

Adverse childhood experiences, criminality, culpability and sentencing: How can attitudes and bias impact criminal justice decision-making?

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What we'll explore

- My journey to a PhD
- Theory linking adverse childhood experiences and criminality
- PhD methods and results
- Key messages to take away





The **more ACEs** people experience, the **greater risk** of negative outcomes



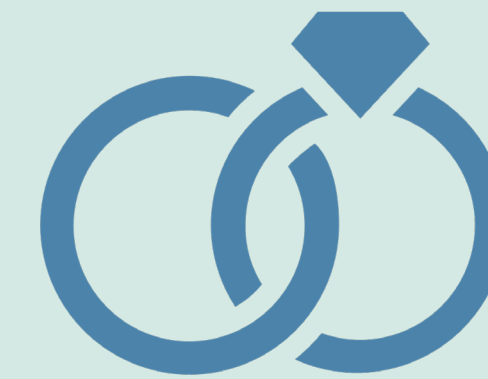
Verbal abuse



Physical abuse



Sexual abuse



Parental
separation



Domestic
violence



Alcohol abuse



Mental illness



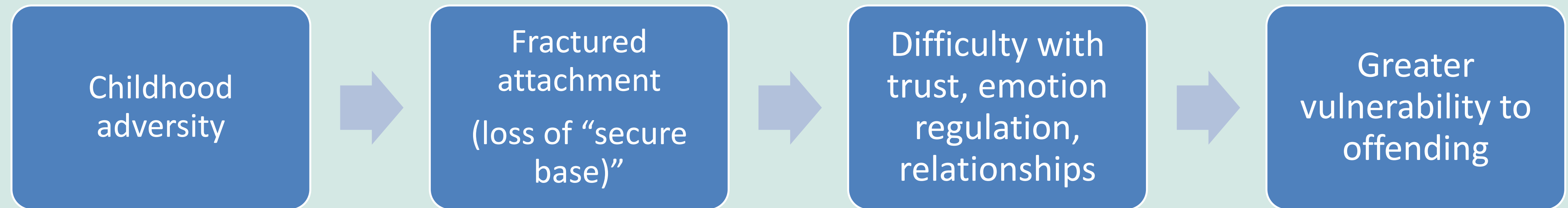
Drug abuse



Incarceration

Theoretical mechanisms linking ACEs & criminality

Attachment theory

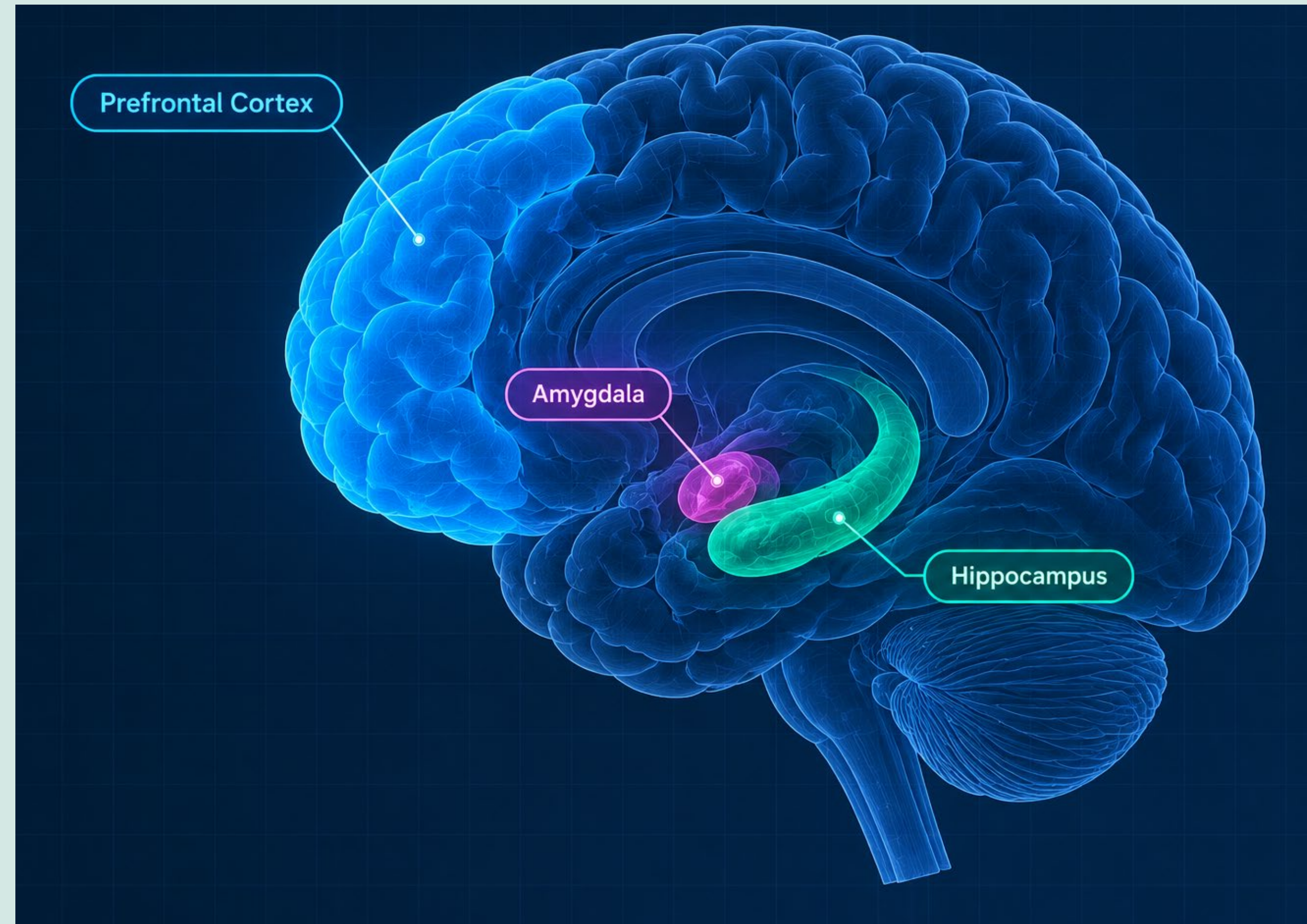


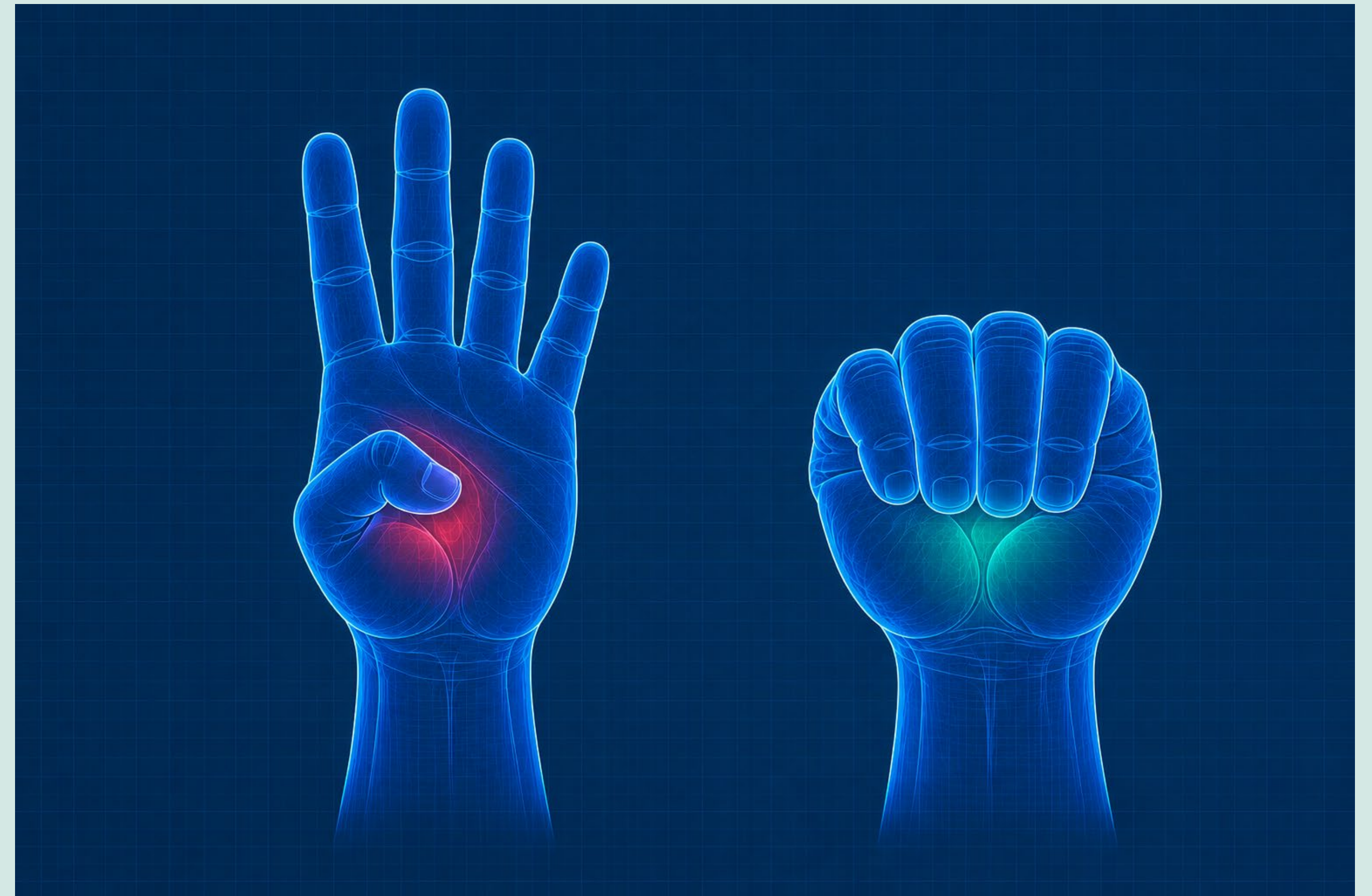
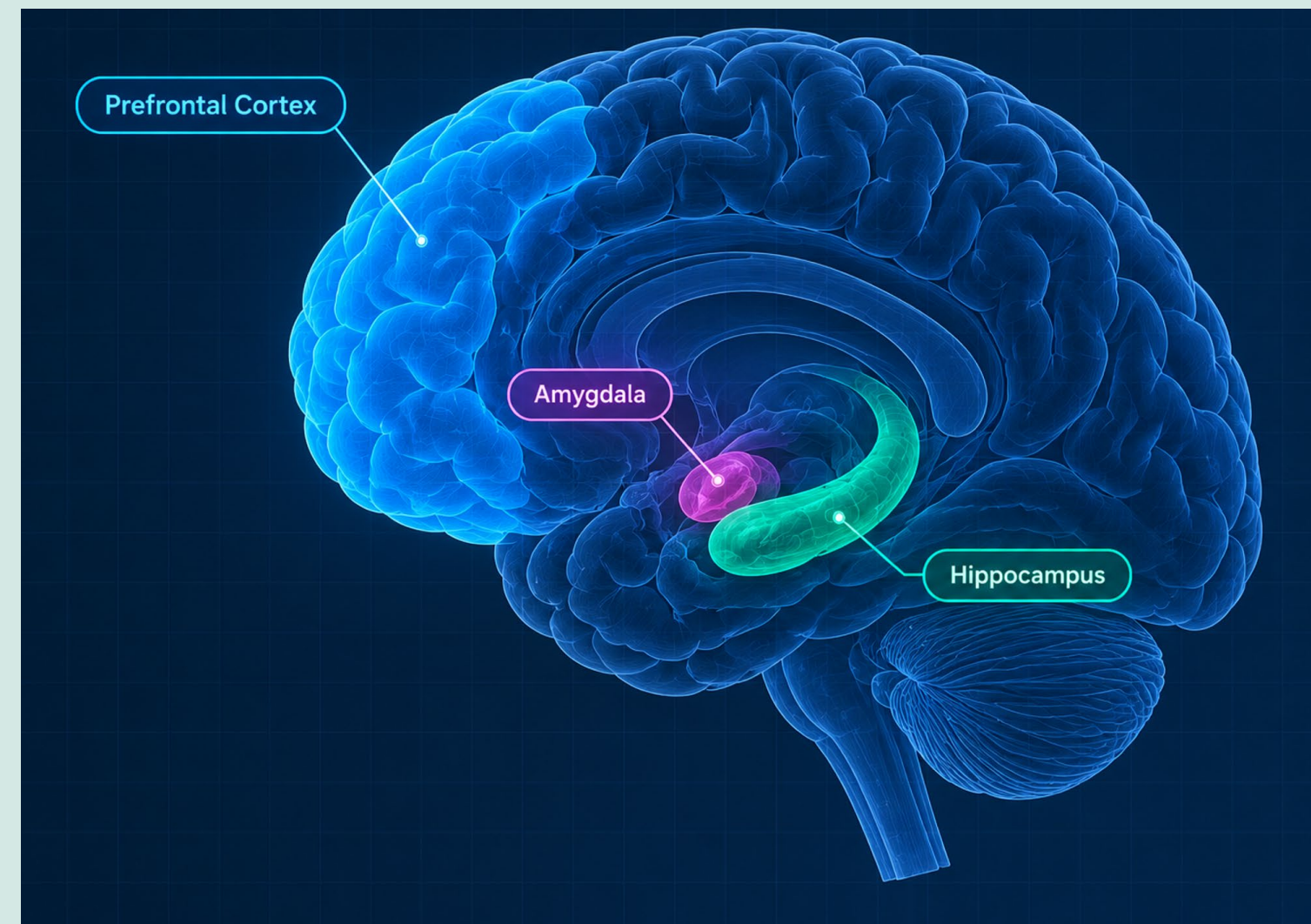


