

Better reading proficiency linked to fewer youth homicides

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Children participating in a school reading program. A study by Johns Hopkins Medicine shows that improving reading proficiency may lead to fewer youth homicides. Credit: US Department of Education

A good education system has long been linked with providing opportunity for people to get better jobs and escape poverty. However, less is known about the impact of education on youth violence. By analyzing data about the residents of 55 Baltimore, Maryland,

neighborhoods from the City Health Department's [2017 Neighborhood Health Profile Reports](#), Johns Hopkins Medicine researchers recently showed that those urban areas with a larger number of third graders reading at grade level had lower rates of homicides among people age 25 or younger.

"Our findings fall in line with what we know about [early childhood education](#), in that it helps form identities and a value system, and assists children with navigating [dangerous situations](#) more easily," says lead author Michael Bray, M.Sc., a medical student at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "Investing in kids at the third grade or elementary school levels could have a positive impact that ripples up through the community and could reduce risk of violence."

In the study, published online on June 8, 2020, in the journal [Injury Epidemiology](#), the researchers found that for every 2% increase in the proportion of kids in a neighborhood who were proficient at reading in the third grade, there was one fewer homicide per 100,000 people a year in that area. On average overall, Baltimore has about 56 homicides per 100,000 people per year.

"Homicides are often the result of systemically inescapable poverty tied to a lack of options for [upward mobility](#)," says Paul Nestadt, M.D., senior author and assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

"Education has long been one of the few pathways out of this circular trap, fortified by racial and economic disparities," he says. "It's not surprising that when neighborhood schools are unable to provide comprehensive early education, the effects echo throughout the community imparting tragic outcomes."

More information: Michael J. C. Bray et al, Educational achievement

and youth homicide mortality: a City-wide, neighborhood-based analysis, *Injury Epidemiology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1186/s40621-020-00246-1](https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-020-00246-1)

Provided by Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

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