Community Violence and Adolescent Development

An Examination of Risk and Protective Factors Among African American Youth

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This study measures the degree of exposure to violence through actual attack, witnessing violent events, and delinquent peer associations among 500 African American high school students in the state of Virginia. In seeking to account for problem behavior, attention is given to sociodemographic characteristics, exposure to guns and violence as risk factors, and the moderating effects of coping strategies utilized by African American adolescents. Relying on recent research examining the relationship between victimization events and problem behavior, the study examines the development of internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems (i.e., delinquency, anxiety, depression) in response to violent victimization and emphasizes the emotional adjustment among African American youth exposed to violence. Findings suggest a linkage between the indicators of exposure to violence, problem behavior, and coping strategy among youth. Implications for future research are addressed.

***Keywords**: victimization; youth violence; coping strategies*

Recent studies of youth violence have suggested that juveniles between the ages of 12 and 17 have the highest rates of victimization for both crimes of violence and crimes of theft (Heavside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). In 1994, juveniles were almost 3 times as likely as adults to experience a crime-related injury, although the rates of injury that required hospitalization were similar. Furthermore, per-

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sonal crimes with juvenile victims occurred most often in school or on school property (Heavside et al., 1998; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). With regard to gun victimization, studies have also shown that a gun was used in one in four serious violent offenses against juveniles in 1994. Nationwide, the prevalence of weapon carrying on school property is 8.5%, and 7.4% of students have reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). Overall, minority and male students are more likely to miss school because they feel unsafe and are more likely to carry guns. A significantly higher proportion of minorities and males are also more likely to report threats or injuries with weapons on school property (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). Studies of adolescent delinquent behavior have also shown that males are more likely to be involved in antisocial and deviant activities than females (Liu & Kaplan, 1999). Hence, although research studies have persuasively demonstrated a general decline in the overall crime rate, they have also suggested an increase in violence-related behaviors on school property, as evidenced in the numbers of juveniles reporting fear of victimization and subsequent gun ownership (e.g., see Chandler, Chapman, Rand, & Taylor, 1998; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1999; George & Thomas, 2000; Hoffman & Cerbone, 1999; Joseph, 1995; Kingery, Coggeshall, & Alford, 1999; Liu & Kaplan, 1999; Springer & Padgett, 2000; Wright, Caspi, Moffitt, Miech, & Silva, 1999). In 1997, far more youths were involved in violent behavior that did not result in arrest, and many researchers have argued that the scope and diversity of youth violence is even greater (Cornell, Loper, Atkinson, & Sheras, 1999).

Although recent incidents of youth victimization on school grounds place the issue of gun violence within a larger social context, studies of the serious negative effects of violence on the mental health of American youth remain relatively scarce. Research continues to indicate that the experiences of children in schools reflect the availability and attitudes toward firearms within children's families and communities, although the serious effect of firearm injuries and violence on children and youth is reflected in self-reports of victimization and the extent to which they witness violent events (Alvarez & Bachman, 1997; Finkelhor, 1997; Kaljee, Stanton, Ricardo, & Whitehead, 1995; Shapiro, Dorman, Burkey, Welker, & Clough, 1997; Warner & Weist, 1996). Thus, children who are exposed to violence as either victims or wit-

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nesses experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, and emotional distress, all of which can impair individual development (i.e., including self-esteem) and educational achievement (Dekovic, 1999; Jang & Thornberry, 1998; Shapiro et al., 1997). Dekovic (1999), for example, argued that the context of development and importance of the factors that affect development changes with age. Findings from her study of internalizing (i.e., depression, anxiety) and externalizing (i.e., delinquency) problem behaviors suggest that association with delinquent peers is the strongest predictor of all negative activities among adolescents. Furthermore, her research emphasized the importance of considering multiple factors as adjustment outcomes among youth exposed to violence. Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996) found that the duration of children's victimization experiences was directly related to the extent of school adjustment problems, whereas Egan and Perry (1998), in a study of self-regard and victimization, found that the experience of being victimized decreased self-regard over time among a sample of youth. Similarly, studies have shown an increased connection between high levels of exposure to violence and indicators of poor adjustment, including depression, anxiety, and antisocial behavior (e.g., Berman, Silverman, & Kurtines, 2000; Compas, Malcaine, & Fondacaro, 1998; Cooley, Boyd, Frantz, & Walsh, 2001; Henry, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 2001; McGee, 2000, 2001; Schwab-Stone et al., 1999; Stolzenberg & Stewart, 2000; Weist, Acosta, & Youngstrom, 2001).