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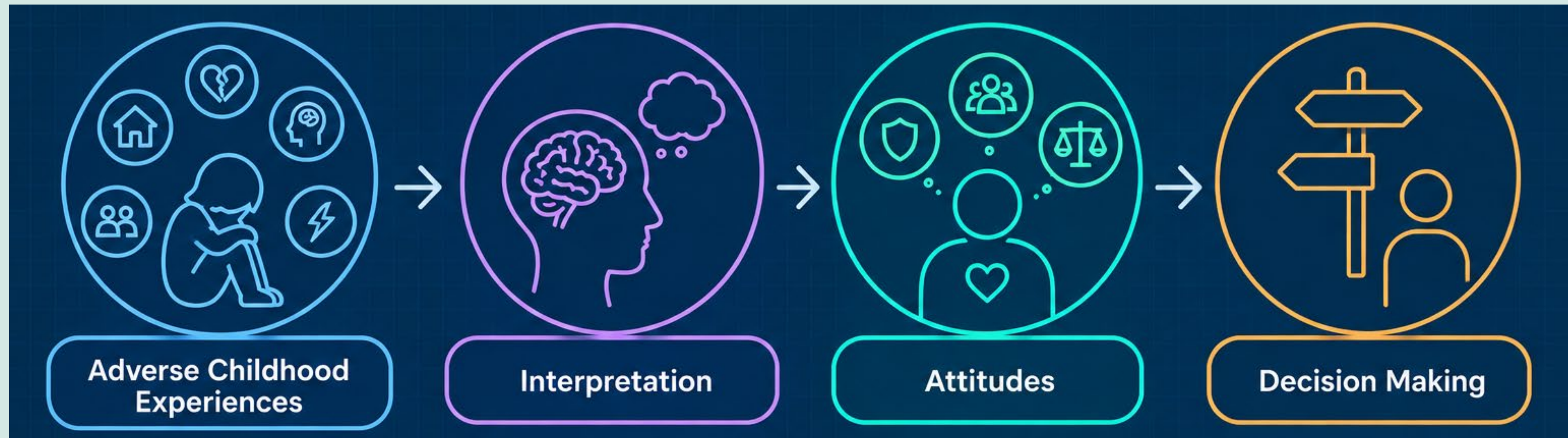


