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Title: Influence of School-level Variables on Aggression and Associated Attitudes among Middle School Students

Text:

Prevention efforts can only succeed to the extent that researchers are able to identify modifiable factors related to risk that can be targeted by interventions. Although important gains have been made in identifying individual factors that place youth at risk for violence, much less progress has been made in the study of setting-level risk factors. An improved understanding of setting-level risk, promotive, and protective factors is critical in the development and refinement of effective prevention efforts that can be implemented in schools and other settings.

Several setting-level variables may put children at risk for increased aggression, or may promote decreases in aggression. Among potential setting-level risk-related variables suggested by previous research are school norms for aggression and for nonviolent ways of resolving conflicts, interpersonal climate (relationships among students, and between students and faculty), the extent to which teachers are aware of and report violence, school levels of aggression, and factors that reduce student sense of safety, such as weapon-carrying and crime. This paper reports the results of a study of the effects of school levels of these factors on aggression and associated attitudes, controlling for demographic and site differences, and individual levels of the proposed risk-related variables.

Data from 5,106 middle school-aged students in 74 classes (2 age cohorts each from 37 schools in 4 sites) participating in the CDC Multisite Violence Prevention Project (MVPP) were used to form class- and individual-level scores on 7 risk-related variables: (1) Aggression, (2) School Norms for Nonviolence, (3) School Norms for Aggression, (4) Student-student relationships, (5) Student-teacher relationships, (6) Teacher awareness and reporting of violence, and (7) School Safety Problems. First, we assessed the level-2 reliabilities of these variables. Next, we entered these predictors, along with demographic covariates and terms to control for intervention condition, into mixed effects linear models predicting five outcomes over time: (1) Composite teacher and student-reported aggression, (2) Individual norms for nonviolence, (3) Individual norms for aggression, (4) Personal beliefs about aggression, and (5) Beliefs about nonviolence.

All predictors had acceptable level-2 reliabilities, suggesting that they tapped setting-level characteristics. Controlling for individual scores, the class-level predictors had effects on all outcomes, with some variation in effects over time. Discussion will focus on potential roles of setting-level characteristics in prevention.

Theme Groups: 1 Key social relationships