With regard to mental health issues, additional studies based on children raised in communities in which violence occurs have shown that direct encounters with violence (either as a victim or witness) increase the likelihood of experiencing anxieties, depression, social withdrawal, and difficulties in concentrating (Garbarino, 1996; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993. Research has also suggested that traumatic events experienced prior to age 11 are 3 times more likely to result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than those experienced after the age of 12. Springer and Padgett (2000), in a study of exposure to violence and PTSD symptomatology, found that direct victimization in the community and the home was associated with PTSD symptoms for a total sample of adolescents. Although males were more likely to report direct victimization experiences, the findings also showed that females experienced more PTSD symptoms. For males, witnessing violence at school predicted PTSD sympotomatology, whereas for females, it was the witnessing violence in the community that was predictive of PTSD symptoms (Springer & Padgett, 2000). Their results suggest the importance of examining gender differences with regard to violence exposure and emotional adjustment. In addition to PTSD, issues of desensitization and addiction to danger are often raised in discussions of continual exposure to violence among children and adolescents (see Garbarino, 1996).

The Urban Stress and Mental Health Model developed by Hector F. Myers (1989) suggests that African American youth are particularly vulnerable to the effects of violence exposure because of stress-inducing factors, as well as factors relating indirectly to issues of oppression and racism (i.e., class oppression, proliferation of drugs, the use of violence to resolve interpersonal conflicts). Myers, Taylor, Alvy, Arrington, and Richardson (1992) also argued that most socially distressing indicators of mental health problems among Black youth are the statistics reflecting the extent to which juvenile delinquency and violence have become a way of life. In many instances, continual exposure to violence is predictive of serious delinquency among youth. Research has also suggested that during childhood, low socioeconomic status serves as one of many environmental factors that can contribute to delinquency and school dropout (Covington, 1997; Mahiri, 1997; McLoyd, 1998; Sampson, 1998; Tolan & Guerra, 1998; Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2000). Therefore, the presence of "structural violence" in many communities can perpetuate systems of inequality, including poverty and unemployment, both of which can severely affect child development and influence behavioral problems among youth. With regard to individual adaptation to violence, Sampson (1998) argued that although issues of childhood development are rarely addressed in the social science literature, structural factors such as poverty, violence, and residential instability can explain variations in crime and delinquency among youth. In this regard, delinquency emerges early in the life-course, remains relatively stable over time, and is an important component to the empirical connection between child health and development (Sampson, 1998). Although many are able to avoid problem behavior despite increased exposure to violence, research also suggests that a substantial number of at-risk youth are unable to adapt to such situations and are more likely to experience school failure and to participate in crime (e.g., see Elliott, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998; Simons, Johnson, Beaman, Conger, & Whitbeck, 1996). Thus, the behavior of children in and around schools is strongly influenced by social and psychological influences out of school, prompting many researchers to argue that the propensity for violence and involvement in delinquency is influenced by the desire of many youth to protect themselves from victimization by carrying guns (Davis, 1999; Lawrence, 1998; Mercy & Rosenberg, 1998; Vaughan et al., 1996).

In one of the studies of community violence and coping strategies, Kliewer, Lepore, Oskin, and Johnson (1998) argued that violence has implications for school performance, social relationships, and the overall quality of a child's life. Emphasis is placed on global distress, depressive symptoms, and the extent to which social relationships moderate the associations between intrusive thinking and internalizing symptoms among inner-city

youth who have been exposed to violence. Results of their interviews with mothers and children indicate that children with high levels of violence exposure and inadequate social support had the highest levels of intrusive thoughts about violence and further suggest that children cope better with violence when social support and opportunities to discuss violent experiences are present (Kliewer et al., 1998). In a related study, Kliewer and Kung (1998) found that higher levels of family adaptability protected inner-city children from the affect of daily stressors, which, in turn, cause negative outcomes such as behavioral problems, anxiety, depression, and school difficulties. A third study examining predictors of threat perceptions in response to everyday situations revealed a relationship between threat perceptions and coping behavior, measured in terms of active support seeking, distraction, and avoidance coping (see Kliewer, Fearnow, & Walton, 1998).

