

ACEs and Trust in Courts

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INTRODUCTION

Trust in the American court system is a foundational pillar of the legal system, based on the public's belief that authorities will make fair and just decisions.¹ Therefore, understanding what factors degrade the public's faith in the system is crucial. Most research on this topic examines the amount of trust placed in the police or the government.^{2, 3, 4}

However, there are no articles that investigate the relationship between trauma and trust in American courts. This is an issue because individuals who have any number of ACEs are more likely to encounter the criminal justice system, including courts.⁵

Understanding how trauma affects individuals' faith in the courts can inform judges on the need to take a trauma-informed approach. Furthermore, it may allow us to determine if the courts are perpetuating additional trauma onto people, creating a vicious cycle. Therefore, the current study proposes to examine the effects of trauma on trust in the American courts.

OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: To explore the effect of ACE scores on belief in the legitimacy of the American court system.

Objective 2: To explore the effect of ACE scores on judgments of the American court system.

Objective 3: To explore the effect of trauma symptoms on belief in the legitimacy and judgement of the American court system.

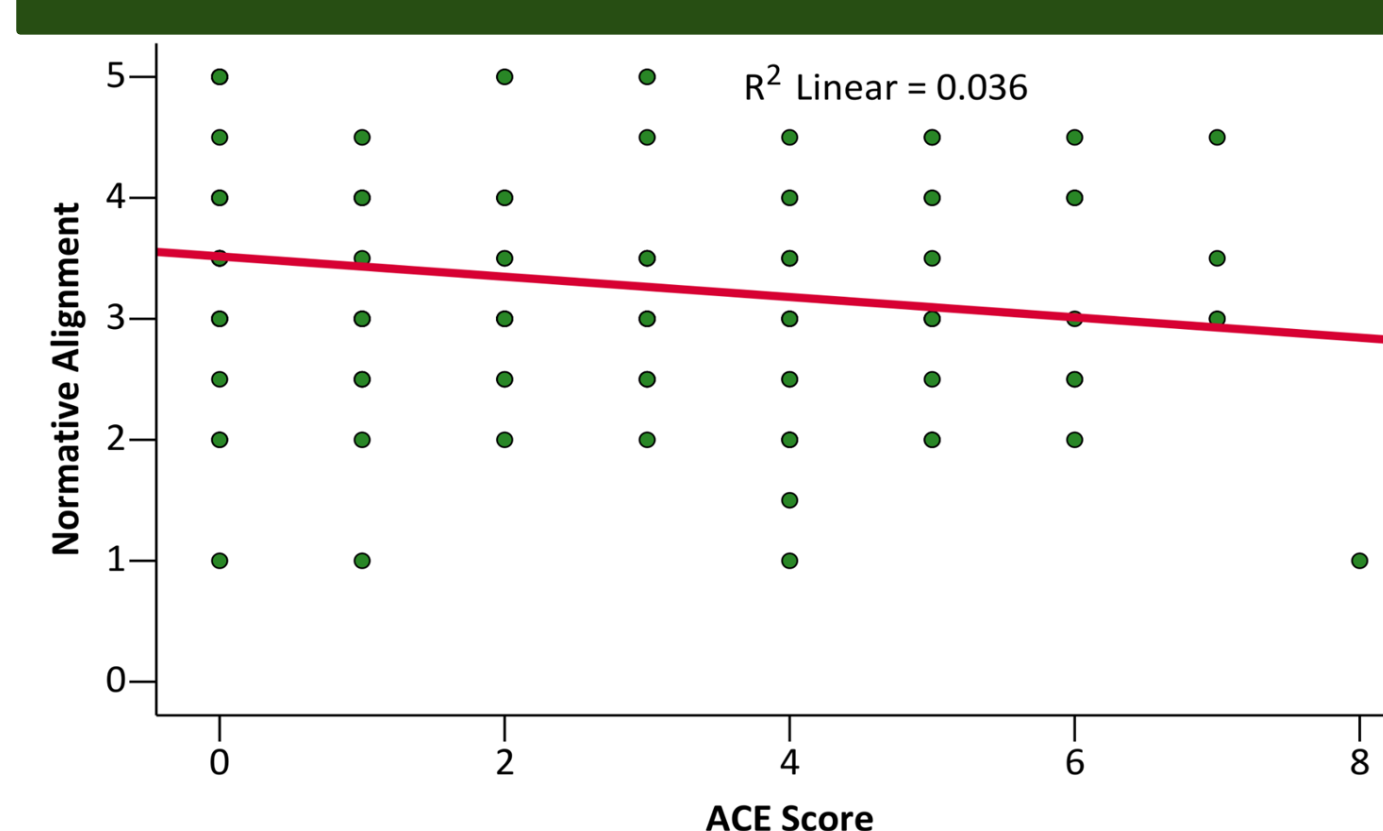
Objective 4: To explore the effect of trauma symptoms on judgments of the American court system.

