

**WBEZ News**

# Some Preschoolers In High-Risk Illinois Areas Aren't Getting Services

March 11, 2019



Susie An/WBEZ

**Updated 8 pm**

A new report shows government services and resources don't always match up with areas of high risk across Illinois when it comes to care and development of young children.

On Monday, the Erikson Institute, a graduate school in childhood development, offered a sneak peek of its "Illinois Risk and Reach Report." Per county, the report shows 15 risk indicators young children under 5 years old face, including poverty, maternal education, parental employment, homelessness, lead exposure, violence exposure and kindergarten readiness.

The analysis found 81 percent of counties had at least one high-risk indicator. Only 12 percent of counties had a low overall risk, while half the counties had either high or

“high-moderate” risk. About 68 percent of the state’s young children lived in counties that are considered high or high-moderate risk.

“This report is designed to be a much deeper understanding with a level of precision that does not exist about how our children are doing and what’s happening for our youngest children,” Geoffrey Nagle, President and CEO of the Erikson Institute, said at the City Club of Chicago.

But Nagle also noted that every county had at least two indicators that were low and “low-moderate.” For example, Cook County, which is considered to be at an overall high-moderate risk, is at low to low-moderate risk for child maltreatment and lead exposure. The county is at high risk when it comes to violence exposure.

The report overlays the risk factors with the government resources and services available in each county. It shows that high risk does not mean more services are offered.

“Cook, Kane, DuPage, DeKalb and Will, you see fairly good amount of higher quality care there for these subsidized children,” Nagle said. “But as we head south to Kankakee down to Vermillion, Edgar and Douglas and even Coles — all with moderate-high or high risk in the county — there’s no high quality childcare there available.”



Susie An/WBEZ

Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton joined members of the Erikson Institute, Metropolitan Family Services and the Irving Harris Foundation at City Club of Chicago on Monday. From left to right: Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton; Ric Estrada, CEO of Metropolitan Family Services; Phyllis Glink, executive director of the Irving Harris

Foundation; Cristina Pacione-Zayas of the Erikson Institute; and Geoffrey Nagle, CEO of the Erikson Institute.

The report also breaks down the state's 2018 budget and shows about 5 percent is dedicated to spending for families with young children. Less than 1 percent of that spending was allocated to mental health services.

Nagle hopes the new annual report will influence how lawmakers negotiate next year's state budget.

"For the first time you have the information to ask a lot more insightful, detailed questions about how the children and families are doing in your community so that you and your community can make much more informed and hopefully better decisions," Nagle said to a crowd of civic leaders.

Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton responded to the report by saying the state can't take a "one size fits all approach" when considering the budget for early childhood programs. She said the governor's administration will rely on community engagement to make these funding changes.

"Families, people who are caregiving, those who are with young people on the ground every single day, that policy is made from the ground up," Stratton said.

The Erikson Institute will release its full report on March 29.

*Susie An covers education for WBEZ. Follow her on Twitter [@WBEZeducation](#) and [@soosieon](#).*

*This story was updated to clarify statistics cited in the Erikson report.*

**#CHILD DEVELOPMENT**



Education news. In context.

FRESH DATA

# Across Illinois, littlest children face some form of ‘high risk,’ new report says

BY [CASSIE WALKER BURKE](#) - MARCH 11, 2019 - UPDATED MARCH 12, 2019



Illinois spends less than 5 percent of its budget on children under 5, two-thirds of whom live in counties where they face high risks to their health or early development, according to a first-of-its-kind report previewed at a civic luncheon Monday.

Introducing the report at a City Club luncheon for business and civic leaders, Erikson Institute CEO Geoffrey Nagle and his group’s policy director, Cristina Pacione-Zayas, said that 68 percent of children under 5 lived in counties that were flagged as “high” or “high moderate risk.” The translation: There’s work to do.

“The biggest takeaway, for me, is that risk factors are not concentrated to one geography — they are spread throughout the state,” said Pacione-Zayas, who was [just named to the Illinois State Board of Education by Gov. J.B. Pritzker](#). “It’s an opportunity to break assumptions we may have about particular

geographies and particular populations and it's an opportunity to really engage a broader group on how we address these issues."

