

New Mississippi survey finds violence is widespread, often begins in childhood and is closely linked to economic hardship

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As in other states, violence is a common part of life for many Mississippians, often beginning in childhood and closely tied to economic instability and mental health challenges — patterns that extend well beyond what crime statistics alone capture, says a new statewide survey from Tulane University's [Newcomb Institute](#).

The [Mississippi Violence Experiences Survey](#) (MsVEX), the most comprehensive population-based assessment to date of Mississippians' experiences with physical violence, sexual violence and intimate partner violence across the lifespan, shows that physical violence is widespread among adults in the state.

An estimated half of all Mississippi adults — approximately 1.1 million people — have experienced physical violence in their lifetime, and more than one in five report exposure to gun violence.

The research, led by [Anita Raj](#), executive director of the Newcomb Institute alongside faculty from University of Mississippi Medical Center, also finds that exposure to violence often begins early in life. One in eight Mississippians experienced physical violence before age 13.

“Sexual violence, including harassment, coercion and assault, is widespread, particularly among women,” Raj said. More than half of Mississippi women — over 600,000 — report experiencing sexual harassment or assault during their lifetimes, as do more than one in four Mississippi men.

Other key findings include:

- Nearly one in four women report having experienced forced sex.
- One in 10 Mississippi adults experienced sexual violence during childhood, with higher prevalence among women than men. In the past year alone, one in 12 adults experienced sexual violence, most often sexual harassment.
- Intimate partner violence — including coercive control, physical violence and sexual assault — affects more than half of Mississippi adults over their lifetimes, including approximately 700,000 women and 530,000 men.
- One in four Mississippi women has experienced potentially lethal forms of intimate partner violence, such as choking, beating, burning or use of a weapon, placing women at four times the risk faced by men.
- In the past year, one in 20 Mississippi adults experienced intimate partner violence, including tens of thousands of women exposed to potentially lethal abuse.

MsVEX also highlights the close connection between violence and economic hardship.

“One in three Mississippians reported lacking enough money for food or basic needs in the past year, and those experiencing economic deprivation were two to three times more likely to experience recent physical violence, sexual violence or intimate partner violence,” Raj said.

Housing instability further increased risk. Mississippians who experienced eviction or homelessness in the past year were three to six times more likely

to experience violence.

Exposure to violence was also strongly linked to mental health outcomes. Adults who experienced violence in the past year were more than twice as likely to report severe depression or anxiety, while those who experienced intimate partner violence were four times more likely to report suicidal thoughts.

“These findings show that violence in Mississippi is not rare — it is widespread and deeply connected to economic and mental health conditions,” Raj said. “For women, violence often comes from a partner, and it can be life-threatening. The data underscore the need for prevention, economic stability and mental health support as core public health priorities.”

Unlike police reports, which capture only incidents reported to law enforcement, MsVEX documents lived experiences of violence, including forms that often go unreported. Researchers say the findings can help guide prevention efforts, inform state policy and strengthen services for survivors.

MsVEX is part of a broader initiative by the Newcomb Institute to provide state-specific, population-level data on violence across the lifespan to support evidence-based decision-making.

Statewide reports for California, Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi are available at www.vexdata.org.