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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the association between resilience and violence as rated by teachers and parents of exceptional students (N=613) from large urban, public schools in Ohio. Multiple types of exceptionalities were represented and a high proportion of the diversity came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Resilience predictor variables were assessed using the Resilience Assessment of Exceptional Students-Parent Rating Form which considered such variables as knowledge; planning for needs; problem-solving; modeling; peer relations; adult interactions; extended family; and community support. The results indicated that positive peer relations were most consistent with unique predictions of violence and externalizing behavior problems. Urban exceptional youth who are violent with externalizing problems have higher positive relations. This finding is consistent with previous research results. It concludes that exceptional youth with violent or aggressive behavior may benefit from techniques to promote peer leadership in socially positive ways. (Contains 3 tables and 10 references.) (JDM)

# Resilience Predictors of Violence and Externalizing Behavior Problems for Urban Exceptional Students

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The purpose of this study was to examine the association between resilience as rated by parents with violence and externalizing behavior problems of urban exceptional students as reported by teachers. There is considerable evidence of increased violence in America's students at school (e.g., National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). The report also documented that violence is more prevalent in urban than rural and suburban schools (i.e., violent deaths in urban schools occur nine times more often than rural schools and two times more often than suburban schools). In order to address this issue, the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS, 1999) has recommended that mental health programs should attempt to enhance resilience in order to prevent youth violence. Research regarding resilience and disruptive behavior is also relevant to conducting Functional Behavioral Assessments and Manifestation Determinations for exceptional students as mandated by revisions to the Individuals with Disability Education Act (Kubick, Bard & Perry, 2000) and developing effective behavioral intervention plans (Wright & Gurman, 1998).

## Method

### Subjects

The total sample was composed of 613 exceptional students from a large urban public school district in Northeastern Ohio. Multiple types of exceptionalities were represented with a distribution similar to the total school district's special education population. This sample included the following distribution of disabilities according to Ohio definitions: 41% Developmentally Handicapped (i.e., DH, Mental Retardation and Borderline in Ohio), 37% Specific Learning Disabled (SLD), 13% Severe Behavioral Handicapped (SBH in Ohio and SED nationally), and 9% low incidence (i.e., Autistic, Hearing, Orthopedic and Vision disabilities). The students were placed in these special education programs for an average of 4.48 years (s.d. = 3.74 years). Similar to the district's total special education population, the subjects were 68% males and 32% were females. The mean Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Third Edition (WISC-III) Verbal IQ was 79 (s.d. = 32), Performance IQ 83 (s.d. = 17), and Full Scale IQ 78 (s.d. = 16).

This sample was similar to general demographics of the total school district reflecting a high proportion of diversity from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds. For example, the race distribution was 65% African American, 29% Caucasian, 5% Hispanic, and 1% other in comparison to the total district's distribution of 70%, 24%, 5% and 1% respectively. Low SES indicators included 64% of the sample receiving free and reduced price school lunches while 70% of the total district's population was below the poverty level. Other low SES indicators for the sample included 46% of the mothers and 48% of fathers not completing high school. Moreover, 70% of mothers and 40% of fathers were unemployed.

The initial sample was based on parent respondents to requests for participating in alternative reevaluations of special education students during the 1992-93 and 1993-94 school years. The 613 respondent's relationship to the child were comprised of 82% mothers, 15% guardian/relatives, and 3% fathers reflecting that about 70% of the total school district's population reside with mothers as single parents. The 613 students were the part of a total group of approximately 3,400 students due for reevaluation during the 1993-93 and 1993-94 years and a total school population of about 70,000 students. However, about 30% (1,020) of 3,400 parents could not be contacted through the mail since mailings were returned due to changes of addresses. The annual mobility rate annually for the district's school population was about 50%. Moreover, about 10% (340) of the students were "non-attendees" and could not be included. Hence, the return rate was estimated to be 30% or 613 of 2,040 students.

