

Study: Immigrant youth exposed to U.S. violence adopt violent ways

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Immigrant youth in the U.S. rapidly adopt social norms that perpetuate aggressive behavior, says Joanna Almeida, associate research scientist at Northeastern. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill.

(PhysOrg.com) -- New immigrant youth in the United States commit significantly fewer acts of violence against their peers than people born here, but appear to rapidly adopt social norms that perpetuate aggressive behavior, according to a study by a Northeastern University researcher and her colleagues.

The findings were reported online in a December edition of the *Journal*

of Interpersonal Violence.

The research team analyzed data from the 2008 Boston Youth Survey, which was completed by more than 1,300 students in Boston public high schools in an effort to learn more about patterns of violence among Boston youth.

They found that U.S.-born youth with a foreign-born parent and immigrants who have lived in the United States for more than four years were roughly twice as likely as those who have lived in the [United States](#) for fewer than four years to commit acts of aggression against their peers, including hitting, punching, and kicking.

Lead author Joanna Almeida, associate research scientist at Northeastern's Institute on Urban Health Research, has applied for a grant from the National Institutes of Health to study the social and environmental factors that may contribute to the rapid increase in violence among recent immigrants.

"It's possible that there's something about the social environment in this country that's contributing to foreign-born youth becoming violent so quickly," she said. "Perhaps it's a way to cope with being bullied or discriminated against, or a consequence of factors such as crime and violence in their new communities."

Among the study's other findings:

- Recent immigrants were less likely than the other students to have used substances in the last 30 days or to have performed poorly in school. These risk factors didn't account for their less violent behavior, according to Almeida's analysis.
- Roughly the same percentage of recent immigrants, non-recent

[immigrants](#) and U.S.-born youth committed acts of emotional or verbal aggression (picking on a peer) and relational violence (spreading lies or rumors about a peer).

- Patterns of [violence](#) perpetration among immigrant youth did not differ by race or ethnicity.

Researchers at the Boston University School of Public Health, Yale University School of Public Health and University of Massachusetts Medical School, coauthored the study.

Provided by Northeastern University

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