METHODS

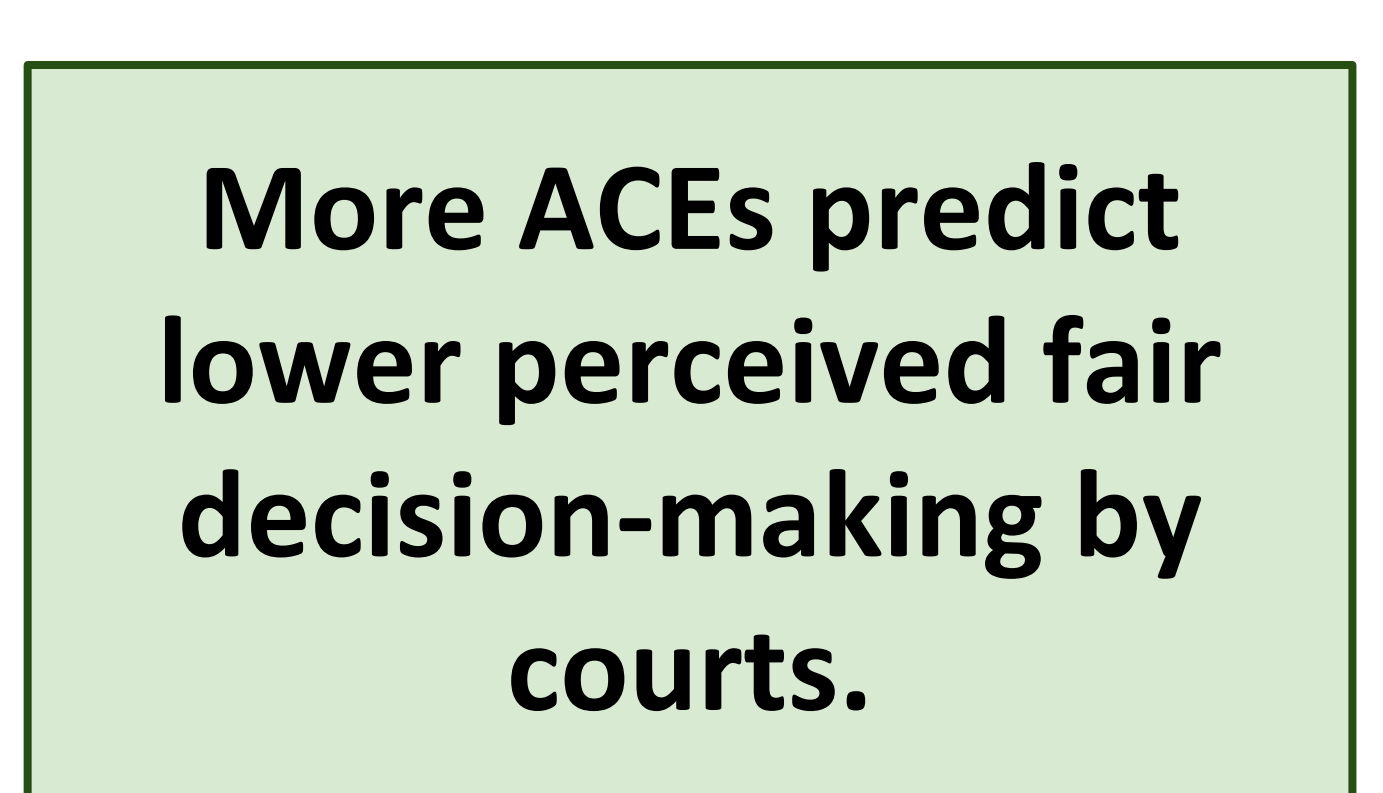
Participants over the age of 18 and that resided in the United States were recruited utilizing SONA, social media, and CloudResearch ($n = 122$). Participants were asked to fill out a demographics survey, Court Legitimacy Scale,¹ ACE questionnaire,⁶ and the PCL-5.⁷