Several issues influenced the return rate. First, it is well established that low SES populations from diverse backgrounds are less likely to participate in research. Second, many low SES parents have limited educational

backgrounds and probably had difficulty comprehending the coping assessments. Third, due to financial restraints, the return envelopes were not stamped and it was necessary for parents to pay postage. Finally, the time requirements for conducting reevaluations limited follow-up for locating parents with changes of addresses. Despite the estimated 30% return rate, the sample of students was representative of the total school and special education population for major demographic variables as noted earlier.

Resilience Predictor Variables

The Resilience Assessment of Exceptional Students - Parent Rating Form (RAES-PRF) was developed by Perry and Bard (2001). Construct validity indicated the eleven factors listed below which were used as predictor variables in the present study. The RAES also includes three domain scores listed below (i.e., exceptionality problem-solving, resilience behaviors, and social support) and a composite score. All items for the eleven factors were based on parent ratings for frequency (i.e., 0 = Not True or Never, 1 = Somewhat True or Sometimes, and 2 = Very True or Frequently) from the original pilot testing form.

Knowledge of Exceptionality. This factor provided a measure of the degree that a child understands essential features of his/her exceptionality with a three point frequency scale for each of five items.

Planning for Needs. This factor provided a measure of the degree that a child is able to understand needs and provide input for academic services and future work with the three point frequency scale for each of five items.

Alternative Thinking. This factor included five items with the three point frequency scale regarding ability to think of alternatives for improving school performance.

Total Exceptionality Problem-Solving. This was a composite score for the above three factors and provided an overall measure of self understanding and planning ability specific to exceptionality.

Modeling/Active. This factor included six items with frequency ratings for ability to understand the behavior of others and attempt new behavior as well as displaying outgoing, active social behaviors.

Self-Efficacy/Locus of Control. This factor included the frequency of seven items as a measure of a positive self-concept regarding school abilities and attributing outcomes to self rather than external issues.

Positive Peer Relations. This factor included the frequency of seven items regarding positive social skills when interacting with peers (e.g., helps others, starts conversations, and shows leadership).

Positive Adult Relations. This factor included the frequency of six items regarding cooperation and compliance in relating to adult authority figures (e.g., follows rules).

Total Resilience Behaviors. This is a total composite score of the above four factors to provide a general index of behaviors often found in related research to describe resilience.

Extended Family. This factor included four items indicating the frequency of social support provided by grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, and uncles.

Community Support. This factor included four items indicating the frequency of social support provided by peers at school, peers in neighborhood, parents of peers, and adult neighbors.

Nuclear Family. This factor included three items indicating the frequency of support provided by fathers, sisters and brothers.

Mother/Teacher. This factor included two items indicating the frequency of support provided by mothers and teachers.

Total Social Support. This domain score is a total of the above four factors to indicate a general index of social support.

Total Composite Resilience. This is the total of all domains (i.e., Exceptionality Problem-Solving, Resilience Behaviors, and Social Support) to provide a measure of general resilience. While available for analyses, this measure was not used as a predictor in order to more directly compare the relative predictive values of the more specific resilience measures.

Violence and Externalizing Criterion Variables

The t-scores for the Externalizing, Aggression, and Delinquency Scales of Teacher Report Form (Achenbach, 1991) were used as measures of externalizing behavior problems. In order to gain a more specific measure of violent behavior, six items were totaled that include more direct violent behaviors (i.e., physically attacks others; gets in many fights; explosive and unpredictable behavior; temper tantrums or hot temper; threatens people; and cruelty, bullying, or meanness to others).

## Results

Table 1 includes descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of major resilience measures. The raw scores presently used are listed for the means and standard deviations based on parent ratings of the RAES scale. There were no significant differences among the various exceptionalities studied for the eleven factor scores or total scores.

