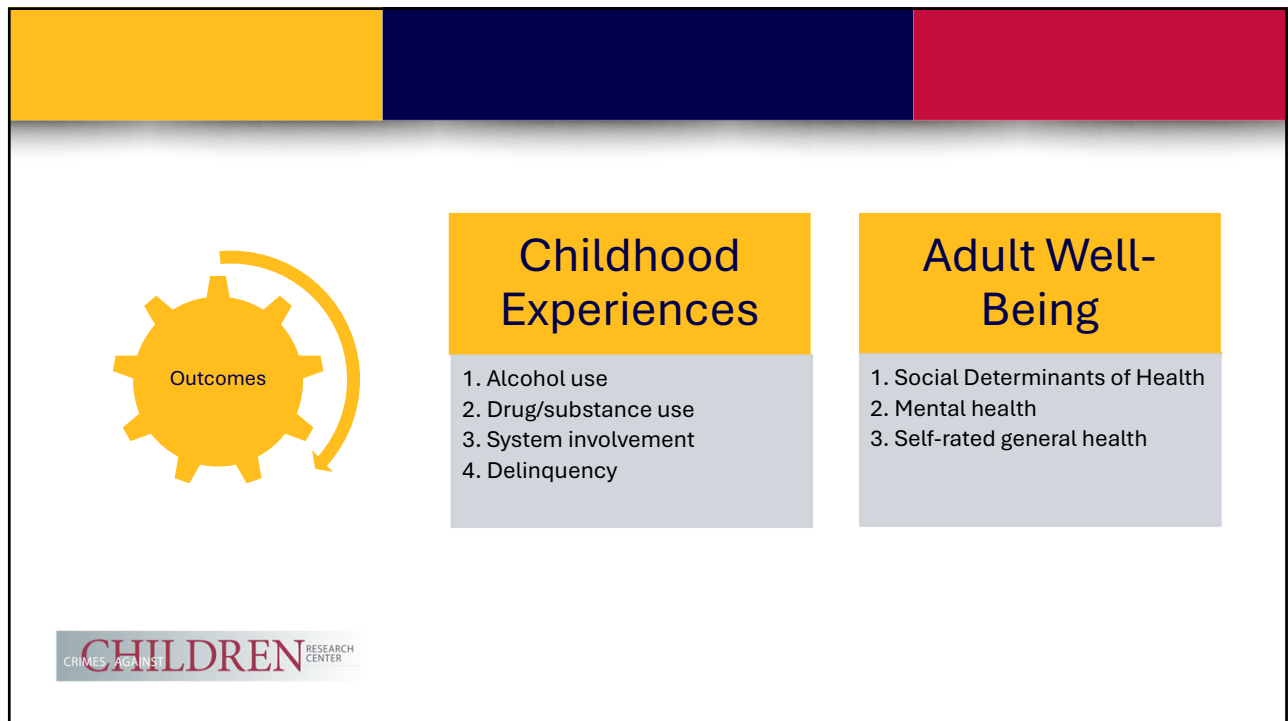


So, where is the “good” in our research?