RESULTS

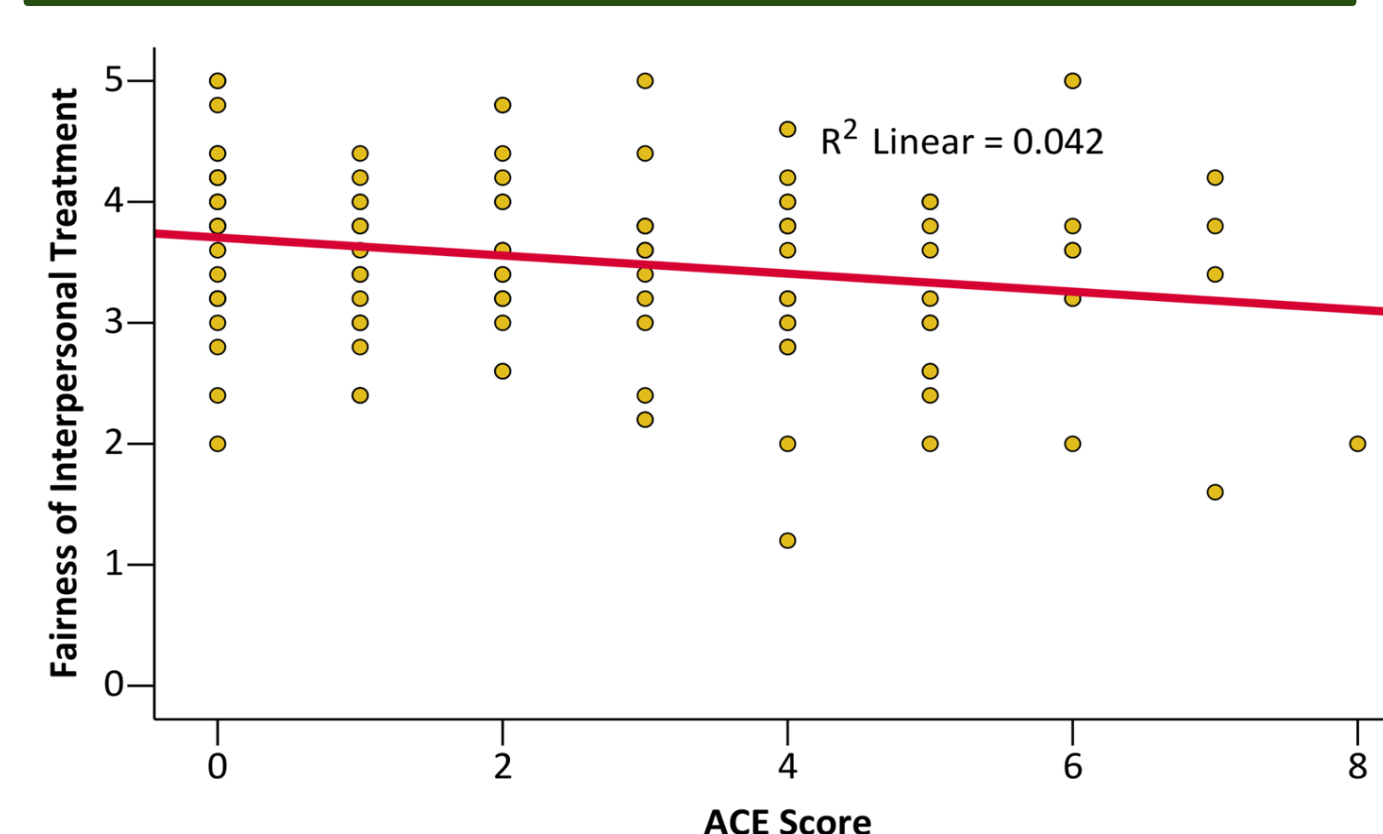
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES



