

The Impact of Violence

NSF Award: [The Violence of "Small Wars," Poverty, and Health in Three Pastoralist Communities in Northern Kenya](#) (Western Michigan University)
[Collaborative Research: The Violence of "Small Wars," Poverty, and Health in Three Pastoralist Communities in Northern Kenya](#) (University of Arizona)

State: [Arizona](#), [Michigan](#), [International](#)

Congressional Districts: Arizona District 07, Michigan District 06

Research Areas: [People & Society](#)

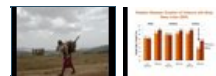
A research team studying three ethnic groups in northern Kenya has found that widespread violence poses a greater and qualitatively different threat to human wellness and dignity than extreme poverty.

Scientists, policymakers and humanitarian organizations have generally found it difficult to determine what the effects of violence are in communities whose residents are already stressed by poverty and severe weather. This research provides quantitative data that support the conclusion that living with endemic violence leads not only to grief, fear, injury and violent death, but also to more subtle but equally injurious costs in mental and physical health.

Researchers from the University of Arizona and Western Michigan University conducted intensive qualitative interviews and collected psychological, physical, dietary and socioeconomic health data in two village sites for each of three different Kenyan ethnic groups: The Pokot, the Samburu and the Turkana. Each pair of sites was culturally and economically comparable but distinct with respect to the degree of exposure to violence. Using this method, they found that emotional trauma was greatest in the community where violence was most recent, but adult nutritional status was worst in communities where exposure to violence was sustained for the longest time.

Overall, the researchers found that persistent violence compromises nutritional coping strategies in ways that are significant for health but often hidden from view. Food and psychological stress are increased by the daily need to create meals from food that must be collected in dangerous locations that are considered to be of lower and demeaning quality.

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