

# Poster Abstract 33

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## Title

The Effects of Cumulative Trauma on the Physical and Mental Health of Urban African American and Iraqi Refugee Adolescents

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## Abstract

**Aim:** The notion of childhood as a time of blissful innocence is, unfortunately, not a reality for many children in the United States and around the world. Many different groups of children and adolescents suffer cumulative trauma experiences, i.e., multiple, significant traumatic events and situations occurring repeatedly and over time. Youth who experience psychological trauma frequently have subsequent health and functioning difficulties. However, much of our current understanding of trauma is based on single event trauma that does not adequately represent the effects of cumulative trauma. The overall purpose of this project is to explore the cumulative effects of various types of violence exposure and trauma, on adolescents' mental and physical health as well as interpersonal, cognitive, behavioral, and academic functioning.

**Method:** The sample consisted of 390 adolescents, ages 11-16 from two different cultural groups with high violence/trauma risk: urban, low income African American teens who live in a high violence neighborhood in Detroit (N=180) and youth from Iraqi refugee families currently living in the U.S. (N=210). An innovative data collection method we termed "youth retreats" was used to collect data. Four day-long sessions (two days for African American and two days for Iraqi youth; approx. 100 youth each day) interspersed five hours of data collection with educational sessions (anti-drug, conflict resolution), crafts, fun activities, a magic show, pizza, and prizes. The teens were separated into 10 groups (five groups of girls; five of boys) and rotated to five different stations throughout the day. Cultural modifications were made to respect each population. Data analysis is now underway.

**Results and Conclusion:** Preliminary analyses show different trauma measures predicting differently for the two population groups. This presentation will focus on the effects of cumulative trauma on the mental and physical health of the adolescents in these two different cultural groups. Implications in terms of assessment and intervention will be discussed.

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