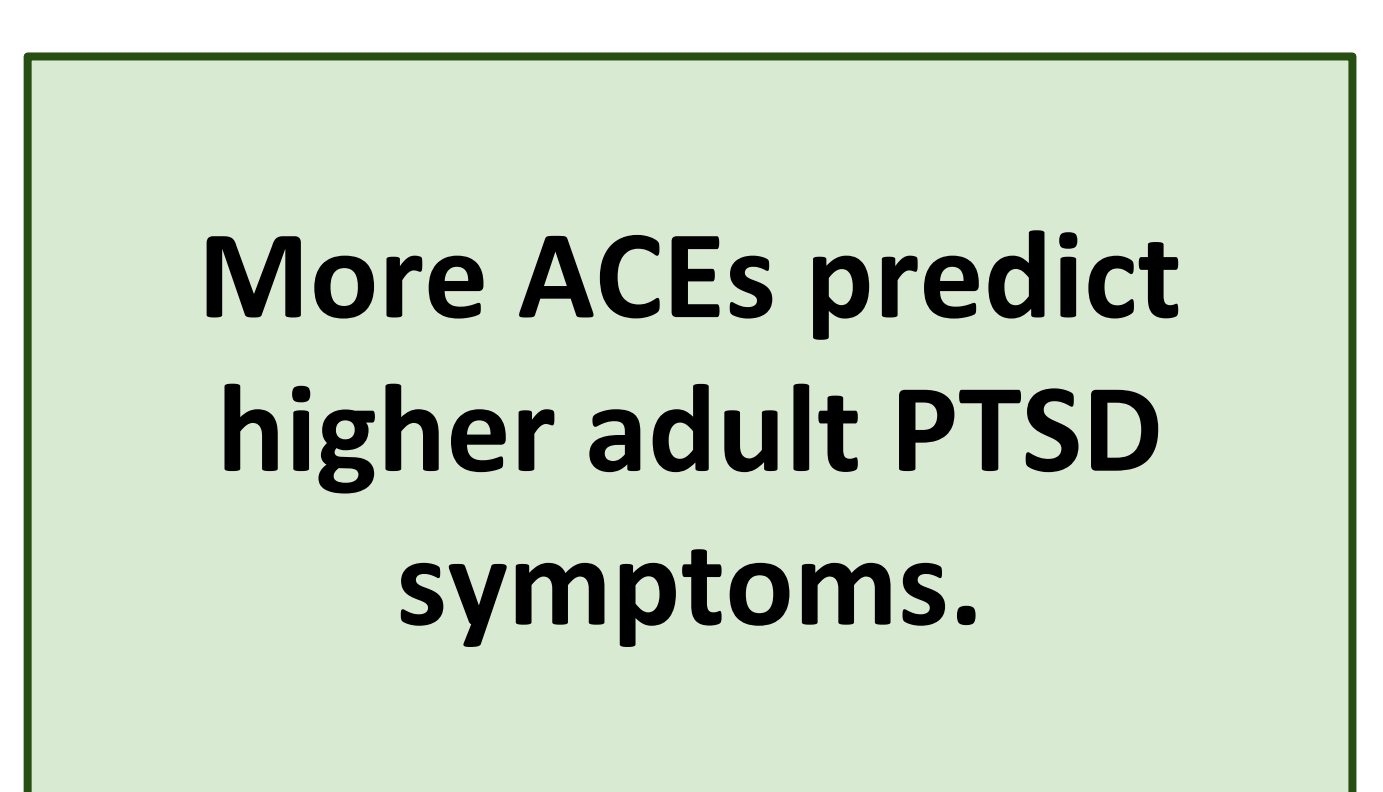
More ACEs predict lower alignment with courts.



