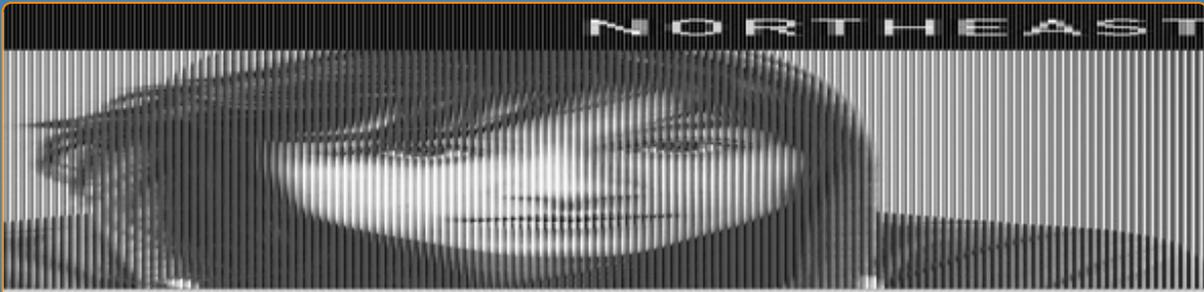


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Dear Colleague:

In celebration of “Back to School” we chose an article that looked at the impact of a teen’s engagement with his or her school as a protective factor against violence. Overall, the research showed that school connectedness was associated with a decrease in violent attitudes, but counter-intuitively the same impact was not necessarily evident in self-reported violent behaviors. But, most significant was learning how certain cultural groups are aggregated in our national census data (e.g., Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans) yet this research showed significantly different responses resulting from unique cultural factors such as parental communication and relationships with peers. The authors call for a deeper exploration into the impact of prevention strategies on different cultural groups and the importance of not ignoring these factors when working with an increasingly diverse group of clients.

As always, if you have any other questions or suggestions for future newsletter topics, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely, Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

The Association of School Connectedness to Violent Attitudes and Behaviors Among a Diverse Teen Population

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

The Question

Will a connection to school help reduce violent attitudes and behaviors among adolescents?

The Research

Chung-Do, Goebert, Hamagani, Chang, and Hishinuma chose to explore school connectedness as a protective factor against violence in an ethnically diverse population. Acknowledging the high level of youth violence as a growing public health issue and the lack of research on protective factors, the authors wanted to explore the factors that would foster healthy behaviors and communities.

School connectedness is a term that explores the level of involvement a student may have in his/her school, his/her academic motivation, the quality of student and teacher relationships, and how a student feels about their school. Past research has shown that youth who feel connected to their school are less likely to get involved in physical fighting, hitting, shoving, stabbing, shooting someone, threatening someone with or carrying a weapon. Working with a school system in Hawaii, the authors evaluated the impact of a high school course (Personal Transition

Plan/Leadership), taught weekly, and designed to build a student's sense of school connectedness.

Since Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are among the fastest-growing minority groups in the US, the authors examined the impact of this course on this population.

The authors found that patterns of violence were similar to other studies (e.g., males are less likely to be connected to their school and more at-risk for engaging in risk and violent behaviors). School achievement, having college aspirations, and favorable attitudes towards school were among the strongest protective factors for violent attitudes among both Asian American and Pacific Islander youth. This particular study did not find the same level of impact on violent behaviors, an outcome that conflicts with the results of some previous studies.

Possibly the most important finding was the significant differences between and within Asian American and Pacific Islander youth. These populations are often grouped together in census data and yet the study indicates different influences of school connectedness across the ethnic groups. For Asian Americans, school connectedness was not significantly related to violent attitudes or behaviors. However, for Native Hawaiian and Filipino students, the higher the school connectedness, research showed a significant decrease in violent attitudes and behaviors. For Caucasian and other Pacific Islander students school connectedness seems related to moderately higher violent attitudes. Again, other studies have found lower victimization rates of peer harassment, higher parental communications, and stronger peer relationships among certain cultural groups that may be factor moderating or enhancing the protective effect of school connectedness. These results highlight the value of disaggregating the Asian and Pacific Islander category in census data as well as the need for further research exploring the impact of ethnicity and cultural backgrounds when exploring both risk and protective factors for youth.