Adjustment studies have indicated that although there is no single source of resilience or vulnerability, the effect of environmental influences plays an integral role in this process (e.g., see Farrell & Bruce, 1997; Hill & Madhere, 1996; Reynolds & Richmond, 1997; Schwab-Stone et al., 1999; Steele et al., 1999; Stiffman, Hadley-Ives, Elze, Johnson, & Dore, 1999). Studies of coping strategies and behavior problems among inner-city youth have suggested that reliance on avoidant- or emotion-focused coping is associated with distress and behavioral problems, whereas problem-focused or active coping is associated with positive behavioral outcomes. Compas et al. (1998) argued that little research has been conducted linking coping to behavioral problems among youth at risk and found variability in coping strategy due to differences in resources available. Their results showed a distinction between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies utilized by youth. Their findings suggest the importance of familial and social patterns that may influence the coping strategies used by inner-city youth to protect themselves from daily stressors such as chronic violence. Other researchers have noted that although some symptoms such as fear and anxiety may be considered normal among youth exposed to increased levels of violence, these reactions have long-term consequences for social, emotional, and cognitive development (e.g., see Berman et al., 2000).

Findings of the current study are based on the results of research to estimate the extent of violent victimization among inner-city youth in Virginia. There were more than 15,000 juvenile arrests for violent crimes in Virginia in 1997, a rate of approximately 2.7 arrests for every 100 youth ages 12 to 17. Regarding victimization, Virginia youth are hospitalized for assaults at the rate of 17.1 per 100,000 (Cornell et al., 1999). More than 20% of all Virginia deaths to persons under the age of 20 are homicides, generating a rate of 4.7 deaths per 100,000. Furthermore, many children and adolescents from

impoverished backgrounds have social, academic, and family experiences that not only affect their development but can also encourage delinquent or criminal behavior (Cornell et al., 1999). Thus, this article presents a discussion of the effects of violence on adjustment outcome and provides information on the effect of inner-city violence on behavioral problems among inner-city youth in Virginia. Emphasis is placed on the need for increased intervention in the lives of youth at risk of community and school violence. Thus, the study addresses the following questions based on survey data collected from 500 African American youth:

- What effects do sociodemographic factors have on the emotional adjustment of high school students (i.e., internalizing and externalizing outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and delinquency)?
- What affect does exposure to violence as a risk factor have on the emotional adjustment of urban high school students (i.e., internalizing and externalizing outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and delinquency)?
- What effect does coping strategy as a protective factor have on the development of problem behaviors (both externalizing and internalizing) among youth? Is there a moderating effect of coping on risk factor with regard to adjustment outcome (problem behavior)?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The analyses reported are based on responses to self-administered questionnaires completed by 500 youth between the ages of 12 and 18 in the state of Virginia. Census tract data were utilized to obtain a stratified sample selected from various school, church, and community organizations that service youth in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. Each participating organization serviced inner-city youth in after-school programs. In each instance, students who participated in the youth organizations attended inner-city schools that had encountered gun-related violence (as victims, perpetrators, or bystanders) out of school. Parental income, educational, and occupational status served as measures of the adolescents' socioeconomic background. Surveys were distributed to 20 to 30 youth at a time during group sessions. The survey was introduced to students as a study of youth violence in the state of Virginia.

