

Public Abstract
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Youth Exposure to Violence
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Graduation Term Fall 2005

Abstract

Recent studies have shown that adolescents in the United States are disproportionately represented among both the victims and the perpetrators of violent crimes (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). Not surprisingly, studies also show that previous exposure to violence, regardless of the ecological context (e.g., family, community, sociopolitical violence), is a strong predictor of aggression and delinquency in youth. Likewise, studies have shown that youth who are exposed to violence report higher levels of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, aggressive cognitions, and other adjustment problems as compared to youth not exposed to violence. There is also evolving evidence that youth who develop PTSD following violent traumas might be at increased risk for aggressive and delinquent behaviors. Utilizing a socio-cognitive framework, this study examined the possible mediational roles of PTSD symptoms and aggressive cognitions in the cycle of violence (exposure-perpetration). This study also examined whether the strength of the violence-exposure/violent-behavior relationship vary across context of exposure and across sex.

Participants were 124 pre- and early-adolescents from two school districts in the Midwest. Findings indicate that there is a strong positive correlation between violence exposure in the community and at home. Findings also show that violence exposure was significantly related to PTSD symptoms, aggressive cognitions, and aggressive and delinquent behaviors in youth. PTSD symptoms and aggressive cognitions were both significant mediators in the cycle of violence but had differential effects across each violence context. Our findings also indicate that the relationships of the predictors, mediators, and criterion variables differ for boys and girls, and suggest that interventions in the exposure-perpetration cycle requires adaptability to allow for optimal utilization across communities, households, and sex of participants.