The [Illinois Risk and Reach report](#) is the most detailed look yet at the health of the state's 945,000 children under 5 as well as the state's early education system. The report examines 15 risks and breaks down data by county and by legislative district. Risks measured include lead exposure, rates of violence and maltreatment, and substance abuse-related deaths of parents and guardians, as well as education metrics such as [kindergarten readiness](#) and health indicators for mothers and babies.

Among the data points examined is the high average cost of child care, which has reached [an annual statewide average of \\$13,747 a year](#), making Illinois one of the least affordable states for working parents. Backed by Erikson and a coalition of early education groups, the report — to be released in full on March 29 — comes at a pivotal time, just after Gov. J.B. Pritzker has proposed [boosting state spending on younger children by \\$100 million](#) as part of a larger \$594 million proposal. Now the Democratic legislature must decide whether to greenlight his plan or argue that money should be spent differently amid a \$3.2 billion budget deficit. Illinois' early learning programs are still clawing back from a two-year budget impasse that decimated many of them. The report spotlights dramatic discrepancies even between neighboring counties on such metrics as seats available in high-quality child care centers.

The report also spotlights some information that was previously little understood, such as participation rates in publicly funded mental health services and counseling programs for the state's youngest children. "We were so ecstatic when we were able to get this data," said Pacione-Zayas. Not only does the data show gaps, she said, it also helps us "figure out what can we learn from the geographies that have greater reach."

And it paints a more comprehensive picture than previously available of how money is spent or not — and which areas of the state benefit.

Illinois' new lieutenant governor, Juliana Stratton, a former state legislator, said at a panel discussion that the report underscored the broad need for more strategic investments, not just for low-income children of color.

"What we see in these maps," she said, "are risks to children all throughout the state."

Click on the video below to see a preview of the project. A [public webinar](#) will be offered on March 29.

*Editor's note: This story was updated to reflect that counties received an overall risk score, and that 68 percent of Illinois children lived in a county that scored "high" or "high moderate" risk.*

**By Cassie Walker Burke**

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## Rockford kicks off statewide initiative to fight crime by investing in early education

🕒 12:47 pm 📅 April 23, 2019

### TOP STORIES

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ROCKFORD (WREX) — Rockford Police, the Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office and local lawmakers helped launch a new initiative to put a focus on early childhood education to prevent crime.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois is a statewide, bipartisan organization of over 330 police chiefs, sheriffs, state's attorneys leaders of law enforcement organizations and survivors of violence.

Rockford law enforcement leaders and lawmakers kicked off the campaign Tuesday at Summerdale Early Learning Center.

Illinois spends more than \$2 billion per year incarcerating adults in state prisons and local jails, according to the organization. A report says expanding access to preschool could reduce the number of people incarcerated in the state and the costs associated with it.

"Addressing violent crime in Rockford is my number one priority," Rockford Police Chief Dan O'Shea said. "Beyond enhanced policing of our streets, we've also got to make sure we create a solid foundation for a safer tomorrow. That's what preschool for these children can do."

The report cites a longitudinal study of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, which found that children not served by the program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.

According to Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, if Illinois can reach a goal of serving 8 out of 10 of disadvantaged children with full-day preschool, the state could accrue nearly \$3 billion in societal benefits over their lifetimes.

The organization identified Winnebago County as a key geographic area to focus the program. An Erikson Institute report named Winnebago County as one of 12 "high-risk" counties in the state due to the number of children living in poverty. According to the report, more than half the at-risk children in the county are not currently being served by preschool, and only 22% of the incoming kindergarteners were assessed as demonstrating full readiness for school.

More than 160 members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois sent a letter to Gov. Pritzker and legislative leaders in February, urging a commitment to include at least \$250 million for early childhood infrastructure needs in any new capital bill. Members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids also support the Pritzker's proposal to increase the Early Childhood Block Grant by \$100 million for FY 2020.



Sen. Steve Stadelman (D) Rockford, Rep. Maurice West II (D) Rockford, Chief Dan O'Shea, Winnebago County State's Attorney Marilyn Hite Ross and Rep. John Cabello (R) Machesney Park read to students at Summerdale Early Learning Center to kick off the initiative.