Exposure to Violence and Victimization Measures

Participants completed the Survey of Children's Exposure to Community developed by Richters and Saltzman (1990). This instrument assesses the frequency with which children and adolescents have been victimized by, have

witnessed, or have heard about 20 forms of violence and violence-related activities in the school and community, excluding media exposure (see also Richters and Saltzman, 1990). The survey has been used in studies examining the effects of violence on low-income school children. Students are asked to rate how frequently they have been exposed to violence at home (i.e., "I have seen a gun in my home"), as a victim (i.e., "somebody threatened to shoot me"), and as a witness (i.e., "I have seen a dead body"). Other items pertaining to a general knowledge of violence occurring in schools and neighborhoods are also included.

Adjustment Outcome Measures

The assessment of adjustment included analyzing responses to instruments measuring development outcomes (i.e., self-esteem, depression, anxiety, school achievement, and delinquency) including the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI), the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS), and additional instruments measuring school achievement and delinquency.

The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents developed by Susan Harter (1988) reflects the concerns of adolescents relating to self-worth and competence. The adolescent is first asked to decide which kind of teenager is most like him or her and then asked whether this is only sort of true or really true of him or her. According to Harter (1988), this type of format ensures that adolescents are giving accurate self-perceptions rather than socially desirable responses. For the current study, perceptions of scholastic competence, physical appearance, social acceptance, and global self-worth were used to address issues of self-esteem.

Depression as an Outcome Measure

Kovacs's (1980) CDI is the most widely cited self-report childhood depression scale. The CDI is a 27-item instrument in which youth are asked to endorse descriptions that best apply, and results are used to assess cognitive, affective, and behavioral symptoms of childhood depression. Evidence suggests that this scale reliably discriminates between clinically depressed and nondepressed psychiatric patients (Kovacs, 1980). Anxiety was measured using the RCMAS, which has been widely used to define the nature and relationships of manifest anxiety in children. The 28-item anxiety scale has been shown to have an internal consistency reliability greater than 0.80 and good convergent validity (see Reynolds & Richmond, 1997). All 28 items were retained from the revised version and will include responses such as, "I wake up scared some of the time," and, "I don't remember things too well."

The measure of student performance was the response by the student to a question that asks for the selection of a category that represents the usual grade the student receives (i.e., mostly A's, about half A's and B's, and so forth). Research has suggested that grades, unlike scores on intelligence tests and measures based on standardized achievement tests, provide the most appropriate measure of school performance (see Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). Finally, delinquency was measured by self-report responses to three offense-type indicators developed by Jang and Thornberry (1998), which includes a 14-item property crime index, a 6-item violent crime index, and a 3-item status offense index.

Coping Strategies

Participants also completed a 54-item coping inventory developed by Wills (1986). Each item is rated on a 5-point scale indicating the frequency with which a particular coping strategy is used for handling specific problems. An orthogonal factor analysis was conducted by the author to produce 11 factors, including problem-solving coping, cognitive coping, adult social support, peer social, parental support, substance use, physical exercise, aggression, social entertainment, individual relaxation, and prayer. Of particular importance is Wills's use of predominately African American adolescents in the sample, addressing the fact that the coping strategies used by these youth may differ from those used by others given different life experiences. The 54-item coping measure has been shown to have high test-retest reliability, whereas correlations have provided support for the validity of the adolescents' self-reports.

Factor loadings for the current project created two primary factors from the inventory: problem-focused/social support (positive ways of coping) and emotion-focused/avoidance (negative ways of coping). The first factor, problem-focused/social support coping, explained 29% of the variance, whereas the second factor, emotion-focused coping, explained 11% of the variance. Thus, 40% of the total variance was explained by these two factors. Additional survey items were combined to create the following scales: indirect victimization such as witnessing events (16 items, $\alpha = .83$), direct victimization (11 items, $\alpha = .77$), peer delinquency (7 items, $\alpha = .80$), property-related delinquency (12 items, $\alpha = .84$), violent delinquency (6 items, $\alpha = .77$), low self-esteem or self-rejection (3 items, $\alpha = .72$), anxiety (27 items, $\alpha = .87$), and depression (21 items, $\alpha = .83$). For multivariate analyses with interaction terms, items were further combined to create a risk factor index (indirect victimization, direct victimization, and peer delinquency, 27 items, $\alpha = .88$), an internalizing behavior index (anxiety and depressive symptoms, 48 items, $\alpha = .92$), and an externalizing behavior index (property-related and violent

delinquency, 18 items, $\alpha = .89$). To reduce problems with multicollinearity, the components of the interaction terms were standardized before multiplication. An inspection of the variance inflation factors reveals that multicollinearity is not a problem. In particular, none of the inflation factors exceeds 4.00, the cutoff point commonly accepted as an indication of multicollinearity problems (Fox, 1991).

