Family-Level Protective Processes Associated with Adolescent Aggression

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Introduction

- · Overview of Adolescent Aggression
- Possible Theoretical Explanations
 - 1) Developmental-Ecological Model (Tolan, Guerra, & Kendall, 1995)
 - Violence stems from inadequate development of pro-social skills as well as a lack of opportunity to express and practice these skills.
 - 2) Social Learning Model (Bandura, 1986)
 - Violence is learned from past experiences

Factors Versus Processes

- Factors: probability markers related to the likelihood of aggression (e.g., demographic factors) that can either increase or decrease the probability of a negative event.
- Processes: specific causal paths or mechanisms that describe how risk and protective factors operate.
- Although factors illuminate areas or populations to target for intervention, processes illuminate what variables might be key for interventions (i.e., how to intervene).

Parenting Practices as Family-Level Protective Processes

- Authoritative Parenting (Baumrind, 1991)
 - Demanding: efforts to ensure that adolescents behave appropriately through supervision, discipline, and maturity demands
 - Responsive: efforts to foster development of autonomy, individuality, and self-regulation by being supportive, caring, and sensitive

Optimal Balance?

Current Constructs Defined

- Demandingness Constructs:
 - Parental Behavioral Control (Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Rogers, Buchanan, & Winchell, 2003; Stattin & Kerr, 2000)
 - Parent-Adolescent Problem Solving (Reese et al., 2000)
- · Responsiveness Constructs:
 - Parental Warmth (Scaramella et al., 1999)
 - Family Involvement (Stroul, 1996)
 - Parent-Adolescent Communication (Blum et al., 2003; Chandy et al., 1996)

Hypotheses

- H₁: The family-level protective processes categorized as <u>demanding</u> (i.e., parental behavioral control and parentadolescent problem-solving) will be more strongly linked to aggression in <u>late adolescence</u> compared to early adolescence.
- H₂: The family-level protective processes categorized as <u>responsive</u> (i.e., parental warmth, family involvement, and parent-adolescent communication) will be more strongly inked to aggression in <u>early adolescence</u> compared to late
- H₃: Adolescents who desist in levels of aggression will have higher levels of family-level protective processes compared to those adolescents who do not desist.

Method

Participants

NC FACES (North Carolina Families and Communities Equals Success) grant communities, funded by the Center for Mental Health Services in 1997.

Eligibility

- 11-and 18-years-old at intake,
- · A local county resident,
- · A clinical diagnosis,
- · Separated or at risk of being removed from the home, and
- · Multiple agency needs.

Demographics

- Cross-Sectional Study (T1 = baseline):
 - 232 clinically-referred adolescents ages 11 to 17 years old, all had at least one clinical diagnosis
 - 65% male, 35% female
 - 60% European American, 36% African American
 - 4% Hispanic or "other"
 - 72% in custody of at least one biological parent, 10% other relative, 4% adoptive or foster parent, 14% in state custody
- Longitudinal Study (T2 = one year later):
 - 134 participants available for longitudinal analysis (out of original 232 participants)
 - · Attrition analysis shows only difference is level of aggression, with longitudinal group showing higher levels of aggression

Procedures

- Evaluation component coordinated by ORC MACRO where children and caregivers are interviewed on a variety of instruments at baseline and at six-month intervals thereafter over a three-year period (current study uses baseline and one year data).
- 2-hour in-home interviews were conducted with the caregiver; 1-hour in-home interviews were conducted with youth.
- Monetary incentives are provided to the respondents (\$25.00 for baseline interviews; \$30.00 for follow-up interviews).

Measures

Aggression

- Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991) utilized *T*-scores from the aggression subscale (20 item subscale);

 "Physically attacks people," and "Gets in many fights"

 3-point scale (0 = rarely/never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often/always)

 Cronbach's \(\alpha = .86 \) (Time 1) and .88 (Time 2)

- Adolescent Report

 Youth Self-Report (YSR; Achenbach, 1991) utilized T-scores from the aggression subscale (20 item subscale);

 "Teases a lot," and "Threatens people"

 3-point scale (0 = rarely/never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often/always)

 Cronbach's α = .84 (Time 1) and .85 (Time 2)

- Adolescent and caregiver reports were correlated .45 ($p \le .001$) at T1 and .52 ($p \le .001$) at T2. Thus, reports combined to create an overall indicator of ageression

Family Involvement

- Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS; Epstein & Sharma, 1997)
 - Family Involvement subscale 10-items
 - 4-point scale (0 = the behavior was not at all like the child through 3 = the behavior was very much like the child)
 - · "Participates in family activities"
 - (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$)

