



TOTS Brief

The Oklahoma Toddler Survey

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Life Stressors Among Mothers of Two-Year-Olds

Stressful life events have the potential to impact family well-being and toddler health. Although all families experience stress, some life events may affect long-term health and family cohesion, and the cumulative effect of multiple life stressors for some families may be disruptive.¹

In 2009-2010, The Oklahoma Toddler Survey

(TOTS) asked mothers about the occurrence of 11 different life stressors. Only 32.4% reported not experiencing any of the stressors in the previous 12 months.

Among those who indicated they experienced at least one stressor (See Figure 1), 37.7% experienced the severe illness or loss of a family member and 22.3% had a lot of debt. Other

common stressors included: the husband/partner lost their job (16.8%); someone close had a drinking/drug problem (16.1%); the mother herself was very sick (15.0%); she got divorced or separated (12.2%); she lost her job (11.0%).

When combined, 45.1% of mothers experienced 1-2 stressors and 22.5% experienced three or more.

In Oklahoma:

- Two-thirds of Oklahoma mothers with two-year-olds experienced at least one stressor.
- The most commonly experienced stressor was the illness or death of a family member (37.7%).
- One in six women reported their husband/partner lost their job (16.8%) in the past year, 11.0% of mothers lost their job.
- Mothers with 3 or more stressors were significantly more likely to smoke (43.9%) compared to mothers with no stressors (16.2%).
- Married women were less likely to report multiple stressors, 11.6% reported 3 or more, compared to 54.9% of divorced/separated and 35.0% single mothers.

Figure 1: Life Stressors Among Mothers of Two-Year-Olds in Oklahoma, TOTS 2009 - 2010

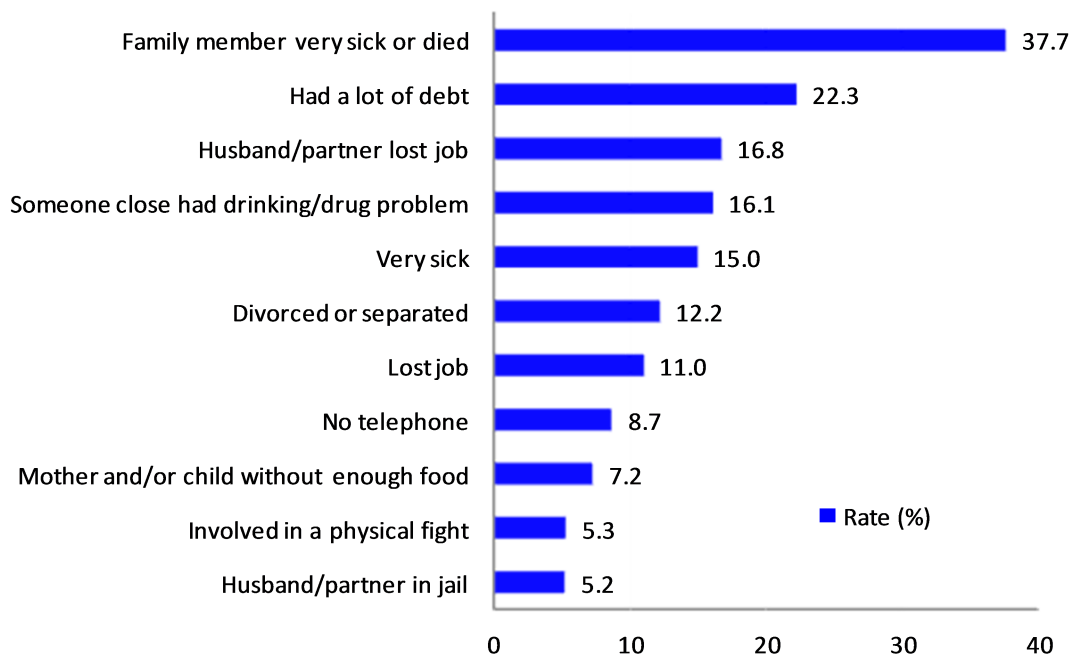


Figure 2 describes the racial disparities among the groups of mothers experiencing no stressors and those experiencing 3 or more. African American mothers accounted for only 2.8% of mothers reporting no stressors but comprised 16.1% of mothers reporting 3 or more stressors. Although white mothers comprised 82.1% of those reporting no stressors, only 67.5% of mothers reporting 3 or more stressors were white. To provide some background for the scope of the disparity, among the 2009-2010 TOTS birth cohort, 76.6% of mothers were white, 9.2% were African American, and 11.9% were American Indian.

