

After the shooting, political violence lives on in kids' behavior problems

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Even short-term exposure to political violence may have long-lasting effects on children's adjustment and behavior, says a new study by a team of researchers from Kenya, Italy and the United States.

Intense violence followed the contested Kenyan [presidential election](#) of December 2007. More than a year later, children who were exposed to the violence showed increased delinquent and aggressive behaviors, including such problem behaviors as bullying, [vandalism](#), stealing and skipping school, said study author Ann T. Skinner of the Duke University Center for Child and Family Policy.

Skinner works with a team of researchers at Duke and abroad who study parenting in different cultures. By chance, Skinner and her colleagues had just begun collecting data in Kisumu, Kenya, when post-election attacks erupted, tearing the city apart.

"The violence split neighborhoods and classrooms along ethnic lines," Skinner said. "In school, children who had sat side by side one week were suddenly being told they were enemies."

More than 1,200 people died as a result of political violence in Kenya that January after the election. Gunfire and death were suddenly so common that in a survey of 100 Kisumu youths and their mothers, more than half of mothers reported seeing a dead body, and 95 percent of children heard gunshots. More than a year later, children who were exposed to the bloodshed displayed a range of increased [problem](#)

[behaviors.](#)

Previous studies have linked childhood exposure to chronic violence to adjustment problems ranging from academic failure to increased aggression. The pattern has been found in dangerous inner-city neighborhoods in the U.S., and in countries such as Northern Ireland that have endured years of political violence.

Shorter episodes of intense violence have received less scrutiny, Skinner said. The new findings suggest that when [political violence](#) erupts, clinicians could play an important role in the aftermath.

"The assumption may have been that after violence subsides, children are no longer affected," Skinner said. "That may not be true. Instead, we may need to assess [children](#) clinically for increased aggression and other behaviors that could benefit from treatment."

More information: "Childrearing Violence and Child Adjustment Following Exposure to Kenyan Post-Election Violence," Ann T. Skinner, Paul Oburu, Jennifer E. Lansford and Dario Bacchini, *Psychology of Violence*, July 1, 2013.

Provided by Duke University

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