

For family violence among adolescents, mattering matters

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Adolescents who believe they matter to their families are less likely to threaten or engage in violence against family members, according to a new study led by Brown University sociologist Gregory Elliott. The research is published in the *Journal of Family Issues*.

A relatively new concept, "mattering" is the belief persons make a difference in the world around them. Mattering is composed of three facets — awareness, importance, and reliance. Do others know you exist? Do they invest time and resources in you? Do they look to you as a resource? Elliott asserts that mattering is the fundamental motivation in human beings. "Above all else, there's a need to matter," he says.

The data for this analysis comes from telephone interviews with a national sample of 2,004 [adolescents](#), age 11-18, as part of the 2000 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Controlling for age, gender, race, religiosity, and [family](#) socioeconomic structure and size, the findings reveal that failing to matter to one's family increases the probability of violence, whereas a strong feeling of mattering is likely to protect the adolescent from engaging in violent behavior toward a family member.

Among the findings:

- Girls hit family members more than boys do.
- Compared to the average respondent, Hispanic youth are less

likely than non-Hispanic whites to commit violence in the home.

- Children from larger families are more likely to use violence.
- If religion is important in one's life, the likelihood of family violence diminishes.
- Children whose parents did postgraduate study are more likely to enact violence than those whose parents did not finish high school.

The authors believe the mechanism behind mattering is that it has an effect on both self-esteem and on one's attitude toward violence, which ultimately determines one's violent behavior.

"Mattering is the prime mover in a chain reaction involving self-esteem and attitudes toward [violence](#)," said Elliott. "If you don't matter, it sets up a chain of unfortunate feelings and events that makes it difficult to get along."

Provided by Brown University

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