

Collective violence and poverty on the Mexican-US border affects child mental health

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Collective violence attributed to organized crime and poverty are adversely affecting the mental health of children living near the Texas-Mexico border, according to a poster presented Oct. 19 at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference and Exhibition in New Orleans.

In the study, "Children's Mental Health and Collective Violence: A Bi-National Study on the United States/[Mexican Border](#)," researchers compared psychosocial and behavior scores among children and adolescents living in El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico in 2007 and again in 2010. All the participating children were of Hispanic origin (Mexican or Mexican-American), lived below the [poverty level](#) and went to a clinic for a non-emergency visit. None of the children had a history of diagnosed mental illness, or a neurological or life-threatening disease or disability.

The psychosocial and behavioral scores among children living in poverty in El Paso, Texas did not change significantly between 2007 and 2010, although these children living in poverty had considerable psychosocial and behavioral problems, said study author Marie Leiner, PhD.

At the Mexican site, however, children exhibited significant increases in social problems, rule breaking and [aggressive behavior](#), with higher scores reported in 2010.

"There is cumulative harm to the mental health of children from the combination of collective violence attributed to organized crime and poverty," said Dr. Leiner. "Untreated [mental health problems](#) predict violence, anti-social behaviors and delinquency, and this affects families, communities and individuals.

"It is crucial to address the mental health of children on the border to counteract the devastating effects this setting will have in the future."

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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