

# Researchers to study gun violence among youths

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How and why children carry weapons is the subject of a \$3.4 million interdisciplinary study led by two University at Buffalo researchers looking to find ways high-risk children can escape a cycle of violence.

The study, led by Rina Das Eiden, senior research scientist at UB's Research Institute on Addictions, and Amanda Nickerson, professor and director the Graduate School of Education's Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention, will examine the pathways from infancy to adolescence that show how and under what conditions adolescents engage in violence and other high-risk behaviors, such as substance use.

"Gun violence is a public health concern that has been the focus of intense political debate," says Nickerson, who often serves as an expert on bullying and violence among [children](#) and whose Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention has organized frequent conferences on these subjects.

"Despite the fueled debates about this issue, there is a surprising lack of carefully conducted research that seeks to better understand how and why youth carry weapons."

Funding for the study comes from a five-year, \$3.4 million grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse titled "Developmental Pathways of Violence and Substance Abuse in a High Risk Sample." The study will examine why and how these children engage in such high-risk behaviors as carrying and using firearms and becoming drug users.

The two researchers lead a team from different academic backgrounds that will study more than 200 children from a high-risk sample. The children, identified by maternal drug use, poverty and exposure to violence since birth, will be examined and interviewed in early adolescence and then again in later adolescence.

"We hope that a better understanding of developmental pathways to weapon-carrying will inform both content and ideal timing of preventive interventions as far as what can be done to end this cycle of violence and stop these violence behaviors from occurring," says Eiden.

"We also hope to better understand protective factors that lead to resilience in the face of adversity."

Nickerson's area of specialization in bullying, violence, and parent and peer relationships complements Eiden's expertise in risk and resiliency of children from substance-using parents.

"Studying the complex issue of weapon-carrying requires understanding physiological, behavioral, relational and environmental influences across development," Nickerson says. "We are fortunate to have such a strong interdisciplinary team that brings unique and complementary expertise to this project."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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