**Breane Lyga**  
Content Manager

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Opinion**Letter: Winnebago County needs more early education**

Posted Apr 26, 2019 at 1:54 PM

Updated Apr 26, 2019 at 1:54 PM

Throughout Winnebago County, only about one out of four third-graders met math and language arts expectations in 2016-17. During the last school year in our county, almost four out of five incoming kindergarteners were rated by their teachers as unprepared for school.

These were among the findings of the “Illinois Risk and Reach” report on young children’s well-being, which the Erikson Institute recently shared with Transform Rockford. And these data are essential to understanding not only the challenges faced by youngsters and their families, but — on a broader scale — our workforce, employers and economy.

Numerous studies have repeatedly shown that, when kids struggle early in learning and life, their struggles too often continue. It’s much tougher for them to succeed in school, graduate on time, and fulfill their potential — including on the job. Ultimately, a lack of skilled workers poses costly problems for employers who must pay for extra training or recruiting.

Yet, we know from further studies what works: high-quality early care and education can set kids on a better and more productive path.

Fortunately, the Rockford area is home to many good preschool, child care and birth-to-3 services. But while the Risk and Reach report revealed Winnebago County has pre-K capacity for about 3,000 young children, it also noted the need for another 3,000 preschool slots.

To that end, we join other members of the ReadyNation network of business leaders in supporting further investments in our young children and future workforce.

In Springfield right now, there is bipartisan backing for extending the 2009 Early Childhood Construction Grants program in any new state building and infrastructure plans. The governor and State Board of Education have called for another substantial boost in preschool resources. And Illinois policymakers are weighing whether to extend child care assistance to several thousand more kids in low-income, working families.

All these ideas are good for kids, and good for our workforce and economy.

— LoRayne Logan, president/founder, Workplace Staff and Search, Rockford; Einar Forsman, president/CEO, Rockford Chamber of Commerce





DISAPPOINTING DATA

## In the second year of statewide assessment, three out of four Illinois children still aren't kindergarten ready

BY CATHERINE HENDERSON - 1 DAY AGO



PHOTO: Getty Images

More than three-quarters of Illinois children are still falling short on kindergarten readiness, according to data released Tuesday and collected statewide last fall.

This is the second year Illinois has implemented the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) — an observational assessment by teachers who log

developmental behaviors to gauge kindergarten readiness. Most of the data points saw slight increases of 1 to 5 percentage points [from the previous year](#).

“On the face of it, not much has changed,” said Geoffrey Nagle, CEO of the Erikson Institute, a Chicago organization studying childhood development. “For this kind of data to change statewide, you would have to do a statewide intervention ... if you want these numbers to change, we’re going to have to do something — invest in children, invest in supports for children and families.”

Illinois governor [J.B. Pritzker pledged \\$100 million](#) to early childhood education in his first budget, for 2019-20. However, Nagle said, given how comparatively little Illinois spends on preschoolers at the moment, it will take a more substantial investment to see results in an assessment like KIDS.

In 2017, Illinois spent an average of \$15,337 per student in K-12 but only \$3,306 for every Illinois child under age 6, according to the Risk and Reach Report from Nagle’s Erikson Institute; however, young children often cost more to educate because they need more adults in the room, Nagle said.

Teresa Ramos, vice president of policy and advocacy at Illinois Action for Children, an advocacy group connecting families and providers with funding, emphasized that KIDS is meant as a tool to illuminate the quality of early childhood more broadly, not judge kindergarten teachers or their districts.

“This is shining a flashlight on what is happening in the years before kindergarten,” Ramos said. “As we frame it in that way, it allows for teachers to see different things coming out of kids [in kindergarten] and be OK with that.”

Rather than an exam, KIDS records teachers’ observations when students perform tasks such as sharing materials, sorting objects, recognizing words, and raising a hand before speaking. Students were measured in three categories: social and emotional development, language and literacy development, and math. In order to be considered kindergarten ready, students had to demonstrate proficiency in all three, said Carisa Hurley, director of early childhood at the Illinois State Board of Education.