Neurobiological theory

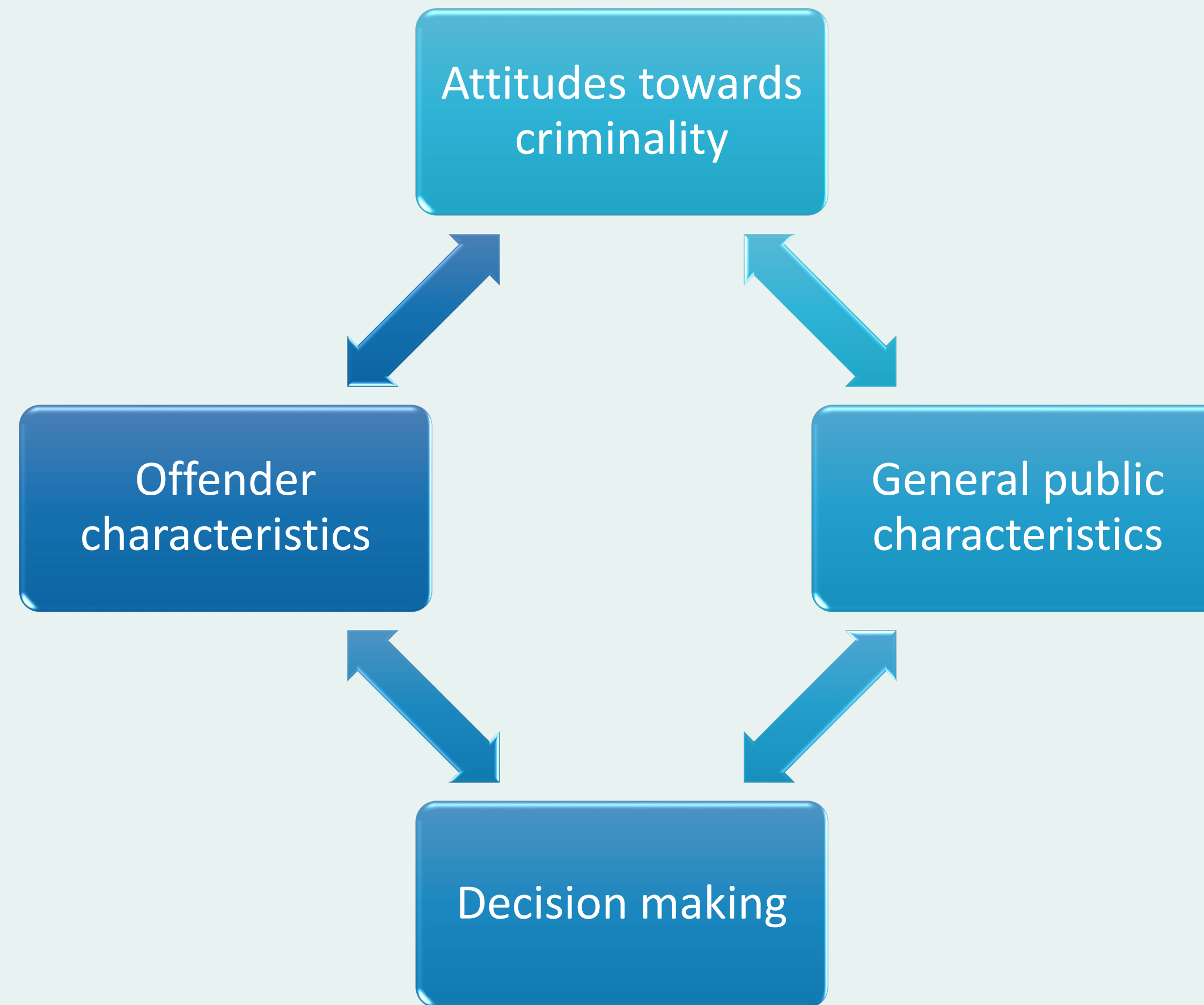




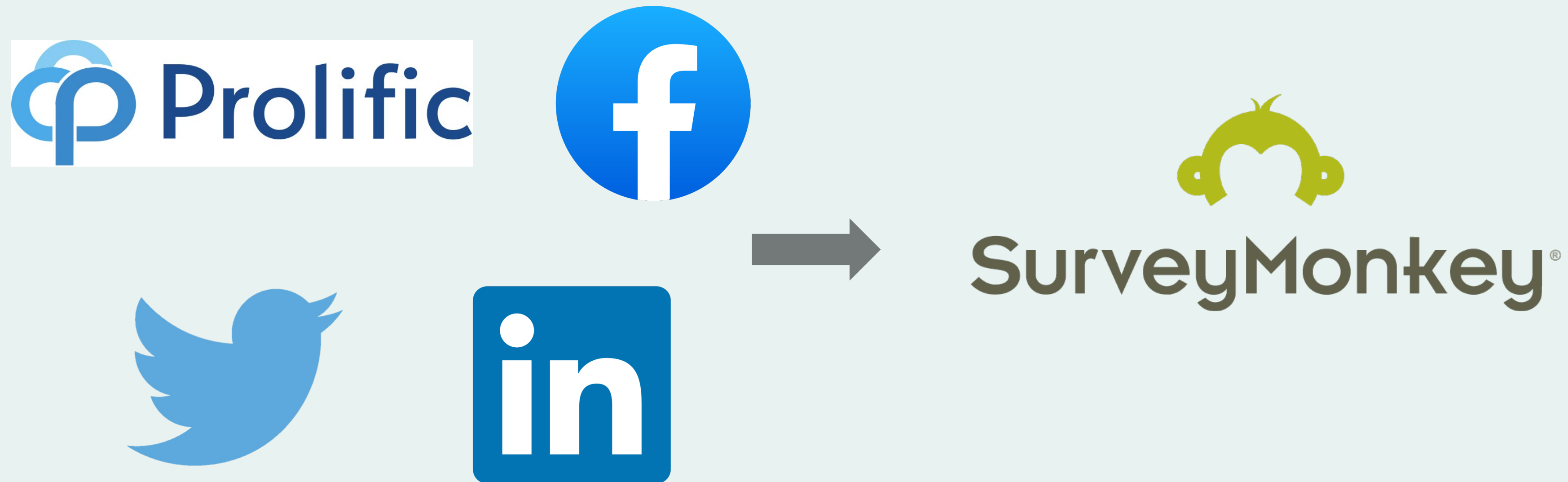
