

Social sciences researchers develop new tool to assess exposure to childhood violence, trauma

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One in five children in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, are either exposed to, or are victims of, violence and trauma, according to a new study from the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University.

In a diverse sample of 6,676 high-risk children up to age seven, researchers from the Mandel School's Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education found that those children had trouble going to sleep at least sometimes (16 percent), had cried or had a tantrum to exhaustion (16 percent) and had difficulty concentrating or focusing (16 percent), significantly higher than normal. Levels of exposure to [violence](#) and victimization were also high.

With such high rates of emotional and behavioral issues, researchers at the Begun Center have developed a new tool to quickly and reliably identify children who need attention from [social services](#).

"We were getting feedback that there wasn't an easy-to-use screener available to evaluate these kids," said Daniel Flannery, the Dr. Semi J. and Ruth Begun Professor and director of the Begun Center at the Mandel School. "So, we developed one and put it in place."

The 22-question screener was designed to assess children—not diagnose them—within a few minutes. Flannery said that current measures take

much longer, can be expensive and require specialized training to administer.

"We found that our screener held up," Flannery said. "The idea is that it can be completed quickly and administered by minimally trained staff in public systems and community-based agencies, who can then refer children and families to necessary assessment and treatment services."

Flannery expects social-[service](#) organizations nationally to begin using the screener. The next step is to analyze data of [children](#) age eight to 18.

Flannery said the research is part of a large, multi-agency collaboration, involving more than 70 organizations nationwide—including Cuyahoga County's Witness-Victim Services Center and the Department of Children and Family Services.

The study's results were recently published in the journal *Victims and Violence*.

More information: Daniel J. Flannery et al. Examination of a New Brief Screener to Measure Trauma Symptoms and Violence Exposure Among Young Children, *Violence and Victims* (2019). [DOI: 10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-17-00214](#)

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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