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table 1 presents descriptive data on the sociodemographic characteristics of the student sample. Representative of inner-city students nationally, the sample was 86% Black and fewer respondents were White, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and other. Most students were 15, and the modal grade level was 9. Of the students, 52% were male. The common living arrangement included mother only (47%), followed by both parents (32%). Of the students, 16% were employed.

Table 2 suggests that the number of students directly victimized was consistent with previous studies (Heavside et al., 1998; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999) in that 24% have been asked to get involved with illegal drug dealing, 30% have been threatened with serious harm, 12% have been beaten up or mugged, 10% have been attacked with a knife, and 4% have been shot at with a gun. Significant gender differences exist for direct victimization experiences, including being chased by gangs, drug dealing, and violent attacks. In most instances, males were more likely to report higher levels of victimization. Females, however, were more likely to report muggings and attacks with guns.

Table 3 indicates that higher rates of indirect victimization (witnessing) exist for the sample when compared to direct victimization. For example, 47% have seen someone being chased by gangs, 69% have seen people using or selling illegal drugs, 68% have seen someone being threatened with serious physical harm, 65% have seen someone being beaten or mugged, whereas 22% have heard the sound of gunfire when they were near or in school. Regarding gender differences, males were more likely to report seeing people using or selling drugs and hearing gunfire in or near school, whereas females were more likely to report seeing people being chased by gangs and seeing someone being beaten or mugged.

Results in Table 4 also suggest that many of the respondents' friends were involved in property- and violence-related activities, with 36% reporting that their friends have stolen items, and 54% reporting that their friends have hit others with the idea of hurting them. Furthermore, 29% of the sample reported that they have seen their friends attack someone with the idea of seriously hurting them.

TABLE 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Student Sample

Description	*% Male*	*% Female*	*% Total*	N
What grade are you currently in?				
6th	5	13	9*	43
7th	16	13	15	69
8th	19	16	17	81
9th	21	19	21	98
10th	15	18	16	77
11th	20	14	17	79
12th	4	7	5	27
How old are you?				
12	10	22	16***	74
13	17	16	16	76
14	17	16	17	77
15	18	21	20	91
16	22	7	15	69
17	11	14	12	58
18	5	4	4	19
Which of the following best describes your current living situation?				
Mother and father	32	31	32	147
Mother only	45	49	47	218
Father only	7	5	6	27
Relatives	9	4	7	31
Foster home	0	2	1	4
Place by myself	2	2	2	10
Other	5	7	5	30
Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic group?				
White	4	1	3*	13
Black	84	88	86	403
Hispanic	1	1	1	7
Asian	1	4	2	11
Native American	6	2	4	18
Other	4	4	4	19
In addition to going to school, do you also work at a paying job?				
No	81	87	84	389
Yes, less than 20 hours a week	8	10	9	40
Yes, more than 20 hours a week	11	3	7	35

* = the relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level. ** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level. *** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level.

TABLE 2
Exposure to Violence and Youth Crime: Direct Victimization

Description	*% Male*	*% Female*	*% Total*	N
During the past year:				
Have you been chased by gangs or older kids?	26	14	20***	465
Have you ever been asked to use illegal drugs?	42	39	41	469
Have you ever been asked to get involved in any part of selling or giving out illegal drugs?	25	23	24**	459
Has your house ever been broken into when you weren't home?	15	19	17	469
Have you ever been threatened with serious physical harm?	32	28	30	472
Have you ever been slapped, punched, or hit by someone?	40	52	56	472
Have you ever been beaten up or mugged?	10	14	12**	472
Have you ever been attacked or stabbed with a knife?	12	9	10**	472
Have you ever been shot with a gun?	2	5	4**	468

* = the relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level. ** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level. *** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level.