“Teachers are observing students, and they’re documenting their interactions and behaviors during the first 40 days of instruction,” Hurley said. “As children are going about their regular, everyday routines, they’re playing, they’re interacting with their peers, they’re doing schoolwork, and following directions. So they’re actually observing children in that environment so they can document what children’s abilities are.”

Hurley said the tool remained the same from last year to this year, but the state has provided more professional development and training for teachers to ensure accurate measurement.

Though Hurley cautioned against making year-to-year comparisons, she said districts can use KIDS data to recognize which communities need more support.

Low-income students receiving subsidized lunch were 16 percentage points behind their more affluent peers, demonstrating well-documented income disparities in access to early childhood education.

By race, only 19% of black students and 13% of Latinx students demonstrated kindergarten readiness, compared with 32% of their white peers. However, Nagle emphasized that all students need support at this point with such low numbers in all groups.

Across the state, 39% of kindergartners failed to demonstrate readiness in any category. Only 26% of students displayed behaviors across all three, considered kindergarten ready. More than half of students met the benchmarks in social and emotional learning, but in math, only one in three students were prepared, struggling to identify numbers, shapes and patterns.

“A large percentage of our kids are not ready for school,” Nagle said. “That should be completely unacceptable to everyone from any parent to every leader in the state... because this is an indicator of what the future of Illinois is, and right now the future is not looking bright.”

Almost 125,000 Illinois kindergartners, 89% of those enrolled in state kindergarten programs, were observed for the survey, developed by San Francisco-based WestEd, up from 81% last year. Nagle said both of these figures suggest the data provides a good snapshot of early learning in Illinois.

Still, only 30% of students are enrolled in state-funded preschool programs. In order to change access, Hurley said, the state needs to invest in more space in those programs, especially for low-income students.

For Ramos, the data highlights a lot of information she and other early childhood advocates already know — “We know there’s a lot of support that needs to happen in the earliest years of life... We know we need to focus on access to high-quality early childhood services from birth, and we know that we’re not investing enough as a state in those services.”

Ramos suggested districts connect with an array of early learning centers and childcare providers in their communities to help ease the transition to kindergarten, sharing KIDS data and doing joint training for early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers. Statewide, Nagle emphasized investing in home visiting, increased pay for child care workers, and paid parental leave.

But where these investments will come from is still unclear.

**By Catherine Henderson**    CHENDERSON@CHALKBEAT.ORG

# Chicago Tribune Articles

# Chicago Tribune

## DuPage Children's Museum ups its game after new report shows young children at risk, regardless of where they live



By KATE THAYER  
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| CHICAGO TRIBUNE |  
JUL 01, 2019 | 5:00 AM



Millie Parra, 2, and her nanny, Jordan Fugua, look at the fish swimming in the tank at the DuPage Children's Museum on June 27, 2019, in Naperville. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

After seeing a report on risks to children during the critical first five years of life, regardless of where they live, DuPage Children's Museum leaders are taking action.

Set to launch in October, "Second Sundays" will designate a day each month to provide museumgoers with information from social service agencies, invite in employers who have flexible work hours for parents, and offer free teeth cleanings, among other ideas, said Thomas Sullivan, director of education and programs at the Naperville museum.



The program is an expansion and reframing of an existing program, and was sparked after Sullivan and others read the “[Illinois Risk and Reach Report](#),” released this spring by the Erikson Institute — a Chicago graduate school that focuses on early childhood education — in collaboration with the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Fiscal Policy Center at Voices for Illinois Children.



Two-year-old Charlotte Cotten, of Plainfield, enjoys catching scarves as they jet out of a wind tunnel at the DuPage Children's Museum on June 27, 2019, in Naperville. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

The report showed that more than two-thirds of Illinois’ children live in counties with higher health and community risks that experts say could have a lasting and negative impact during their first five years of life.

While the museum is in DuPage County, its visitor base comes from several other surrounding counties, Sullivan said, and it’s important for the museum — especially because it’s geared toward children — to understand and serve its community.

“We’re helping to build your brain in this space,” he said. “We need to make sure that goes on all the time.”

While the museum now offers some informational social service vendors once a month on Thursday evenings, Sullivan said that after reading the report, leaders decided to expand the program to offer more services, and on a day with more attendance.

