

Reducing severe violence among adolescents

January 4 2017

The World Health Organization reported in 2014 that homicide was the fourth leading cause of death among 15 - 29 year olds worldwide. Severe youth violence (SYV), which can be defined as including aggravated assault, rape, murder, and robbery committed by adolescents, has been described by some public health experts as "highly contagious," referring to the way it seems to spread among people.

A new Special Section of the journal *Child Development*, edited by Tina Malti, entitled "Severe Youth Violence: Developmental Perspectives," includes articles intended to explore how to better screen and assess SYV risk, and inform "novel, developmentally sensitive practices and policies to prevent SYV."

Severe [youth violence](#) results in billions of dollars in costs to societies annually, including criminal justice system expenses. However, in addition to the costs to society at large, both victims and agents of violent behavior experience substantial negative outcomes. Both victims and agents may experience physical and mental health consequences, as well as reduced life expectancy. Agents may also experience retaliatory cycles of violence.

Previous research has explored a dual pathways theory, suggesting that there are two groups of adolescents committing violent offenses: those who start early in life and persist into adulthood, and those who limit their offenses to adolescence. This research has shown that the group that persists in committing violent offenses into adulthood typically has a wide range of genetic, neurobiological, and/or social risk factors, such as

growing up in poverty or rejecting parenting. The group that commits offenses only in adolescence, however, show the normal psychological stressors and structural and functional brain changes of adolescence.

The articles in the special section explore the developmental course of such key capacities as emotion regulation skills and judgment and decision making among youth who commit violent offenses, examining possible points of intervention. Additionally, the Special Section explores the role of gender in violence. While the majority of perpetrators of extreme violence are male, a study by Cauffman and colleagues investigates the development of female offenders.

More information: *Child Development*, [DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12694](https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12694)

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

Citation: Reducing severe violence among adolescents (2017, January 4) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-01-severe-violence-adolescents.html>

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