

Job opportunities, after-school activities, cleaner city top urban teens' priorities

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When researchers in New Haven, Conn., asked teens to identify solutions to reduce violence in their community, the adolescents had clear recommendations: better employment opportunities, more after-school activities and a cleaner city environment.

The [adolescents'](#) input came as part of a unique partnership between academicians and [community members](#). Findings from the project, Youth Haven, will be presented at the 2015 American Academy of Pediatrics Conference & Exhibition in Washington, DC.

As part of the project, 12 "[youth](#) ambassadors" between the ages of 16 and 18 were recruited from city public schools for their interest in [violence](#) prevention. The [teens](#) convened a citywide Youth Congress to gather other adolescents' perspectives on violence. Data collected included audience response surveys and small group sessions analyzed through qualitative methods. Each group was led by a youth ambassador and facilitated by adult academic and community partners. Highlights include:

- 61 percent of youths attending the conference reported having a family member who was killed in an act of violence.
- 81 percent said a family member had been hurt by an act of violence.
- Violence prevention priorities that were identified focused on improving employment opportunities for teens, after-school activities for all ages, and the city's physical environment.

The youth ambassadors presented their research findings to city leaders, including law enforcement officials, and directly contributed to the development of a citywide planning document on [violence prevention](#) policy, said lead author James Dodington, MD, FAAP, a pediatric emergency medicine fellow at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital, who will outline the project's findings during the AAP conference.

Because urban youth are disproportionately impacted by violence, suffering loss of support systems and enduring chronic stress from unsafe environments, they should be more frequently engaged in violence prevention activities, Dr. Dodington said.

"Our study demonstrates that youth can be fully engaged as partners in community-based participatory research on violence prevention, and can effectively contribute to related policy discussion by gathering consensus from their peers and leading evidence-based research efforts," Dr. Dodington said. "The incorporation of youth perspectives, experiences, and priorities is both feasible and critical to creating violence prevention strategies and policies that can be endorsed by those for whom the policies are often intended."

Funding for the project was provided by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, one of the National Institutes of Health.

More information: Dodington will present the abstract, "Youth Haven: A Community-Based Approach to Youth Violence Prevention," at 11:30 am on Friday, Oct. 23, in the Marriott Marquis Independence Ballroom. To view the abstract, <https://aap.confex.com/aap/2015/webprogrampreliminary/Paper31207.html>.

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