More ACEs predict lower perceived fair decision-making by courts.

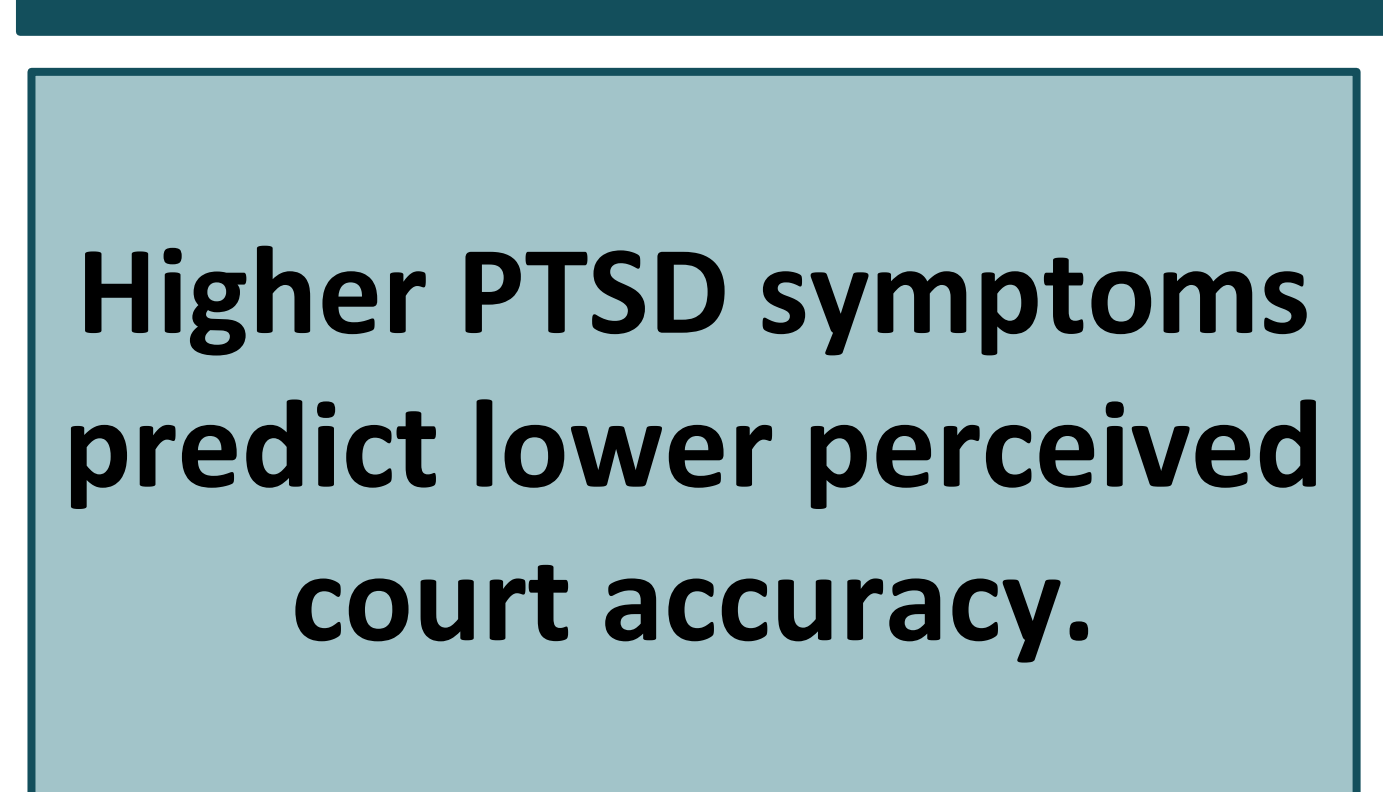


More ACEs predict lower perceived fair treatment by courts.

