

Study: 1.4M Children Annually Receive Medical Care for Violence

**New estimate is four times higher than previous data
indicated**

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DAVID FINKELHOR, CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN RESEARCH CENTER DIRECTOR AND
PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY

A national report from UNH shows close to one and a half million children each year visit a doctor, emergency room or medical facility as a result of an assault, abuse, crime or other form of violence. This is four times higher than previous estimates based only on data from U.S. emergency rooms for violence-related treatment.

“We should not be treating assaults as just a rite of passage for children.”

In their [study](#), recently published on JAMA Network Open, researchers from UNH’s [Crimes against Children Research Center \(CCRC\)](#) used survey information from a representative sample of 8,503 children and youth from across the country, ages two to 17 years, as part of a series of nationwide studies in 2011 and 2014. They found that while the majority of those needing medical attention for violence exposure were teens, one third were under the age of 10. The rate of past-year medical visits due to violence exposure was 1.9%, which is equivalent to a national estimate of 1.4 million children and teens. Previous estimates based on data obtained only from emergency rooms were 340,000 visits, which reflects a severe undercount of violence related medical treatment for children.

“This flood of visits to medical authorities each year by young crime victims means that our medical professionals need to know more about how to help, not only treating the

injuries but how to counsel children and their families about how to stay safe and how to get appropriate help from schools, therapists and child protection agencies,” says study lead author [David Finkelhor](#), professor of sociology and director of the CCRC.

Most of the medical visits were to treat injuries but some were to document harms and to seek supportive help for problems like bullying and sibling victimization. The violence responsible for these visits included gang violence, aggravated assault by peers, dating violence, sexual assault and parental abuse, with the largest category being simple assault by peers. Researchers say that children are the most crime-exposed segment of the population, experiencing serious assaults at twice the rate as adults.

“We should not be treating assaults as just a rite of passage for children,” says Finkelhor. “We need to build interpersonal safety into our education systems, our environments and prepare practitioners to provide resources on prevention and safety skills.”

[Heather Turner](#), professor of sociology and CCRC research associate, and sociology doctoral student Dierdre LaSelva were co-authors on the study. This research was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

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