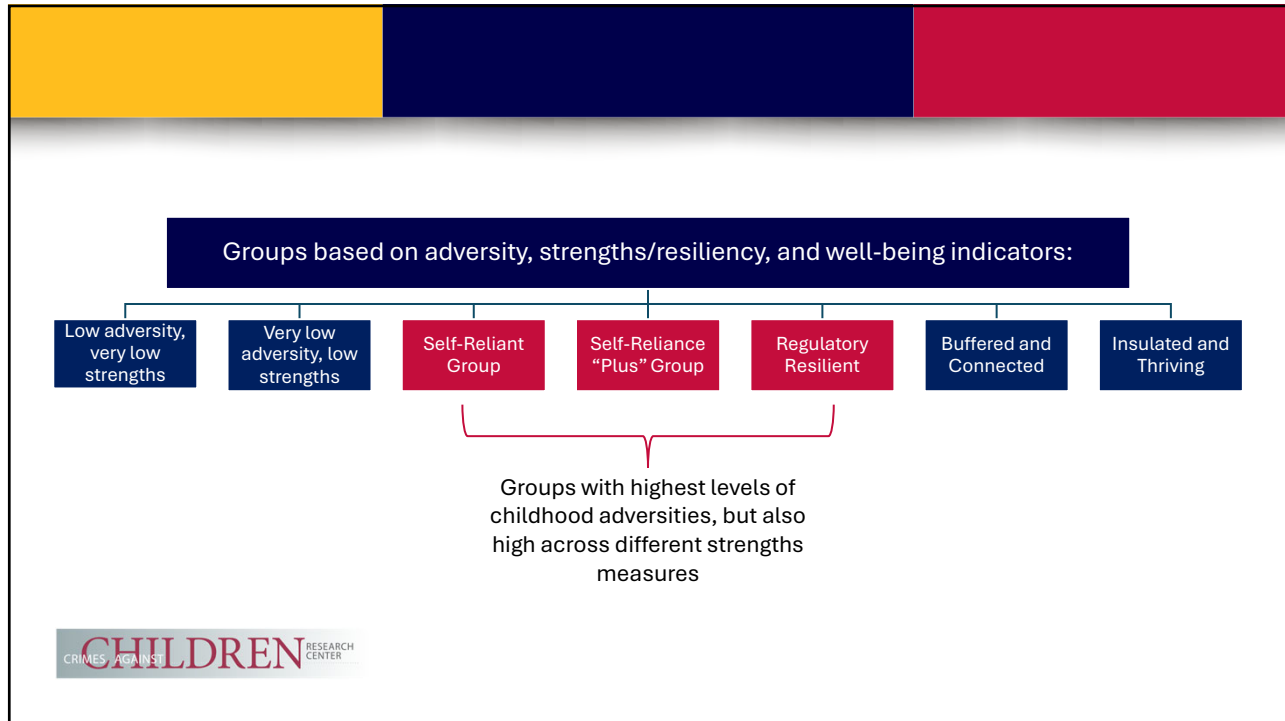
CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN RESEARCH CENTER