“Every museum could and should come out of what the community needs,” he said. “It’s a high priority for our museum ... to serve the community any way we can.”



Katie Miksula makes large bubbles while holding her 5-month-old son, Zachary Miksula, at the DuPage Children's Museum on June 27, 2019, in Naperville. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

The museum's response to the "Risk and Reach" report is an example of how the first-of-its-kind report for Illinois can make an impact, according to framers of the report. They say they hope other community leaders, legislators and advocates use the report to make shifts in how they serve families and children. Early childhood experts say well-placed supports from the time children are conceived through 5 years old are the best way to provide them with the best shot at a successful future.

"If we care about the future of this state, we need to give kids these supports," said Geoffrey Nagle, Erikson Institute president.

Using county data, the report assigned a level of risk, from low to high, for each county in the state in 15 areas, including poverty, child care cost, housing cost, drug overdose deaths, preterm births, maternal morbidity, violence exposure and kindergarten readiness. The assigned levels (high, high-moderate, low-moderate and low) are based on the county's data compared with the state average.

The report also measured each county's "reach" — supports that could assist those struggling with the risk factors. There are also racial breakdowns and information on how much government funding is going to certain programs included in the report.

Over all areas of risk, 51 of the state's 102 counties were high or high-moderate risk. More than 643,000 children age 5 and younger live in those counties, about 68 percent of the state's population in that age group, according to the report.



Two-year-old Agustina Lento plays with the water table at the DuPage Children's Museum on June 27, 2019, in Naperville. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

While those children are exposed to the most risks, the report also shows that no matter where you live, there's some sort of risk factor at play, Nagle said.

Cook County was rated high-moderate risk overall, across all categories, but not in each individual risk category. While children living in Cook are at a higher risk for some factors — like poverty, child care cost and violence exposure — the county was deemed lower risk in categories like homelessness, maltreatment (various forms of abuse) and lead exposure.

In nearby DuPage County, the overall risk level for children was low, according to the report. However, in the housing costs category, the risk was rated high.

"This report should ignite conversations across counties," said Cristina Pacione-Zayas, Erikson's director of policy.

She said she's been presenting the report to various groups in hopes that they'll use the information to tailor policy and programs to help the families they serve. "People have been hungry for something like this."

Karen Berman, director of Illinois policy at the Ounce of Prevention Fund — a nonprofit that offers early childhood programs — said programs that serve the youngest children have the greatest impact. Research shows the bulk of brain development happens in the first five years of life, most of it during the first three, she said.



Davis Elting, 4, and his brother John Elting, 7, play in the water area at the DuPage Children's Museum on June 27, 2019, in Naperville. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

“These investments are the best investments we can make, really, to have people on the right trajectory for success in school and life,” she said, adding, “Those investments are relatively low cost compared to if you don’t.”

While the state has recently pledged increases to early childhood spending, Berman said more is needed, and the “Risk and Reach” report is a good resource to use when deciding where to allocate funds.

“We tend to think we have these communities in Illinois, and those are the ones at risk,” she said. “But when you look at this report, you see that moving; in different parts of the state, you will have different risk factors and different reach.

“What is it that this community needs ... to make sure children and families have that equitable opportunities?”





**A-E**  
**Weather hushes**  
**chill summer vibes**  
 Outdoor resorts and events have been hit straight by one of the worst weather in Chicago history. Meanwhile, inside the Loop, people prepare emergency evacuation plans.



**CHICAGO SPORTS**  
**Djokovic wins fifth**  
**Wimbledon title**  
 Unlike Roger Federer in a nearly five-hour match, the Serb won and saved seven sets.

# Chicago Tribune



CHICAGO CALL & TELETYPE

MONDAY, JULY 10, 2017

READING ROOM AT CHICAGO TRIBUNE

## Trump attacks Dem women on Twitter

President tells 4 liberal freshmen to 'go back' to their countries

**BY FELICIA KENNEDY**  
**AND NICOLE DEBENE**  
 The Washington Post

**WASHINGTON** President Donald Trump said Sunday that four incoming liberal congresswomen who have been called out of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., should "go back and help the

country looker and crime national players from which they came," prompting other Democrats (including Pelosi) to rally to their defense.