Regarding personal violence and property-related activities, findings in Table 5 indicate a slightly higher rate of involvement in violent activities such as hitting others (55%) and throwing objects at people (50%) when compared to property-related activities such as damaging property (34%), setting fire to houses and cars (16%), and theft (17%). Regarding weapons usage, fewer students have reported committing crimes using guns or weapons to hurt or kill someone or to force people to give them money or other items (17% and 8%, respectively). As with previous studies, significant differences in gender suggest that males are slightly more likely to report involvement in both property and violent crimes, although females were more likely to report throwing objects such as rocks or bottles at people (Dekovic, 1999; Liu & Kaplan, 1999). This finding is consistent with Liu and Kaplan's (1999) argument that in some instances, males and females engage in similar delinquent activities.

Table 6 presents the bivariate correlations between measures: three risk factors, two protective factors, and four measures of problem behavior. As expected, protective factors involving problem-focused coping are nega-

TABLE 3
Exposure to Violence and Youth Crime: Indirect Victimization (Witnessing)

Description	*% Male*	*% Female*	*% Total*	N
During the past year:				
Have you seen someone get chased by gangs or older kids?	41	55	47***	467
Have you seen people using or selling street (illegal) drugs?	75	66	69***	464
Have you seen someone try to force their way into somebody else's house or apartment?	35	42	38	464
Have you seen someone being picked up, arrested, or taken away by the police?	87	86	87	462
Have you seen someone threatened with serious physical harm?	67	70	68	461
Have you seen someone getting beaten up or mugged?	64	67	65**	464
Have you seen someone carrying or holding a gun or knife?	60	59	60	455
Have you heard the sound of gunfire outside when you were in or near school?	28	16	22***	471
Have you seen someone get shot with a gun?	25	26	25	463
Have you seen a dead body somewhere in the community?	10	15	13	463

* = the relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level. ** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level. *** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level.

tively related to risk factors, whereas those strategies involving emotion-focused coping are positively related to risk factors. It is worth noting that problem-focused coping strategy decreases the likelihood of youth engaging in externalizing behaviors such as delinquency but is not significantly associated with internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression. In contrast, emotion-focused coping not only increases the likelihood of youth engaging in externalizing behaviors such as delinquency but is positively associated with anxiety. These findings suggest the importance of making a conceptual distinction between problem- and emotion-focused coping and operationalizing them with distinct measures. They also suggest the need and direction for increasing the quality and strength (validity) of measures of coping and adjustment outcome among youth exposed to violence.

To examine the importance of risk and protective factors for externalizing and internalizing problems, hierarchical multiple regressions were used. Age

TABLE 4
Peers, Weapons, and Exposure to Violence Among Student Sample

Description	*% Male*	*% Female*	*% Total*	N
Have your friends ever stolen something worth more than $50?	41	31	36	466
Have your friends ever damaged or destroyed someone else’s property on purpose?	56	58	57	466
Have your friends ever used a weapon or force to get money or things from people?	29	25	27	466
Have your friends ever attacked someone with a weapon with the idea of seriously hurting them?	32	26	29	466
Have your friends ever hit someone with the idea of hurting them?	54	55	54	439

* = the relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level. ** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level. *** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level.

and gender were entered first, followed by protective factors. In the third step, risk factors were entered. Consistent with previous research on gender differences and problem behavior, results in Table 7 show that females are more likely to exhibit internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression, whereas males are more likely to exhibit externalizing symptoms such as delinquency. Younger students are also more likely to exhibit externalizing symptoms. However, age has no effect on internalizing symptoms. When entered in the next steps, both protective factors and risk factors add a significant amount to the explained variance in problem behavior, although protective factors are more to likely to explain externalizing behaviors when compared to internalizing symptoms. Risk factors are substantial predictors of both internalizing and externalizing problems, with direct victimization being the best predictor of internalizing symptoms. In addition, protective and risk factors significantly predicted the degree of experienced externalizing problems. Among the protective factors, emotion-focused coping has the largest beta for externalizing problems, although neither strategy is significantly related to internalizing factors.

