


SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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Development and Evaluation of a Measure of Social Problem Solving Skills for Urban Adolescents

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A focus of youth violence prevention efforts has been on improving social problem solving skills based on research highlighting the critical role of social-cognitive processes in aggression (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994). One challenge has been the lack of well developed measures of social-cognitive decision-making processes. Many existing measures use a structured approach where individuals choose from a list of responses to a problem situation. Such measures are limited in their ability to assess important aspects of problem solving such as response generation. This poster describes the development and evaluation of the Problem Solving Interview (PSI), a measure based on a series of studies that identified factors influencing adolescents' responses to problem situations.

The PSI and measures of aggression and prosocial behavior were administered to 53 sixth grade students (51% male, 55% African American) from one rural and two public schools. The PSI uses a semi-structured interview to assess responses to two specific problem situations. Adolescents discuss their goals and potential actions, and evaluate responses in terms of perceived consequences, matches with goals, and their self-efficacy. They then discuss their perceptions of specific provocative, aggressive, and effective nonviolent responses.

Preliminary findings from regression analyses supported the construct validity of the PSI. The frequency of effective nonviolent behavior was significantly predicted in the expected direction by adolescents' ratings of the effectiveness of relationally aggressive ($R^2=.15$, $p<.01$), provocative ($R^2=.11$, $p<.05$), and nonviolent responses ($R^2=.10$, $p<.05$) for a problematic situation with a close friend. In a problematic situation with a peer, however, aggression was significantly predicted by adolescents' ratings of the effectiveness of provocative ($R^2=.08$, $p<.05$) and physically aggressive responses ($R^2=.08$, $p<.05$). Adolescents' frequency of effective nonviolent behavior was significantly related to whether students indicated that they would engage in a relationally aggressive ($r=-.33$, $p<.05$) or an effective nonviolent response ($r=.30$, $p<.05$) in the close friend situation. Analyses also indicated that in the peer situation students with higher levels of aggression reported that an effective nonviolent response was less likely to achieve a goal of kids not picking on you ($r=-.28$, $p<.05$).

These findings provide support for the PSI's utility in predicting adolescents' responses in problematic situations. Additional analyses will be conducted to determine relations between other aspects of problem solving skills currently being coded (e.g., ability to generate effective responses) and adolescents' engagement in aggression and experience of victimization.

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