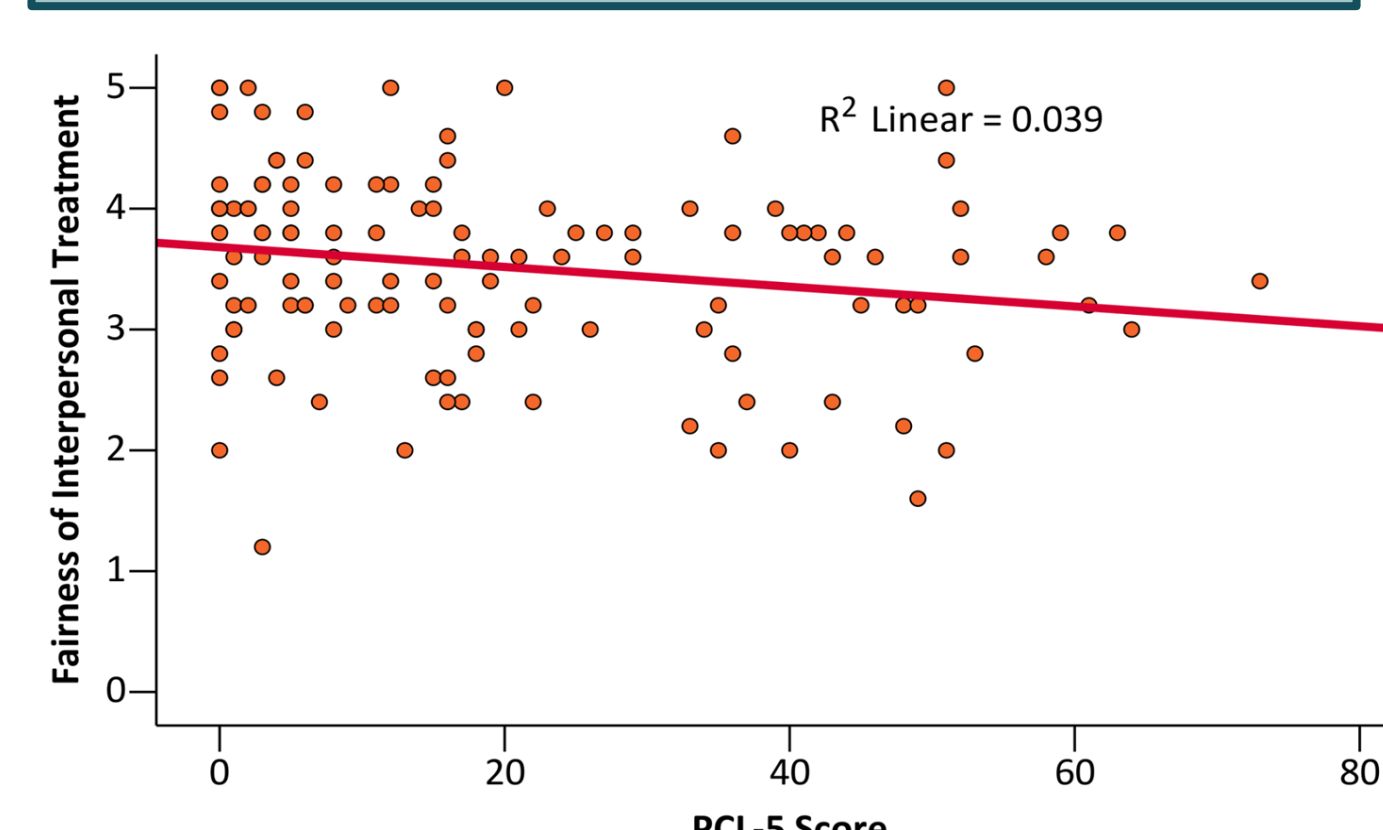


More ACEs predict higher adult PTSD symptoms.