In sum, in addition to age and gender, risk and protective factors assessed in the present study explained a significant amount of variance in adolescent problem behavior. Regarding externalizing problems, the most important factors are emotion-focused coping and direct victimization, although direct victimization is the best predictor of internalizing problem behaviors. As noted earlier, coping strategy is not significantly related to internalizing behaviors.

TABLE 5
Personal Violence- and Property-Related Activities Among Student Sample

Description	*% Male*	*% Female*	*% Total*	N
Property-related offenses				
Have you ever taken a car for a ride without the owner's permission?	10	7	8***	463
Have you damaged, destroyed, or marked up somebody else's property on purpose?	35	32	34	463
Have you used or tried to use a credit card, bank card, or automatic teller card without the owner's permission?	9	0	5***	472
Have you tried to cheat someone by selling them something that was not what you said it was or that was worthless?	39	26	32**	463
Have you tried to sell or buy things that were stolen?	32	14	24***	466
Have you tried to steal or actually stolen money or things worth more than $50?	19	14	17*	469
Have you gone into or tried to go into a building to steal or damage something?	23	14	19***	469
Have you set a fire on purpose or tried to set fire to a house, building, or car?	19	13	16*	469
Violent offenses				
Have you hit someone with the idea of hurting them?	55	54	55*	469
Have you thrown objects such as rocks and bottles at people?	45	55	50**	466
Have you attacked someone with a weapon with the idea of seriously hurting them?	18	16	17*	469
Have you been in gang or posse fights?	21	25	23	472

* = the relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level. ** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level. *** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level.

The next set of analyses involved the possible moderating role of protective factors. Results in Table 8 again show significant gender and age differences regarding externalizing problems, although gender is the only significant sociodemographic predictor of internalizing problems. In each instance, risk factor index is the best predictor of problem behavior among adolescents. The significant main effects of protective factors and risk factor index indicate that these factors play an independent (additive) role in adolescents' adjustment. The significant interactions indicate a moderating effect of pro-

TABLE 6

Correlations Between Violence Exposure, Delinquent Behavior, Anxiety, Depression, and Coping

Variable	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*
1. Indirect victimization		.674**	.632**	.538**	.696**	.292**	.141*	–.157*	.304	.633**	.121
2. Direct victimization			.555**	.626**	.659**	.320**	.259**	–.040	.294**	.600**	.435**
3. Peer delinquency				.524**	.651**	.411**	.187**	–.299**	.245**	.598**	.422**
4. Nonviolent delinquency					.824**	.213*	.060	–.313**	.368**	.973**	.215**
5. Violent delinquency						.301**	.097	–.251**	.413**	.933**	.298**
6. Symptoms of anxiety							.568**	.056	.255**	.303**	.911**
7. Symptoms of depression								–.071	–.123	.067	.856**
8. Problem-focused coping									.030	–.240**	.124
9. Emotion-focused coping										.434**	.144
10. Delinquency scale (externalizing)											.249*
11. Anxiety/depression scale (internalizing)											

* = the relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level. ** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level. *** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level.

TABLE 7
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Adolescent Problem Behavior From the Specific Risk Factor and Protective Factor Measures

	Externalizing Symptoms		*Internalizing Symptoms*	
Step/Predictor	β	R^2	β	R^2
Demographic variables		.021		.029
Age	–.115*		–.150	
Sex	–.106*		.192*	
Protective factors		.270		.063
Problem-focused coping	–.285***		.096	
Emotion-focused coping	.431***		.122	
Risk factors		.535		.308
Indirect victimization	.201***		.315**	
Direct victimization	.372***		.807***	
Delinquent peers	.267***		.257*	

* = the relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level. ** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level. *** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level.