Results of multiple regression analysis are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 includes the eleven resilience factors or subtest scores as predictors of violence and externalizing problems defined earlier. Table 3 includes the three total scores (i.e., exceptionality problem-solving, resilience behaviors, and social support) as predictors of violence and externalizing problems. The composite resilience score was not entered into the multiple regressions in order to investigate the relative predictive values of the seperate factors and domains of resilience.

Results in Table 2 indicated that the positive peer relations consistently entered as the best single predictor of violence and externalizing problems when all eleven factors were examined simultaneously. The only other factor that was found to make a unique contribution to positive peer relations in predicting violent behavior and externalizing total t-scores was social support from fathers and siblings.

While the prediction of violence and externalizing problems by the resilience factors was limited, the pattern of the results has relevance. The zero order correlations indicated that exceptionality problem-solving factors as well as other resilience behavior and social support factors were not related to violence and externalizing problems. While there was a consistent relationship of positive peer relations with all problem scores, the correlation was positive. This indicated that exceptional students with high scores for positive peer relations had higher violence and externalizing problem scores. This was consistently found for the prediction of violent behaviors, as well as externalizing, aggression, and delinquency scores.

The relationship of the social support from fathers and siblings factor had a negative relationship with violent behavior and externalizing scores in adding to the prediction of these criteria provided by positive peer relations. Hence, this social support factor was associated with a decreased violence and externalizing problems.

Results in Table 3 indicated that the total resilience behaviors score entered as providing the unique contribution in relationship to all violence and externalizing problem scores when all three total resilience scores were entered simultaneously. Total exceptionality problem-solving added to the prediction of delinquency provided by the total resilience behavior scores. The direction of the relationship indicated that high resilience behavior and problem solving scores were associated with increased disruptive behavior. The resilience behaviors score was a total score of positive peer relations, self-efficacy/locus of control, positive adult scores, and modeling/active.

## Discussion

Results indicated limited predictions of violence and externalizing problems by resilience indicators from the RAES. As Brooks (1999) noted, seeking to identify the resilience of exceptional youth is like "searching for islands of competence". While limited, the results indicated that positive peer relations was the most consistent, unique predictor of violent and externalizing behavior problems.

The present finding that urban exceptional youth who are violent with externalizing problems have higher positive relations with peers is consistent with other recent research. For example, it has been reported that bullies have high peer status and bullying is a way of establishing dominance in peer relations (Pelligini and Bastini, 1999). In fact, the RAES measure of positive peer relations included items that reflect assertiveness (e.g., able to stand up to bullies; willing to show others how to do things; and shows leadership skills with peers).

An important implication of the above finding for intervention is that exceptional youth with violent and aggressive behavior may benefit from techniques to promote peer leadership in socially positive ways. This is consistent with the recent recommendations for interventions with aggressive youth (Miller, Brehm, & Whitehouse, 1998). Promoting positive standards and values as well as adapting interventions to disadvantaged, diverse populations are also relevant (Goldstein, 1999).

Social support from fathers and siblings was associated with reduced violence and externalizing behavior problems of exceptional youth. This suggests that positive family support for children may help reduce violence. Fournier and Perry (1999) provided a review of family support initiatives that are relevant to this service delivery approach.

A major issue that may have limited the power of statistical analyses for the present study was the homogeneity of disadvantaged subjects in the sample studied. As indicated in the sample description, the exceptional urban students sample experienced severe general education impairment by definition of their exceptionality. The students were primarily from low socioeconomic backgrounds and single parent families. The pervasiveness of these types of potential mediators may have operated as "suppressor variables" which restrict the empirical identification of positive characteristics such as the resilience measures. However, research to identify "islands of competence" or resilience of this type of population is critically needed. Future research will include broader sampling of exceptional students and the general population of youth.

