

# Study links childhood hunger, violence later in life

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Children who often go hungry have a greater risk of developing impulse control problems and engaging in violence, according to new UT Dallas research.

The study, published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, found that people who experienced frequent hunger as kids were more than twice as likely to exhibit impulsivity and injure others intentionally as adolescents and adults.

Thirty-seven percent of the study's participants who had frequent hunger as [children](#) reported that they had been involved in [interpersonal violence](#). Of those who experienced little to no childhood hunger, 15 percent said they were involved in interpersonal violence. The findings were strongest among whites, Hispanics and males.

Previous research has shown that childhood hunger contributes to a variety of other negative outcomes, including [poor academic performance](#). The study is among the first to find a correlation between childhood hunger, low self-control and interpersonal violence.

"Good nutrition is not only critical for academic success, but now we're showing that it links to behavioral patterns. When kids start to fail in school, they start to fail in other domains of life," said Dr. Alex Piquero, Ashbel Smith Professor of Criminology and associate dean for graduate programs in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences.

Researchers used data from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions to examine the relationship between [childhood hunger](#), impulsivity and interpersonal violence. Participants in that study responded to a variety of questions including how often they went hungry as a child, whether they have problems controlling their temper, and if they had physically injured another person on purpose.

More than 15 million U.S. children face food insecurity—not having regular access to adequate nutrition, according to the study. Piquero said the results highlight the importance of addressing communities known as food deserts that have little access to grocery stores with [healthy food choices](#).

The findings suggest that strategies aimed at alleviating hunger may also help reduce violence, Piquero said.

"At the very least, we need to get children the nutritional food they need," Piquero said. "It's not a very difficult problem to address, and we can envision lots of gains."

Piquero also has co-authored other recent studies related to the role that self-control plays in delinquency and violence.

The Journal of Experimental Criminology published research by Piquero and co-authors that reviewed existing studies on programs designed to improve children's self-control. The first study found that programs designed to improve self-control are effective in improving self-control and can help reduce delinquency. The second study concluded that parenting-training programs also can play an important role in preventing delinquent behavior in children.

**More information:** Michael Vaughn et al. Childhood Reports of Food Neglect and Impulse Control Problems and Violence in Adulthood,

*International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph13040389](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph13040389)

Alex R. Piquero et al. A meta-analysis update on the effects of early family/parent training programs on antisocial behavior and delinquency, *Journal of Experimental Criminology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s11292-016-9256-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-016-9256-0)

Alex R. Piquero et al. A meta-analysis update on the effectiveness of early self-control improvement programs to improve self-control and reduce delinquency, *Journal of Experimental Criminology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s11292-016-9257-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-016-9257-z)

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