

Chain of violence: Study shows impact on Palestinian and Israeli children

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Children exposed to ethnic and political violence in the Middle East are more aggressive than other children, a new study shows. And the younger children are, the more strongly they are affected, in a "chain of violence" that goes from political and ethnic strife, to violence in communities, schools, and families, and ends with their own aggressive behavior.

"Our results have important implications for understanding how political struggles spill over into the everyday lives of families and children," says psychologist Paul Boxer, lead author of the study.

The study, forthcoming in the peer-reviewed journal *Child Development*, was conducted by a consortium of researchers from the U.S., Palestine, and Israel, and funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, part of the National Institutes of Health.

For the study, researchers conducted three yearly sets of interviews with approximately 1,500 children and their parents living in the Middle East. Participants included 600 Palestinian-Arab families, 451 Israeli Jewish families, and 450 Israeli Arab families. At the time of the first interview, one-third of the children were 8 years old, one-third were 11 years old, and one-third were 14 years old.

"We found that over time, exposure to all kinds of violence was linked to increased aggressive behavior among the children," says Boxer, who is affiliated with the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research

(ISR), and Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

"We also found that these effects were strongest among the youngest age group, and that they appear to result from a chain of influence in which ethnic-[political violence](#) increases violence in families, schools, and neighborhoods, which in turn increases aggressive behavior among children."

In addition to collecting demographic information from the children's parents, the researchers assessed exposure to conflict and violence by asking parents and children a series of questions. Among them: how often a friend or acquaintance had been injured as a result of political or military violence; how often they had spent a long period of time in a security shelter or under curfew, and how often they had witnessed actual violence.

Children and their parents were also asked about the extent of their exposure to violence in the community that was not ethnic or political in nature, as well as violence at school, and violent arguments within the family. And children were asked how often in the last year they themselves had engaged in violent behaviors ranging from pushing someone, punching, beating, or choking someone, saying mean things, or taking others' things without asking.

They found that Palestinian children had the greatest exposure to violence, although Israeli Jews experienced more security checks and threats. Palestinian children also showed the highest levels of [aggressive behavior](#). And males experienced more violence and displayed higher levels of aggression than did females.

"Importantly, we found that late childhood was a critical period," says L. Rowell Huesmann, a U-M psychologist who is a co-author of the paper. "The [children](#) who were 8-years-old at the start of our study were more

susceptible than older children to the effects of witnessing [violence](#). "

More information: To read more about the study, visit www.sampler.isr.umich.edu/2012...-effect-on-children/

Provided by University of Michigan

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