(Siegel, 2010)



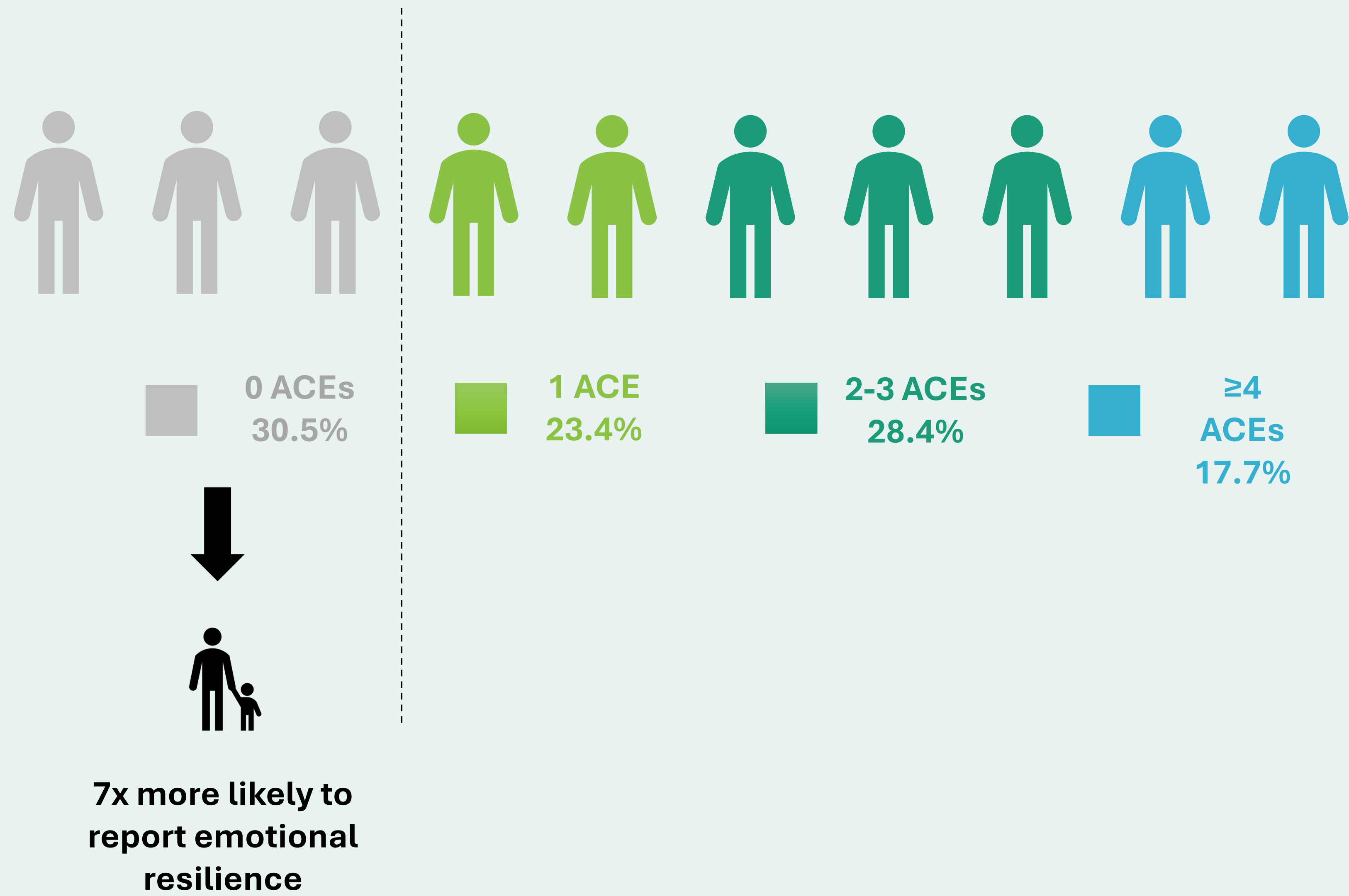
Exploring public attitudes towards criminality