Bottom Line: Overall, school connectedness was associated with a decrease in violent attitudes but not necessarily self-reported violent behaviors. However, a deeper exploration into the impact of cultural groups is needed when working with a diverse population.

Implications for Professionals

Although the cultural groups within this study may not be part of the practice of most clinicians, this research has significant implications for treatment interventions, contextual supports, and school engagement. These considerations for different cultural communities are not well researched and largely ignored when crafting the multi-dimensional container within which our clients will be less likely to abuse again. Just as we have learned that unguided clinical judgment yields poor treatment outcomes, the absence of more specific research on various cultural groups, requires that we use caution in assuming that our standard assessment, treatment or prevention strategies will impact these groups in similar ways. In the absence of research to guide our work, using research-based "generic" strategies may be our safest approach. However, just as our risk assessments need to include cautionary notes about the length of time our assessments may remain valid, our recommendations for prevention and contextual stabilization interventions may also need to include cautionary notes specific to each cultural community.

Implications for the Field

As our field begins to shift its attention from looking exclusively at risk factors, we must consider the possible protective factors as well as an individual's strengths in assessment, treatment, and where necessary, community re-entry. Furthermore, as we explore prevention opportunities, this research reminds us that our advocacy to go beyond a "one size fits all" approach needs to include cultural considerations. While school engagement is a research-based prevention strategy, its impact on distinct cultural communities may require more sensitivity than previously thought whether those groups are Pacific Islanders or Asian (or other populations yet to be

studied). Cultural competence has always been a component of a quality treatment provider. Clearly, we need further research to support that competence and ultimately, that same competence will be required when crafting effective prevention strategies.

Abstract

Abstract Interpersonal youth violence is a growing public health concern in the United States. Having a high sense of school connectedness has been found to be a protective factor for youth violence. A high school course that aims to enhance school connectedness was developed and evaluated to investigate the students' sense of school connectedness and its association with violent attitudes and behaviors. Survey data from 598 students from a predominately Asian and Pacific Islander student body were analyzed to assess their level of school connectedness and violent attitudes and behaviors. Analysis of Variance was used to identify differences in the school connectedness and violence scores related to students' demographic characteristics. The role of school connectedness in the relationship between student demographic characteristics and violent attitudes and behaviors was examined with structural equation modeling. Overall, students reported a moderately high sense of school connectedness. School connectedness was found to be negatively associated with violent attitudes but not self-reported violent behaviors. Multiple-group analyses were conducted across the ethnic groups, which found differential associations between the school connectedness and violence variables. These results highlight the value of disaggregating the Asian and Pacific Islander category and the need for future research to further contextualize and clarify the relationship between school connectedness and interpersonal youth violence. This will help inform the development of evidence-based strategies and prevention programming that focus on school connectedness to address disparities in interpersonal youth violence outcomes.

Citation

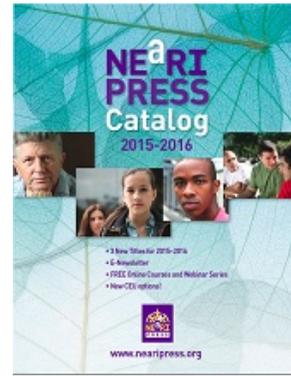
Chung-Do, J.J., Goebert, D.A., Hamagani, F., Chang, J.Y., and Hishinuma, E.S. (2015). Understanding the Role of School Connectedness and Its Association With Violent Attitudes and Behaviors Among an Ethnically Diverse Sample of Youth. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. DOI: 10.1177/0886260515588923.

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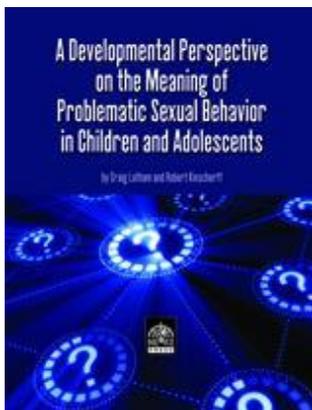
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Volume 8, Issue 8: August 2015



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