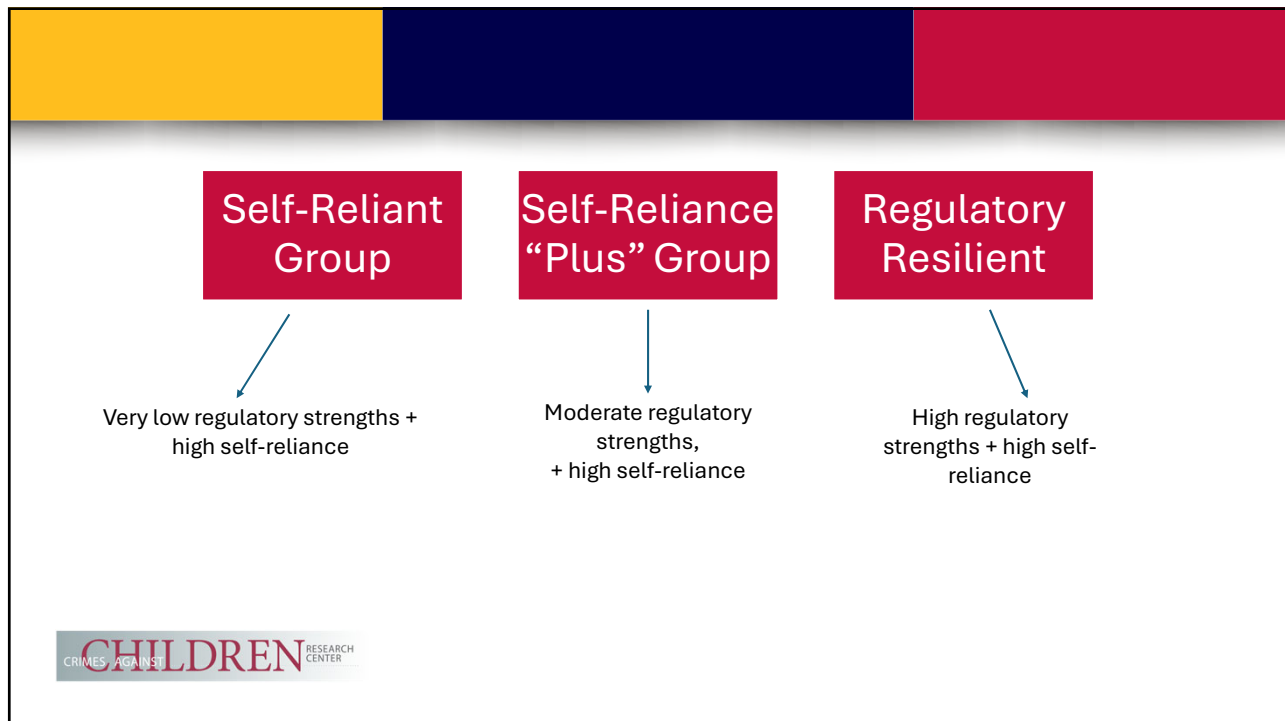
21



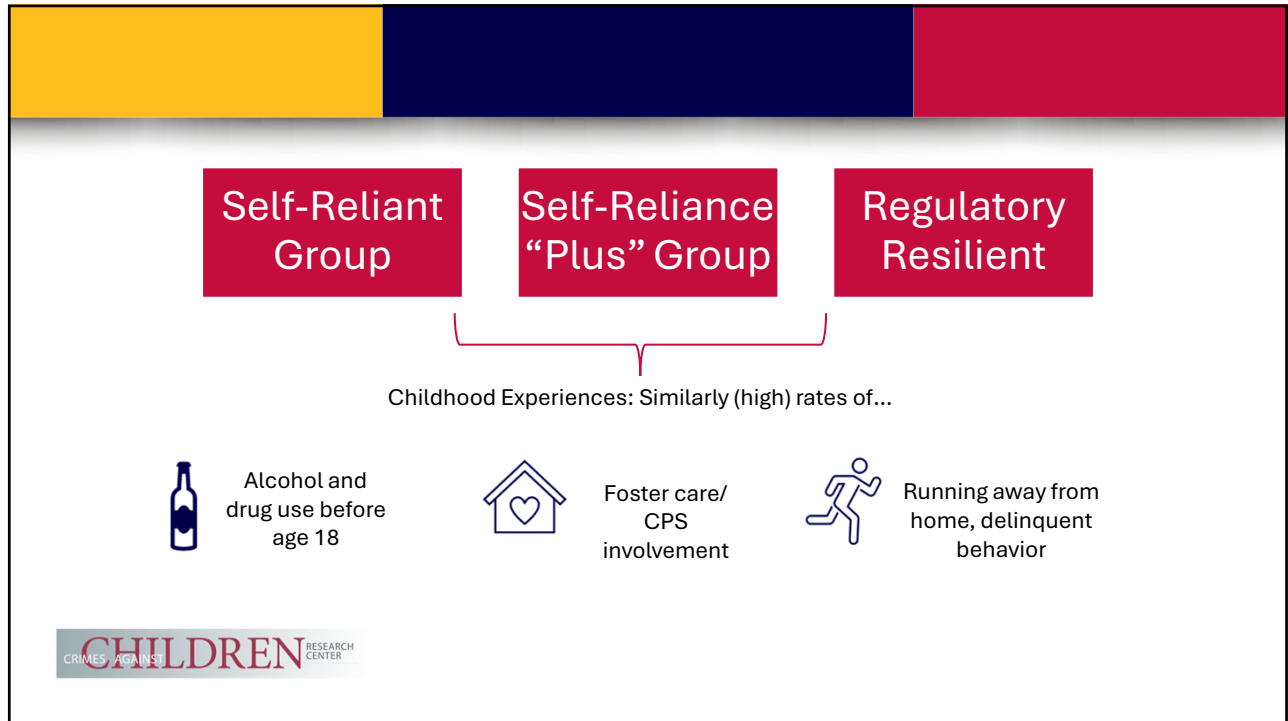
22



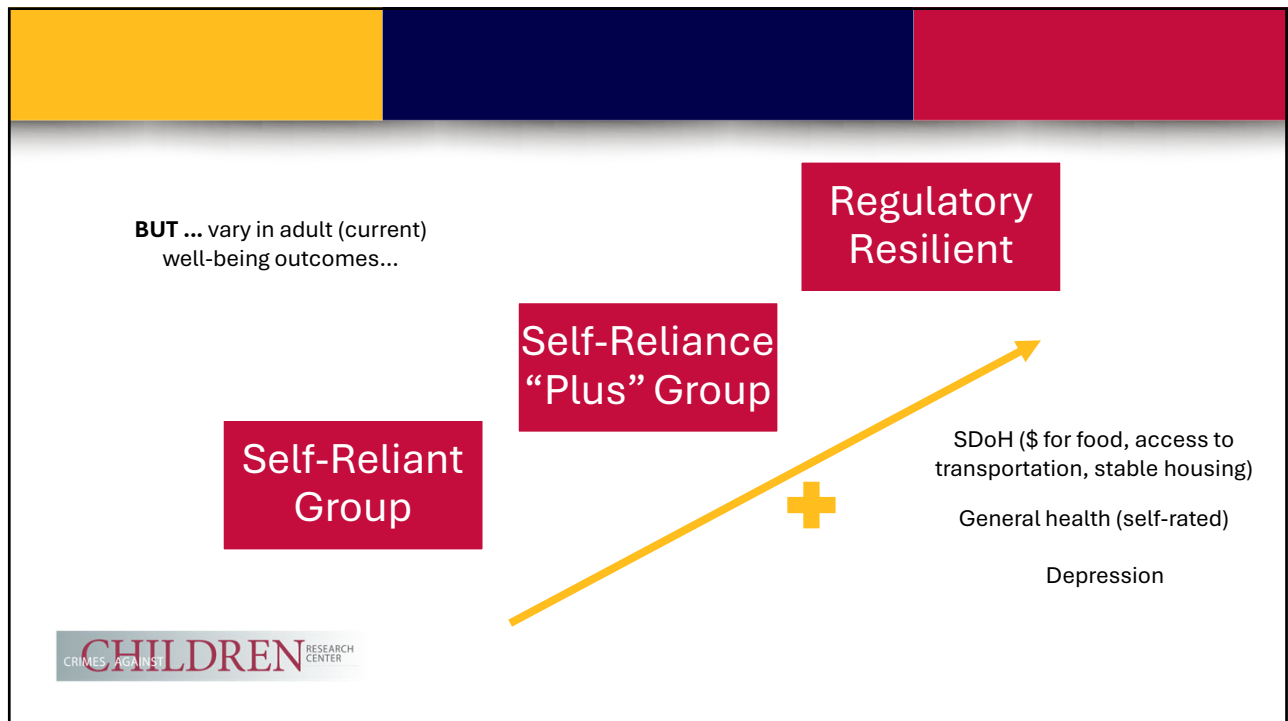
