



Children and Community Violence

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Background

- Substance abuse prevention grant 92-97
- Ex post facto study of children in grant and witnessing community violence (fights/robbery)
- Looked at how exposure to community violence affected aggression and self-control or being able to control behavior

Results:

- 497 children, mean age 10.4 years
- As exposure to violence increased, aggression increased and assertiveness and self-control decreased
- Self control increased with social support, family bonding, and, for girls, having close friends and school support
- Self control decreased for boys who experience more family arguments and who had a positive outlook on life



Present study

- Revisited same agency, Neighborhood Houses
- Changed measure of community violence
 - Added police and gang violence
- Included measures of psychological distress

Measures

- Nadel, Spellman, and Alvarez-Cannio Victimization Scale (Nadel, et al., 1996)
 - How often saw, had happen, perpetrated
 - four-point scales, “never” to “often.”
- Levonn: A Cartoon-Based Interview for Assessing Children’s Distress Syndrome, Richter, Martinez and Valla (1990)
 - Cartoon asking if child felt like character a lot, sometimes, never
 - Example of question--“Here Levonn is thinking about something scary he saw and even when he tries to forget it, he can’t stop thinking about it. How many times have you felt like Levonn?”



Characteristics of the Sample

- N = 162
- Children reside in north St. Louis City
- School grade 1-8, 30% in third grade
- 49% boys, 51% girls
- Age range from 7-13, average age 10 years
- 91% African American

Exposure to School and Neighborhood Violence

	School	Neighborhood
Hit	87%	62%
Beaten up	49%	36%
Attacked knife/sharp weapon	7%	12%
Threatened with gun	6%	16%
Shot at	NA	19%
Robbed	15%	22%
Killed	NA	12%

Victimization at School and in the Neighborhood

	School	Neighborhood
Hit	69%	35%
Kicked/shoved	56%	36%
Threatened knife/sharp object	13%	6%
Attacked knife/sharp weapon	3%	2%
Threatened with gun	5%	5%
Shot at	NA	4%
Robbed	9%	12%
In a fight	60%	37%

Exposure to Other Forms of Community Violence

■ Gang violence

- Hitting, 32%
- Pushing/shoving, 23%
- Seeing gang member kill someone, 10%

■ Police violence

- Hitting, 27%
- Pushing/shoving 27%
- Seeing police kill someone 5%

■ Heard about

- Hitting, 52%; fights, 49%; kicking, 43%; and pushing/shoving, 43%
- someone being killed, 20%



Exposure to Violence and Psychological Distress

- All forms of exposure significantly related to psychological distress except “witnessed violence at school”
- Witnessed school violence was the highest of all forms of exposure
- Although may seem paradoxical, consistent with other research and suggests a “numbing” effect
- Hearing about violence also had a significant effect, but not as strong as other forms

Exposure to Violence and Violent Behavior

Pearson Correlation Coefficients (all significant at $< .001$)

	Victim at school	Witness at school	Victim in neighborhood	Witness in neighborhood
Violent at school	.528	.335	.502	.376
Violent in the neighborhood	.505	.340	.547	.426




Gender and Age

- No gender effects in exposure to violence or violent behavior Older children exposed to more neighborhood violence, gang violence, secondary violence
- Older children more likely to be violent at school and in the neighborhood
- No overall gender or age differences in psychological distress

However:

- Girls more likely to develop psychological distress as result of exposure to neighborhood violence, police violence, and secondary violence
- Boys more likely to experience psychological distress as a result of victimization in the neighborhood and gang violence
- Older children more affected by victimization at school, victimization in neighborhood, gang violence, police violence, secondary violence – accumulation effect

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- Responses to trauma differ with age of child more than with type of trauma
 - Portnova, 2007 found:
 - Children 3-6 years:
 - 32% insomnia
 - 42% phobic
 - 16% psychopathic like
 - 5% depression



□ Children 7-11

- 40% insomnia
- 24% phobic (61% fear of going places)
- 10% depressed (87% sad about people who have died)
- 26% psychopathic like

Symptoms in children

- Repetitive and intrusive thoughts, especially when trying to sleep, (72%)
- Fears of dark, bad dreams, nightmares, waking during night or fear of monsters. (74%)
- Separation anxiety
- Often can't talk to parents or peers
- Phobic levels of avoidance
- Behavior disorders
- Depression follows PTSD,
- Dissociative features