Pelosi denounced Trump's remarks as "unacceptable remarks meant to divide our nation," while one of the freshmen Democrats, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of

New York, responded that "the country we all came to" is the United States.

Trump's remarks, made in a morning tweet, came as the outgoing Congress and the new freshmen members of either Democratic Rep. House Tuesday

See on Trump, Page 10



President Trump said four congresswomen should "go back and help the country looker and crime national players from which they came."

**Sandy: Population of children living in high-homicide areas has increased**



Children wait outside as police investigate a double shooting in the 3000 block of West 74th Street in Chicago.

## 'Staggering' number of kids exposed to violence

**BY PETER NICKLAS**

Over the month of July building, Weta Kinsler brought the children he saw here to a building where a law enforcement exhibit allowed visitors to learn about the police and what they do.

But the Kinslers, the parents of the children, and the staff of their program all agreed the children, Kinsler said, "they think the Kinslers for protection and through the program, they've learned more than just."

**"When you peel back the layers, the number of children exposed has increased in spite of being population."**

Chicago Police Dept. members are president of policy for the Kinsler Institute.

Kinsler works for the Friends of the Children program, monitoring at risk kids in Chicago's South and West Lawndale areas, which have experienced more homicides in recent years than almost every other community area in the city.

And while it's long been known that exposure to violence and trauma — even indirectly — has a negative impact on children, especially before the critical weeks age 5 begin, a new analysis by the Kinsler Institute suggests the problem might be getting

worse in Chicago.

The Institute found that more than the number of homicides in Chicago and its population dropped over the last five years, the number of children under the age of 5 living in high homicide areas had tripled.

In fact, about 10% of Chicago's youngest children lived in community areas where 10% of homicides took place, according to the analysis.

The Institute looked at three years of city of Chicago

See on Violence, Page 6

## Adviser skirts the rules on residency

Whitehouse school board president holds key role in Lighthizer's office

**BY JOHN STONE**  
**AND JOHN PIERCE JR.**

The Illinois, Chicago, resident who has been registered in the law firm's office in Whitehouse, N.J., where he is a partner, has been registered in the law firm's office in Whitehouse, N.J., where he is a partner, has been registered in the law firm's office in Whitehouse, N.J., where he is a partner.

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See on Violence, Page 6



7/15/2019

# Chicago Tribune

## ‘Staggering’ number of kids exposed to violence

Study: Population of children living in high-homicide areas has increased



Children wait outside as police investigate a double shooting in the 3000 block of West 25th Street in Chicago. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune 2017)

BY PETER NICKEAS

Over the Fourth of July holiday, Felix Kombwa brought the children he mentors to a festival where a law-enforcement exhibit allowed visitors to sit in a squad car, try on police gear and chat with officers.

But the fireworks, the presence of the officers and the sight of their weapons all scared the children, Kombwa said. They mistook the fireworks for gunshots and thought the guns, though holstered, were “too loud.”

<https://digitaledition.chicagotribune.com/html5/desktop/production/default.aspx?pubid=3e7227b1-e3b7-4fac-aa07-5f943e58b4c5> 1/3

Kombwa works for the Friends of the Children program, mentoring at-risk kids in Chicago's Austin and North Lawndale areas, which have experienced more homicides in recent years than almost every other community area in the city.

And while it's long been known that exposure to violence and trauma — even indirectly — has a negative impact on children, especially before the critical under-age-5 stage, a new analysis by the Erikson Institute suggests the problem might be getting worse in Chicago.

The institute found that even while the number of homicides in Chicago and its population dropped over the last few years, the number of children under the age of 5 living in high-homicide areas got bigger.

In fact, about 60% of Chicago's youngest children lived in community areas where 91% of homicides took place, according to the analysis.

The institute looked at three years of city of Chicago crime data and census demographic reports to estimate the number of children under the age of five 5 living in community areas with a greater-than-median number of homicides. The association was most stark in the Austin neighborhood, which, according to the Erikson study, had the most homicides of any community area in 2018 and the most children under the age of 5 in 2017, the most recent years with available data.