1,336 participants were included in the final sample



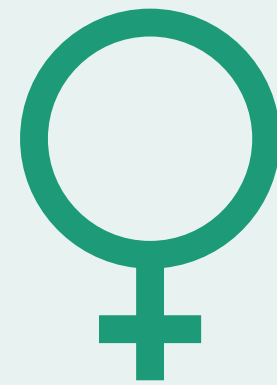
Over 17% of the sample reported 4 or more ACEs



Relationships between **ACEs** and **decision-maker demographics**



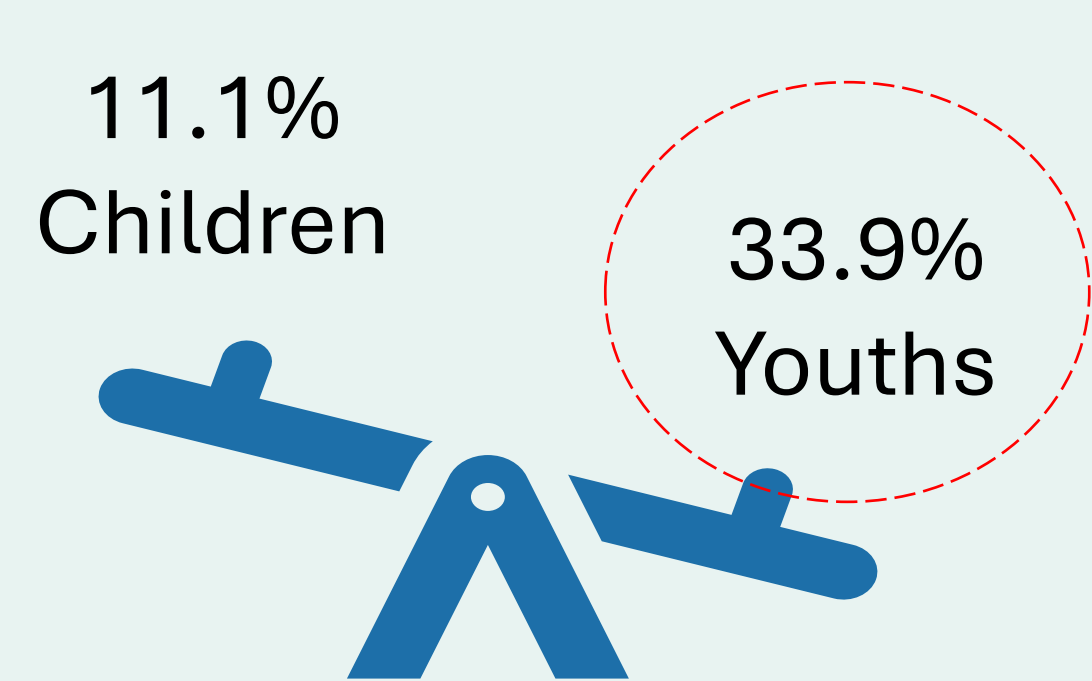
ACE prevalence decreases with age



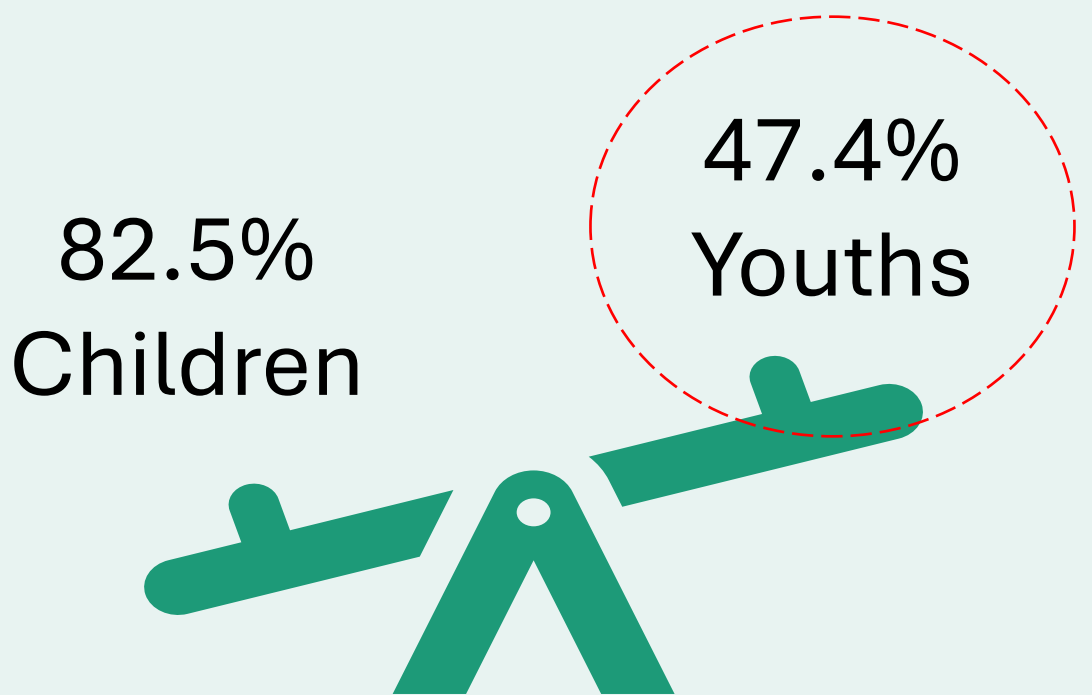
Females more likely to report ACEs

Impact of offender age on attitudes towards...

Sentencing severity
(same sentence as adults deserved)



Criminal responsibility
(less responsible than adults for criminal actions)



*Children (under 13 years old), Youths (13-18 years old)

Impact of offender ACE history on attitudes towards...

Sentencing leniency

(if ACE history then shorter/more lenient sentence deserved)

25.1%
Child

Criminal responsibility

(if ACE history then criminal responsibility is reduced)

28.1%
Child

The proportion of participants believing an offender deserved a **shorter/more lenient sentence** if that offender had experienced...



Sexual abuse
38.9%



Physical
abuse
28.6%



Domestic
violence
16.0%



Drug abuse
16.0%



Alcohol abuse
14.7%



Mental illness
9.6%



Verbal abuse
6.4%



Incarceration
5.7%



Parental
separation
2.2%

Key messages to take away

See the child before the offence

- A child can cause harm and still need protection from harm

Challenge age-based assumptions

- Growing older does not mean growing out of the need for protection

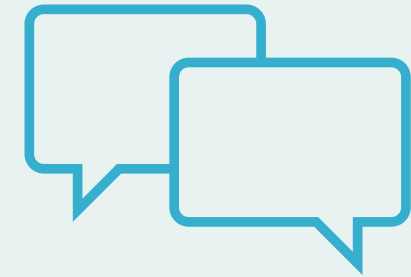
Avoid a hierarchy of trauma

- The absence of visible injury does not mean the absence of serious harm

Balance accountability with protection

- Punishment alone may deal with the behaviour, but not the reasons behind it

Thank you



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