

# Increased organized activities could help reduce firearm violence among youth

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Participation in organized and group activities may play a key role in preventing firearm aggression among youth who have been exposed to violence or violent behaviors, according to a new study in *Developmental*

*Psychology* by researchers at the University of Michigan Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention.

"Our study supports the idea that engaging youth in supervised, prosocial activities is vital to help them feel connected to others for support and mentorship, which can break the cycle of victimization to violence—especially firearm violence," said Marc Zimmerman, co-director of the Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention and the Marshall H. Becker Collegiate Professor at U-M's School of Public Health.

Zimmerman and his U-M colleagues are working with [community partners](#) to identify and implement solutions that address the leading cause of death among individuals ages 14 to 24—among whom nearly 10,000 died as the result of a firearm injury in the United States in 2020.

Zimmerman partnered with Daniel Lee, research scientist at the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, to launch the study that sought to identify ways in which youth exposure to violence could be directly or indirectly disrupted.

As part of their research, they analyzed [survey data](#) from more than 500 youth who sought care at Hurley Medical Center Emergency Department in Flint, Michigan. They found that positive socializing and [social ties](#) to prosocial adults and peers may help younger youth regulate their [emotional responses](#) to exposure to violence and help them seek support from prosocial adults.

"This is an example of why rigorous firearm research is so important for the field—such studies can help researchers understand the pathways for interrupting the cycle of firearm violence and develop interventions to address the leading cause of death among U.S. youth," said Patrick Carter, co-director of the Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention and associate professor of emergency medicine at U-M's Medical School.

The study shows that organized activities also may mitigate the association between retaliatory attitudes and firearm aggression. To address retaliatory attitudes as a potential factor linking exposure to violence and firearm aggression, the researchers suggest that increased organized activity opportunities for youth dealing with exposure to violence could provide a multitude of benefits.

Study results indicate that social, psychological and developmental benefits, such as academic engagement, mentorship, [prosocial behaviors](#) and others, may serve as a vital strategy for preventing firearm aggression among youth, and more research is needed to examine how organized activity participation offers protection against firearm aggression.

This study is one of many community-engagement projects being led by the Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention, which launched last summer as part of a \$10 million university commitment to generate new knowledge and advance innovative solutions to reduce firearm injury, while respecting the rights of law-abiding citizens to legally own firearms.

"Retaliatory attitudes is a point of intervention for disrupting the well-documented link between exposure to violence and firearm aggression among youth," Lee said. "Participating in organized activities like extracurricular school activities can attenuate the influence of retaliatory attitudes on firearm aggression and may be a viable strategy for preventing [firearm](#) aggression for [youth](#) exposed to [violence](#)."

**More information:** Daniel B. Lee et al, Retaliatory attitudes as mediator of exposure to violence and firearm aggression among youth: The protective role of organized activity involvement, *Developmental Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1037/dev0001339](https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001339)

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