

Public Abstract

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Educational Leadership

Impact of Social Competence as a Protective Factor for Violence Resiliency

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Youth violence has been targeted as a public health issue and has gained a considerable amount of attention in recent years. Homicide and suicide remain the leading causes of death for individuals between the ages of 10 and 24. Current research has identified risk factors (e.g., history of victimization, poverty, alcohol or drug abuse, and academic failure) that contribute to and promote violent and aggressive behavior in youth. However, there is considerably less information about protective factors that promote resilience and limit the potential influence of risk factors that contribute to the development of violent behavior.

The focus of this investigation was to determine the protective influence of social competence on whether or not adolescent males engaged in violent or aggressive behavior at school. Further, the study sought to determine to what degree the elements of social competence serve as protective factors for violence resiliency among adolescent males exposed to known risk factors that contribute to violent and aggressive behaviors, which may be referred to as anti-social behavior in this report. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods this study utilized a case design to identify adolescent males who shared similar risk factors such as poverty, the use of alcohol and drugs, hyperactivity, risk taking, and a history of victimization in order to explore the relationship between risk factors and the elements of social competence and violence resiliency. Data were collected through surveys, open-ended interviews with the participants, and focused interviews with selected school personnel. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with the processes of open and axial coding.

The findings from this investigation indicate that several elements of social competence were positively associated with violence resiliency, including a sense of humor; development of positive relationships with parents, school personnel and friends; and empathy. Additionally, school connectedness, a sense of future, and helping behaviors emerged as potential protective factors for violence resiliency. Of importance is that young males who have accumulated significant risk factors related to the development of violent and aggressive tendencies can rebound and demonstrate violence resiliency.

Findings of this investigation have generated several implications for schools. School connectedness is an important component of promoting violence resiliency for males. Schools should focus on methods of creating school oriented opportunities for all students. The concept of school connectedness should move beyond the walls of the building and help promote the belief that learning and education are worthwhile endeavors. Additionally, schools should strive to encourage students to participate in school and community activities that reinforce the value of helping behaviors and should continue to promote and teach elements of social competence such as communication skills and empathy.