Maternal marital status at the time of the TOTS survey also was associated with stress. Less than 12% of married mothers reported 3 or more stressors, compared to 54.9% of divorced or separated mothers and 35.0% of single women ($p < 0.001$).

Mothers 35 years and older were significantly less likely ($p < 0.001$) to experience three or more of the measured stressors (6.7%) when compared to mothers 25-34 (22.1%) and younger than 25 (29.2%).

Presence of stressors also differed by maternal education. Among mothers 18 or older, those with more than a high school education were more likely to report no stressors (36.7%) compared to those with high school (26.4%) and less than high school (21.3%) education ($p < 0.001$).

The current maternal smoking rate for women without any stressors was 16.2%. Among women with 3 or more stressors, the rate was 43.9%. Almost one-third of mothers with 1-2 stressors smoked at the time of the TOTS survey (31.8%).

Women with 3 or more stressors were more likely to have moved at least 3 times since their toddler's birth. Twenty-nine percent of mothers with 3 or more stressors moved 3 or more times, compared to 8.3% of women with 1-2 stressors and 4.3% with no reported stressors ($p < 0.001$).

Reference:

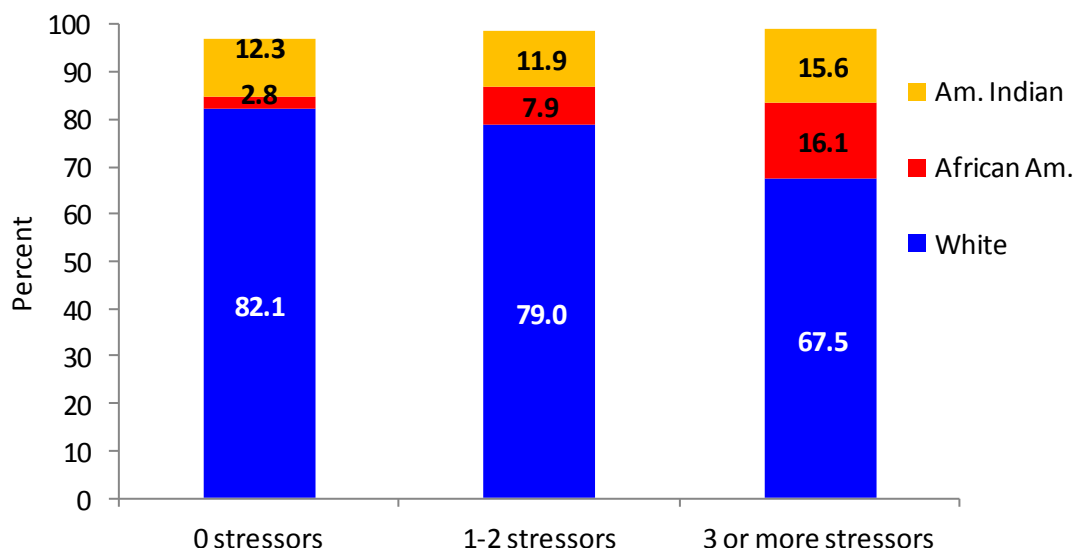
1. Avison WR, Ali J, Walters D. Family structure, stress, and psychological distress: a demonstration of the impact of differential exposure. *J Health and Social Behavior*. 2007, 48(3), 301-17.

The Oklahoma Toddler Survey (TOTS) is a two-year follow-back survey to the Oklahoma Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) survey. Mothers with live infants who respond to the PRAMS survey are sent a TOTS survey the month their children turn two-years-old. TOTS is a mixed-mode surveillance system. Two mail surveys are sent in an effort to gain participation followed by telephone surveillance for non-respondents. The unweighted response rate for 2009-2010 data was 73.8% ($n=3,739$). Data were weighted to represent the two-year-old's birth cohort for those years. Prevalence rates were calculated and the potential risk factors were identified using the Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square (χ^2) Test.

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Figure 2: Maternal Race* by Number of Life Stressors, TOTS 2009-2010



* Categories do not equal 100% due to small cell sizes for women not included in these three race groups.