TABLE 8
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Adolescent Problem Behavior From the Specific Risk Factor Index and Protective Factor Scores

	Externalizing Symptoms		*Internalizing Symptoms*	
Step/Predictor	β	R^2	β	R^2
Demographic variables		.021		.029
Age	–.115*		–.150	
Sex	–.106*		.192*	
Protective factors		.270		.063
Problem-focused coping	–.285***		.096	
Emotion-focused coping	.431***		.122	
Risk factor index	.716***	.513	.260*	.068
Interaction terms		.433		.061
Risk × problem-focused	–.313***		.178	
Risk × emotion-focused	.518***		.162	

* = the relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level. ** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level. *** = the relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level.

tection, that is, protective factors have a different effect on behavior of higher and lower risk groups, further suggesting that an increase in problem-focused coping decreases the positive effect of risk factors on externalizing problem

behaviors, whereas an increase in emotion-focused coping increases the positive effect of risk factors on externalizing problem behaviors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Findings of this research study suggest a linkage between victimization, coping, and development among African American youth exposed to danger. They also suggest the need for further exploration of additional measures of coping and emotional development to examine the strength of these associations. Regarding gender, the study's results indicate the importance of continued examination of community- and school-based preventions focusing on the specific needs of students exposed to danger. For males, the effects of victimization have a stronger influence on the development of externalizing problem behaviors such delinquency, whereas females are more likely to exhibit internalizing symptoms indicative of PTSD resulting from violence exposure. The findings also suggest that coping strategies differ significantly between males and females, further indicating the need to explore violence-prevention programs across multiple domains (Springer & Padgett, 2000).

The research investigated the relationship between exposure to violence, coping strategy, and problem behavior in a representative sample of African American youth. The study found that direct victimization, as a measure of exposure to violence, was the best predictor of problem behaviors, both internalizing and externalizing. Problem-focused coping strategy was negatively related to externalizing problem behaviors such as delinquency, whereas emotion-focused coping strategy was positively related to externalizing problem behaviors such as delinquency. Results show little support for the role of coping strategy as a predictor of internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Results also suggest that coping strategy has a moderating effect in that the overall effect of coping variables on (externalizing) problem behaviors differed by levels of risk among groups of adolescents. Thus, the use of problem-focused coping reduces the positive effect of risk factors on externalizing problem behaviors such as delinquency, whereas the use of emotion-focused coping increases the positive effect of risk on externalizing problem behaviors such as delinquency. These results do not suggest that protective factors such as emotion and problem-focused coping are less relevant for internalizing problem behaviors such as anxiety and depression. In contrast, the results indicate that these coping strategies have a greater affect on externalizing problem behaviors. Thus, there is evidence to suggest that prevention programs aimed at strengthening protective factors would be more effective in reducing risk factors by considering variations in coping strategies utilized by adolescents. Compas et al. (1998), for example, argued that all strategies used by adolescents exposed to stressful events

should be considered, including those suggesting effective coping as well as those suggesting maladaptivity.

These analyses are based on a race-homogenous design consisting of data collected from African American youth residing in areas plagued with violence and crime. With regard to social class, research indicates that low socioeconomic status serves as one of the many environmental factors that can contribute to the use of violence to resolve conflicts (Myers, 1989; Myers et al., 1992). McLoyd (1998) argued that studies of child development must encompass the powerful influence of environmental factors, focusing primarily on experiences within the African American community. Thus, this study addresses the adjustment and coping experiences of lower income youth minority with interpersonal violence in an effort to understand the affect of negative environmental influences on individual adolescents.

McLoyd (1998) argued that the validity of research involving American minorities is often impaired by the rejection of the cultural context of minority experiences and viewpoints. In addition, she suggested that a major consequence of racism involves the misrepresentation of the minority experience through acceptance of common myths and stereotypes. The author pointed toward the importance of situationally relevant factors (i.e., unequal education, structured inequality) as opposed to person-centered characteristics (i.e., aggression, intelligence) in an effort to better understand problematic situations that American minorities face. Within this context, she argued that greater opportunities should be given to allow minorities to interpret their own experiences, lending additional support to interpretative validity in social science research. The instruments utilized in this study were composed of a series of questions relating personal experiences regarding violent events, adjustment outcomes, and coping strategies. Future research should continue to explore the linkage between these factors as contributing to studies addressing youth violence with the African American youth population.

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