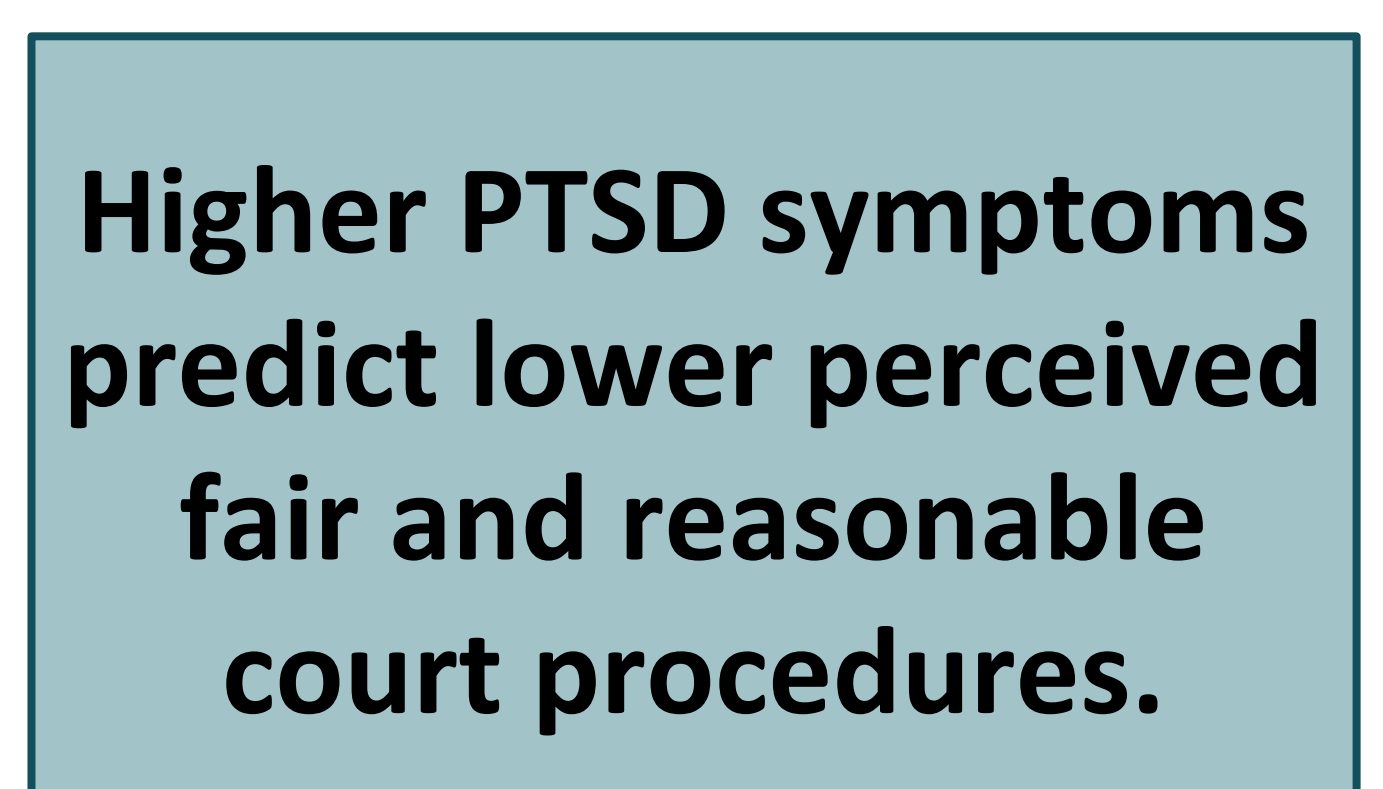
PTSD SYMPTOMS



Higher PTSD symptoms predict lower perceived court accuracy.