Officials with the Chicago-based Erikson Institute, which focuses on early child development, said their report underscores the need to address not just the roots of community violence but the trauma it causes for children who live in those areas. President and CEO Geoffrey Nagle said the number of children in Chicago exposed to gun violence is “staggering.”

And the trend is heading in the wrong direction, said Cristina Pacione-Zayas, associate vice president of policy for the institute.

“When you peel back the layers, the number of children exposed has increased in spite of losing population,” she said. “If we think math is bad now, we need to think of what it's going to look like 10 years, 15 years from now if these children live and we don't do types of interventions necessary to make sure they're set on course for optimal development in spite of this exposure.”

The percentage of the city's population of children under the age of 5 who live in areas with above-median number of homicides grew from about 54% during 2016 to 60% in 2018, Pacione-Zayas said.

For Friends of the Children, that intervention is done through long-term mentoring of some of the city's most vulnerable children. Each mentor spends at least four hours per week with eight children.

“We can't solve all of our kids' issues. ... Kids who have lots of trauma can act out and that's when they need the support,” said the program's executive director, Taal Hasak-Lowy. “If

there's one thing we know helps build resilience, it's a positive, consistent relationship with an adult."

Exposure to violence that early in life can have lifelong effects because so much of a child's development happens in the first five years. Children exposed to chronic violence can become fearful, demonstrate aggression, anxiety, depression and sadness, and have difficulty feeling secure, according to the institute.

Children can enter kindergarten having already learned to settle disputes with violence, Hasak-Lowy and Kombwa said. Friends of the Children aims to teach them other ways of solving disputes.

"There is a sense of violence in solving their problems. They want to fight instead of talk it out," Kombwa said. "There is a sense that this is what kids do, but sometimes it's a lot."

Erikson officials noted that exposure to violence doesn't necessarily mean eyewitnessing it, as young children are also affected by how their parents or other adults around them respond to violence.

"The adults in their lives know about (homicide), and children experience the world through their adult caretakers," Nagle said. "If a parent or caretaker is stressed or scared or fearful, even though they're trying to protect infants or toddlers, it doesn't mean it's not impacting what the child gets to do, or their interactions with the adult caregivers."

Brad Stolbach, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Chicago who's worked with childhood trauma patients for two decades, noted that the discussion of those effected by homicide often stops with the victims and their immediate family.

"Homicide has a major effect on people, and that one that often does get lost. We've become just bean counters and numb to the fact that one person gets killed, there are hundreds of people directly affected by that," Stolbach said.

The city had 577 homicides in 2018, 672 in 2017 and close to 800 in 2016, according to public city data.

"If it's a child who gets killed, everyone they go to school with, all their teachers, the family, people have families, every member of their family, extended family, their friend networks are affected," Stolbach said. "We just, we think about the total number of homicides and, 'Oh this is so terrible,' but we don't actually look at ... the value they have to the people who loved them. They're just a number."

The increase in the amount of children exposed to homicides comes even though the city's population is dropping and total number of homicides are edging downward. About 12,000 kids under the age of 5 live in communities that had more than 30 homicides in 2018, according to the study. Those were the Austin, Englewood and North Lawndale communities that year. About

55,000 children under the age of 5 lived in the 20 communities with more than 10 homicides in 2018.

The connection between early childhood adversity and negative health outcomes has been long known. A 1998 study of patients in the Kaiser Permanente health system in San Diego established a link between childhood adversity and poor health behaviors and outcomes, though that study didn't ask respondents about community violence. Research over the last 20 years, very often citing the 1998 study, has also established a link between negative outcomes and childhood exposure to things like domestic violence, substance abuse, incarceration of parents or the death of a parent.

"What we know is ... it impacts everything," said Colleen Cicchetti, executive director of the Center for Child Resilience at Lurie Children's Hospital. "The earlier the exposure, the worse."

"The science around the impact of trauma of the brain, and impact of science on early childhood, have come together to help us understand that exposure to trauma for kids who are younger can be more devastating," said Cicchetti, adding the brain is in its most active growth period before age 3, with ages 3 to 5 second.

"So the brain is developing the pathways that will become the foundation of growth and learning in multiple domains of growth going forward," she said.

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