



The Role of Emotional-Social Intelligence in the Relation between Community Violence and Psychological Symptoms in Youth



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INTRODUCTION

Youth in the United States continue to experience alarmingly high rates of community violence (CV; US Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2005). As a result, youth are at-risk for exhibiting internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Grant et al., 2005 & Kliewer et al., 2004). Recently, some researchers have shifted their foci from establishing the relation between exposure to CV and symptoms, to identifying the underlying processes that may contribute to this relation (Dempsey, 2002).

Emotion regulation has been examined as a possible factor. While researchers tend to define this term differently, it broadly refers to a youth's ability to control positive and negative feelings in a way that facilitates the appropriate expression of his/her emotions, leading to adaptive coping in situations. For youth exposed to CV, those who display greater emotion regulation have fewer internalizing symptoms compared to youth who display poor emotion regulation (Kliewer et al., 2004). Schwartz and Proctor (2000) found evidence of mediation, with youth with greater emotion regulation abilities exhibiting fewer social difficulties (i.e., rejection from peers, bullying others, and aggression) than youth with poor emotion regulation abilities.

While emotion regulation appears to be significant, it is but one part in a set of abilities known as emotional-social intelligence (ESI; Bar-On, 2006). According to this model, there are both *intrapersonal* abilities and *interpersonal* abilities. Past research provides evidence of mediation and moderation pathways when investigating emotion regulation and exposure to CV; however, ESI has not been examined. It is possible that the different emotion abilities (i.e., emotion awareness, emotion expression, awareness of others' emotions) in the model of ESI may better explain the relation between exposure to CV and symptoms. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the role of ESI in the relation of exposure to CV and symptoms.

METHODS

Participants

One hundred and twenty-four youth participated in the current study. The participants were recruited from a summer program that targets youth from low SES backgrounds and who are at-risk for exposure to community violence. The majority of the participants were female (90%). Participants' ages ranged from 11 years to 15 years, with a mean age of 12.5 years. Approximately 73% of the youth were African-American, 9% were Hispanic, 8% were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 6% were Caucasian.

Procedure and Measures

Parents were informed about the study and asked to participate. Parents interested in their children participating in the study signed a consent form. Children were administered the measures during the beginning week of camp in groups of approximately 25 to 50 children. Youth completed the following measures: *The Survey of Children's Exposure to Community Violence* (Richters & Saltzman, 1990)

This measure assesses the frequency of children's exposure to CV. Exposure is categorized into hearing about, witnessing, or directly experiencing violence. For the purposes of this study, an overall measure of violence was used including witnessing and victimization. Two items regarding family violence were eliminated. *BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version, Short Form (EQI; Bar-on & Parker, 2000)*.

The EQI is a self-report measure that assesses several areas of emotional-social functioning. There are six scales, but only the overall measure of emotional-social intelligence was used for the current study. *The Behavior Assessment Scale for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004)*.

The BASC-2 is a self-report measure that assesses a wide range of behaviors in children. Two composite scores were used to assess internalizing symptoms (i.e., internalizing composite) and externalizing symptoms (i.e., inattention/hyperactivity composite).

ANALYSES

Relations among the observed variables were computed using Pearson product moment correlations. See Table 1 for the correlation matrix. Two models of mediation and moderation were tested. Two mediation analyses using the Sobel test investigated the potential mediating role of EQI in the relations between CV and psychological symptoms (i.e., externalizing and internalizing). Additionally, two moderation analyses investigated the potential moderating role of EQI in the relations between CV and psychological symptoms (i.e., externalizing and internalizing).

Table 1

Correlation Matrix

	ECV	Intern.	Extern.	EQI
ECV	1.0			
Intern.	.275*	1.0		
Extern.	.166	.620**	1.0	
EQI	.177*	.052	.130	1.0

$p < .05$, ** $p < .05$ ECV=exposure to community violence; Intern.= internalizing symptoms; Extern.= externalizing symptoms, EQI= emotional intelligence

Table 2

Moderation Analysis for the Relation of Exposure to CV and Internalizing Symptoms (N=124)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Model 1			
Exposure to CV	.116	.037	.275*
Model 2			
Exposure to CV	.116	.038	.276*
EQI	.003	.063	.004
Model 3			
Exposure to CV	.116	.038	.275*
EQI	.003	.064	.004
CV*EQI	.000	.003	.007

* $p < .01$

RESULTS

Correlations Among Variables

Exposure to CV, internalizing symptoms, externalizing symptoms, and EQI were all significantly positively correlated.

Mediation Analyses

Sobel's test of indirect effects was used to test for mediation. Neither mediation analyses were significant. Exposure to CV was predictive of internalizing symptoms ($t = 3.16, p < .01$); however, the indirect effect was not significant ($z = .037, p = .970$). Exposure to CV was not predictive of externalizing symptoms; however, it approached significance ($t = 1.86, p = .066$). Additionally, the indirect effect was not significant ($z = .910, p = .363$).

Moderation Analyses

EQI was not found to be a moderator in the relation between exposure to CV and externalizing symptoms ($t = .853, p = .395$). Similarly, EQI was not found to be a moderator in the relation between exposure to CV and internalizing symptoms ($t = .081, p = .935$). See table 2 for the coefficients.

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated the role of emotional-social intelligence in the relation between exposure to community violence and psychological symptoms. Previous research has indicated that emotion regulation is a mechanism in the relation between CV and psychological symptoms; however, there is a paucity of research in the role of the relatively new concept of emotional-social intelligence. EQI did not function as either a moderator or a mediator in this study. Moreover, an unexpected positive correlation between exposure to CV and EQI was found. It is important to note that the mean raw score on the EQI ($M = 63.4$) was about six points higher than the normative data. Additionally, the normative sample differed significantly from the current study's sample. In the normative data, approximately 50% of the participants were Caucasian, whereas the current study's sample consisted of 6% Caucasian youth. It is possible that, on average, minority youth may respond in a different manner than majority youth. Additionally, these findings suggest resiliency in this sample of youth. That is, high levels of violence exposure may promote an increased ability to recognize and manage one's emotions. Certainly other factors may also play a role in this difference; however, this points to a need for the factor structure of the EQI to be examined in this sample.

Despite the contradictory findings, these results contribute significantly to the field. Exposure to CV predicted youth's internalizing symptoms. This finding supports previous research that found that female youth are more likely to witness CV and experience internalizing symptoms (Foster, Kupermine, & Price, 2004). Indeed, the majority of the current study's sample were females who witnessed CV. Future research should continue to examine the role of emotional-social intelligence. It will be especially important to investigate the individual scales of the EQI, as they may uniquely contribute to this relation.

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