Warmth, Behavioral Control, & Communication

- Family Assessment Device (FAD; Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983)
 - · Utilizes averaged standardized subscale scores
 - Reported by both caregivers and adolescents
 - 4-point scale (0 = strongly disagree through 4 = strongly agree)
 - (Cronbach's $\alpha \ge .87$ for each subscale across each reporter)
 - · Adolescent and caregiver reports were combined to create overall composites

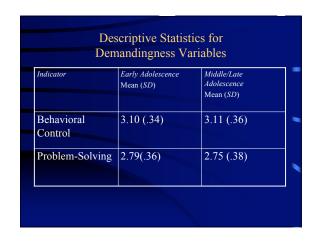
Zero-Order Correlations Among Adolescent Aggression, Family-Level Protective Processes, and Adolescent Age

	Adjustment Measure	FI	PS	Com	BC	War	Age
	Aggression	31***	15*	12*	.03	23***	19*
	Family Involvement		.35***	.21***	.11	.26***	.01
	Problem-Solving			.61***	.50***	.44***	.11
	Communication				.52***	.50***	01
	Behavioral Control					.42***	.02
	Warmth						06

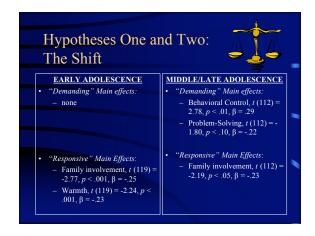
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Non-significant correlations among aggression, gender, ethnicity (African-American; European-American), and ses.

Descriptive Statistics for Aggression Variables								
Indicator	Early Adolescence ^a Mean (SD)	Middle/Late Adolescence ^b Mean (SD)						
Aggression (T1)	70.65 (10.94)	66.96 (11.11)						
Aggression (T2)	66.73 (9.54)	61.64 (9.12)						
$a_t(80) = 3.33, p < .001.$ $a_t(54) = 3.46, p < .001.$								



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Indicator	Early Adolescence Mean (SD)	Middle/Late Adolescence Mean (SD)	-
Family Involvement	7.94 (2.57)	7.56 (3.41)	
Warmth	2.64 (.41)	2.61 (.42)	
Communication	2.71 (.35)	2.73 (.29)	



Hypothesis Three: Desistance Vs. Non-Desisted "Desistance" defined here as a drop in aggression *T*-score by at least one-half standard deviation Collapsed age groups 38% desisted (n = 51), 13% increased in aggression, 49% showed no significant difference in aggression 63% of desisted group were age 13 or younger Desisted: 33 boys, 18 girls Examined group differences with all five family-level protective processes using independent samples *t*-tests No significant group differences, suggesting that levels of family protective processes did not differ for adolescents who desisted in aggression over a one year period.

Discussion Behaviors and needs of adolescents differ...optimal balance of parenting practices to protect against aggression differ. H₁ regarding demandingness (behavior control, problemsolving) was marginally supported. As adolescents get older, effective problem-solving ability between parent and youth becomes more protective against adolescent aggression.

- As adolescents get older, parental behavioral control becomes a significant factor for adolescent aggression, but in the opposite direction predicted. That is, higher levels of parental behavioral control are linked with higher levels of aggression.
 - Desire for autonomy leads them to rebel against control?

 (Large percentage of youth in study with oppositional-defiant disorder and conduct disorder)
 - Behavioral control efforts in response to increase in aggression, rather than prior to onset of aggression?
 - However, no evidence that parental control increased over the course of the study

- H₂ regarding responsiveness (warmth, family involvement, parent-adolescent communication)
 - Supported for warmth: Higher warmth linked with lower aggression in early adolescence, NOT related to aggression in middle/late adolescence
 - Supported for involvement: More involvement linked with lower aggression in BOTH early and middle/late, but the magnitude of the relationship was larger for early adolescence
 - Not supported for communication

Aggression Desistance

- H₃: sub-sample of adolescents who desisted compared with sample that did not desist (longitudinal)
 - Levels of family protective processes did NOT differ
 - Relatively few adolescents desisted over the 1 year period
 - Longer timeframe needed?

Strengths

- Further examination of protective processes
- Specific to adolescent stage (early vs. middle/late)
- Use of multiple reporters for protective processes and aggression

Limitations

- Attrition
- Longitudinal study of desistance
- · Clinically-referred sample vs. community sample
- Other types of protective processes not included (psychological control, discipline, absence of marital conflict, etc.)
- · Potential variability in treatment

Implications and Future Directions

- · Shift to Positive Psychology
 - Focus on strengths-based services
 - · Are we really using them?
- Need for Intervention to Prevent Further Decompensation