23



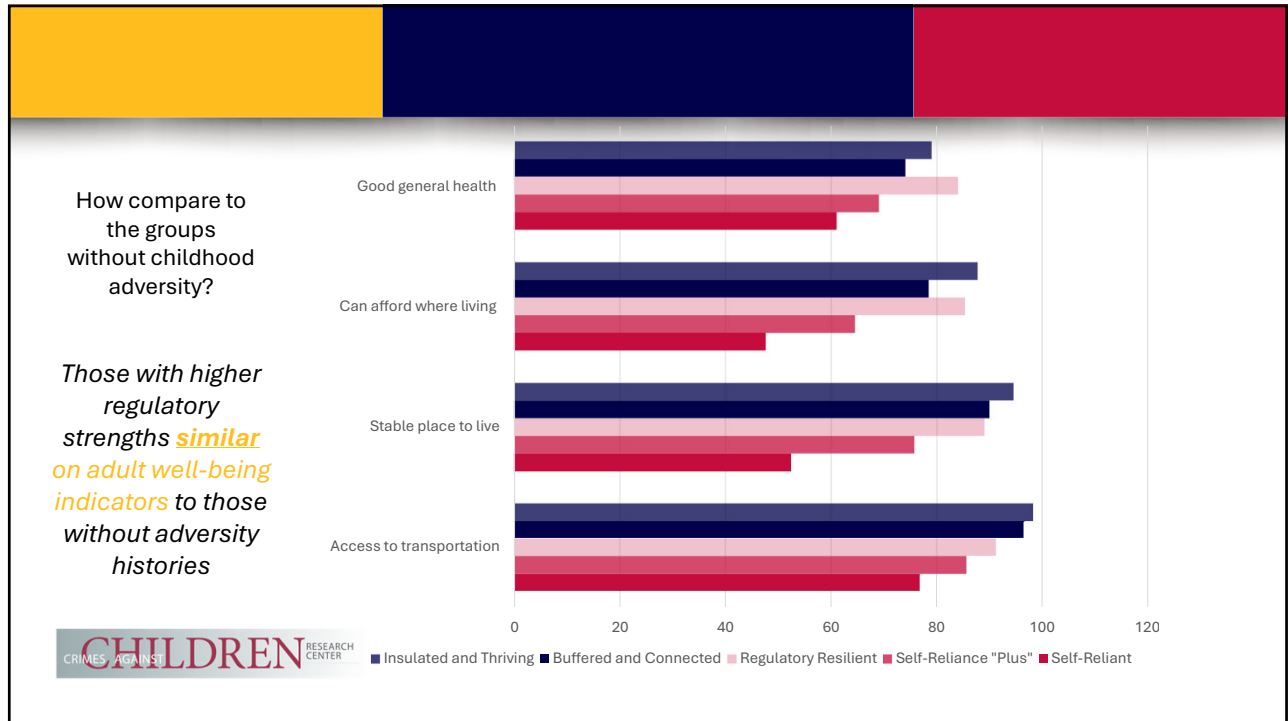
24



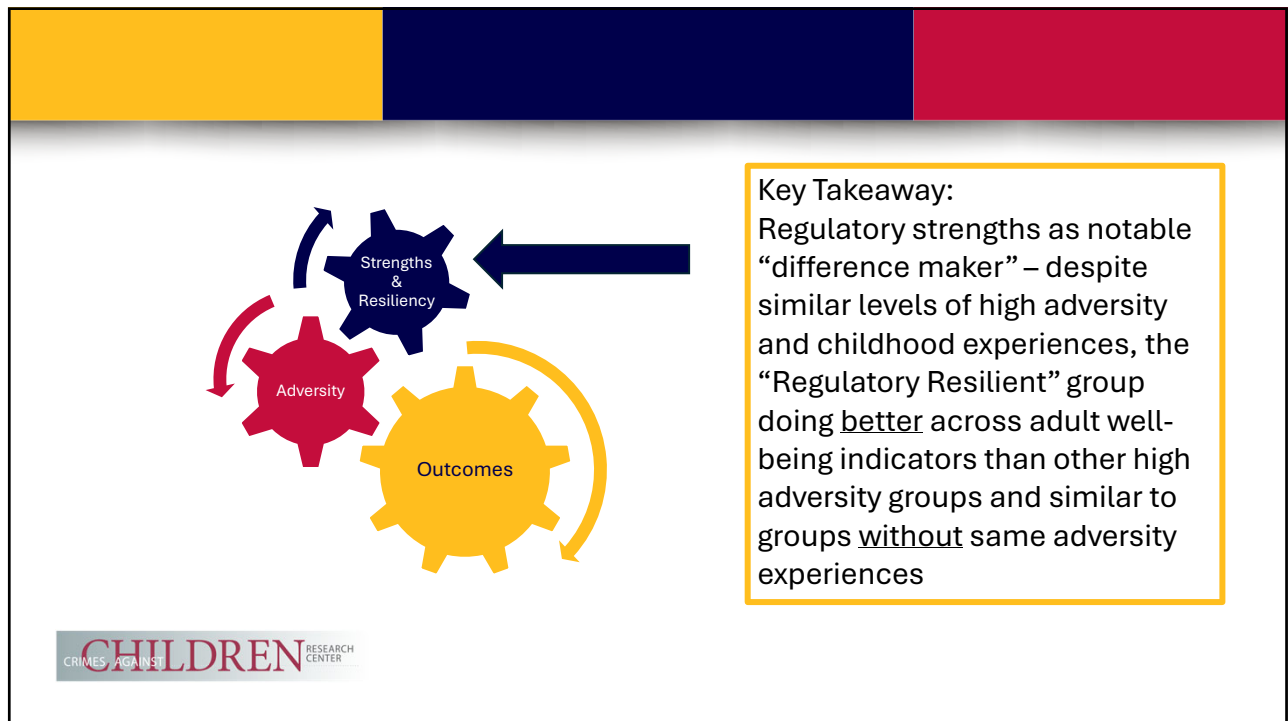
25



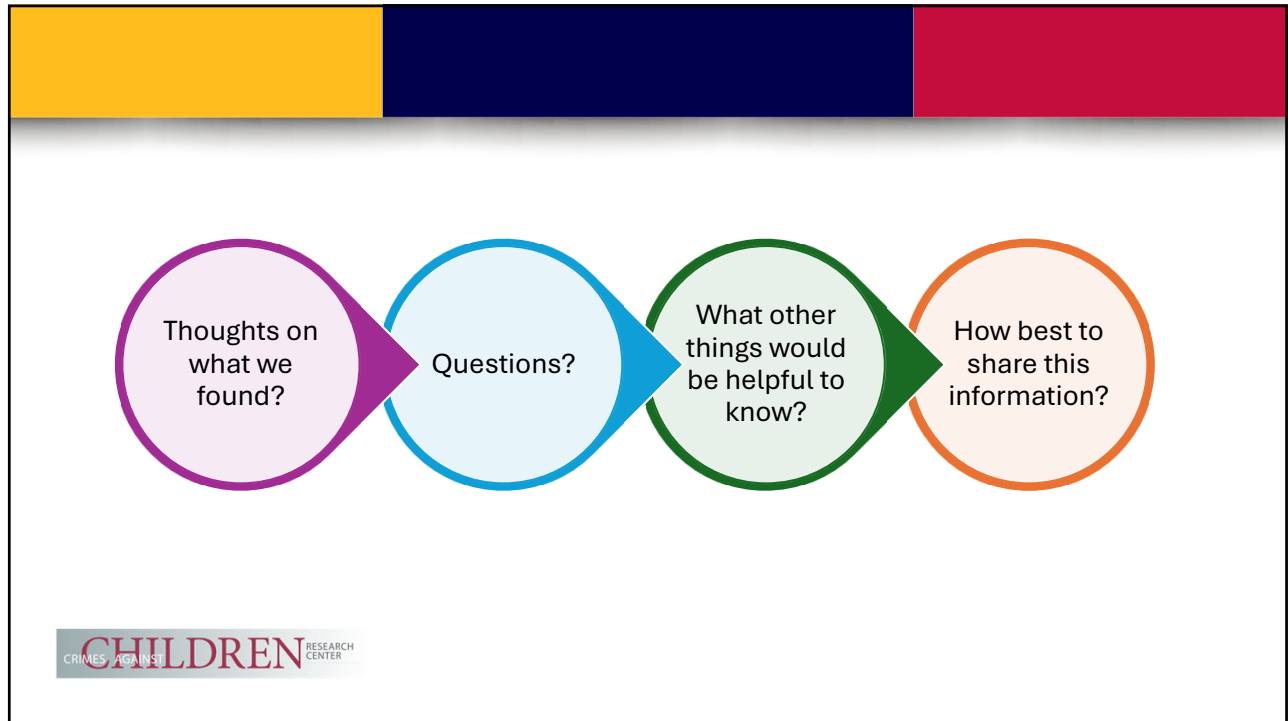
26



27



28



29

Follow our work on LinkedIn!

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/crimes-against-children-research-center>

Deirdre.Colburn@unh.edu

Kimberly.Mitchell@unh.edu

CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN RESEARCH CENTER

30