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## Table I

## Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for RAES-PRF Predictor Variables

| Variable | M | SD | KE | PN | AT | PS | MA | SE | PR | AR | RB | SS | CR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge Except. (KE) | 7.7 | 4.3 | -- | .68*** | .71*** | .93*** | .38*** | -.07 | .36*** | -.07 | .21*** | .11 | .68*** |
| Plan for Need (PN) | 2.7 | 2.5 | | -- | .67*** | .85*** | .46*** | -.16** | .42*** | -.13* | .18** | .19*** | .61*** |
| Alt. Thinking (AT) | 6.5 | 3.0 | | | -- | .88*** | .57*** | -.23*** | .58*** | -.25*** | .00*** | .24** | .74*** |
| Total PS (PS) | 16.6 | 8.7 | | | | -- | .52*** | -.12* | .49*** | -.15** | .26*** | .23** | .79*** |
| Model/Active (MA) | 5.3 | 2.4 | | | | | -- | -.35*** | .51*** | -.23*** | .33*** | .17* | .45*** |
| Self-Efficacy (SE) | 6.2 | 3.4 | | | | | | -- | -.18*** | .48*** | .49*** | -.19* | -.05 |
| Peer Relations (PR) | 9.0 | 3.7 | | | | | | | -- | -.16** | .55*** | .17* | .58*** |
| Adult Relations (AR) | 5.0 | 3.2 | | | | | | | | -- | .58*** | -.12 | .13 |
| Total Res. Behav. (RB) | 25.3 | 6.3 | | | | | | | | | -- | .06 | .58*** |
| Total Soc. Support (SS) | 12.1 | 4.7 | | | | | | | | | | – | .47*** |
| Composite Resilience (CR) | 54.9 | 11.5 | | | | | | | | | | | – |

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

# Table 2

## Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses of Resilience Factors Predicting Violence and Externalizing Problems.

| Predictor Variable | r[a] | B | SEB | $\beta$ | t[b] | P< |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Violent Items (TRF) | | | | |
| Step 1 | | | | | | |
| Positive Peer Relations | .28* | .28 | .12 | .28 | 2.38 | .020 |
| Step 2 | | | | | | |
| Support: Father & Sibs | -.19 | -.49 | .22 | -.26 | -2.18 | .033 |
| | | Externalizing T-Scores (TRF) | | | | |
| Step 1 | | | | | | |
| Positive Peer Relations | .25* | .85 | .38 | .25 | 2.22 | .029 |
| Step 2 | | | | | | |
| Support: Father & Sibs | -.20 | 1.02 | .38 | -.25 | -2.28 | .025 |
| | | Aggression T-Scores (TRF) | | | | |
| Step 1 | | | | | | |
| Positive Peer Relations | .27* | .84 | .35 | .27 | 2.40 | .019 |
| | | Delinquency T-Scores (TRF) | | | | |
| Step 1 | | | | | | |
| Positive Peer Relations | .34** | .86 | .27 | .34 | 3.13 | .002 |

a= Zero order correlation coefficients
b= t-tests and associated p values for beta coefficients
*p< .05 **p<.01

# Table 3

## Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses of Resilience Factors Predicting Violence and Externalizing Problems.

| Predictor Variable | r[a] | B | SEB | *B* | t[b] | P< |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Violent Items (TRF) | | | | |
| Step 1 | | | | | | |
| Total Resilience Behaviors | .33** | .22 | .08 | .33 | 2.81 | .006 |
| | | Externalizing T-Scores (TRF) | | | | |
| Step 1 | | | | | | |
| Total Resilience Behaviors | .26* | .60 | .25 | .26 | 2.37 | .020 |
| | | Aggression T-Scores (TRF) | | | | |
| Step 1 | | | | | | |
| Total Resilience Behaviors | .23* | .49 | .23 | .23 | 2.08 | .041 |
| | | Delinquency T-Scores (TRF) | | | | |
| Step 1 | | | | | | |
| Total Resilience Behaviors | .26* | .43 | .19 | .26 | 2.33 | .022 |
| Step 2 | | | | | | |
| Total Problem Solving | .20 | .23 | .11 | .22 | 2.04 | .045 |

a= Zero order correlation coefficients

b= t-tests and associated p values for beta coefficients

*p< .05 **p<.01

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