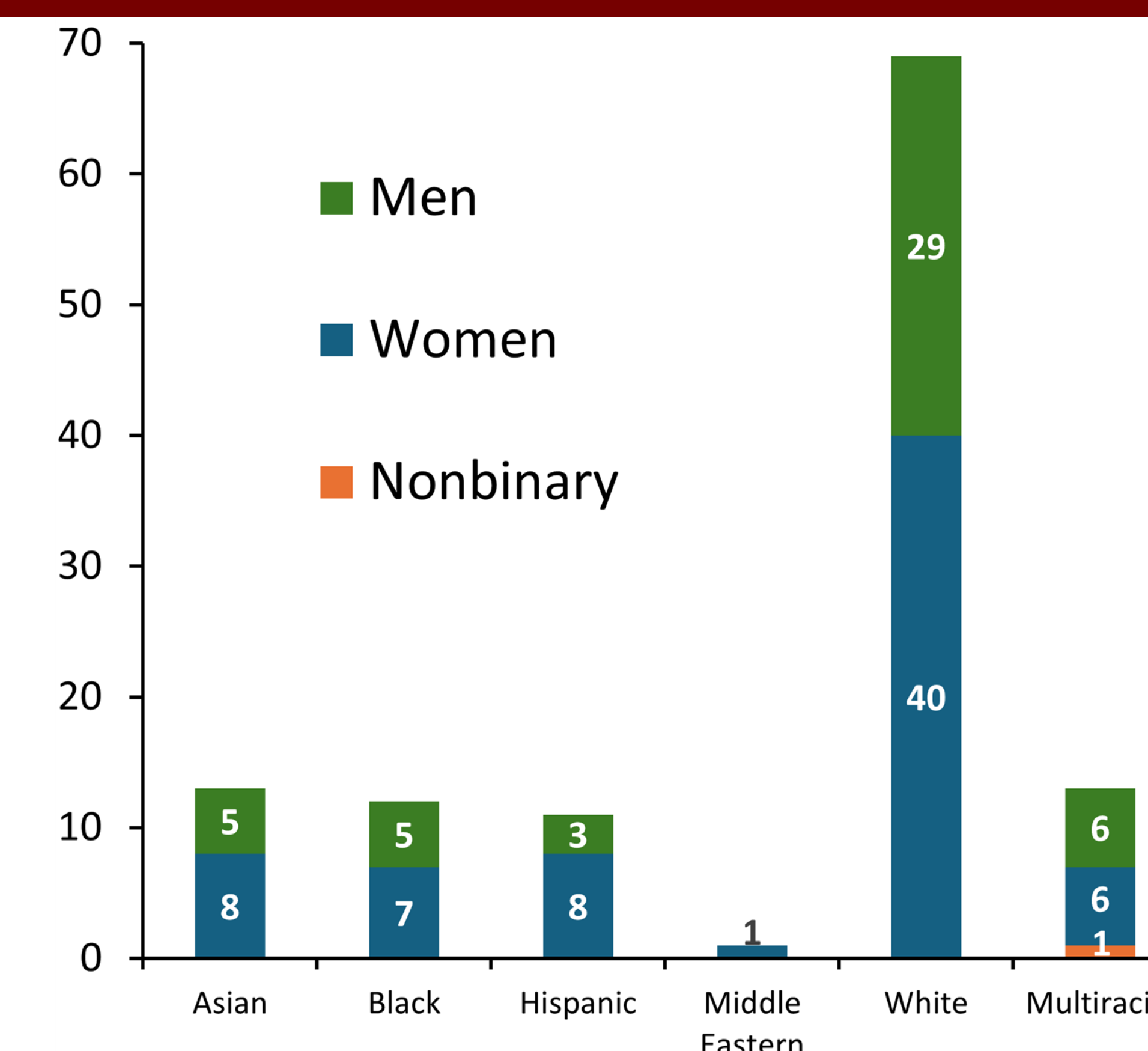


Higher PTSD symptoms predict lower perceived fair treatment by courts.



Higher PTSD symptoms predict lower perceived fair and reasonable court procedures.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS



CONCLUSIONS

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) predict lower alignment, lower fairness in decision making, and lower fair treatment by the courts. These findings extend the research demonstrating a relationship between ACEs and the other entities in the criminal justice system, showing it applies in some ways to the courts. Consistent with previous findings, ACEs predict adult PTSD symptoms. PTSD symptoms also predict lower perceived accuracy, fair treatment, and just decision making by courts. This indicates that both childhood and adult trauma experiences degrade faith in the American courts.

IMPLICATIONS

Court authorities should seek to:

- ❖ Educate
- ❖ Improve communication style
- ❖ Explain decision-making process
- ❖ Increase the use of therapeutic jurisprudence
- ❖ Use victim advocates to assist with trauma
- ❖ Increase social media communication of court processes

SOURCES

