The Influence Of Family Violence On Youth Attitudes

Karen Slovak Ph.D., Karen Carlson, and Linda Helm

ABSTRACT: This study investigated the impact of violence exposure on youth attitudes toward violence and guns. Rural youth were surveyed on their exposure to violence in the home, school, and neighborhood in addition to their attitudes toward guns and violence. Results indicated youth were exposed to an alarming amount of violence in each setting, particularly the school. Findings also demonstrated that attitudes toward violence and guns were significantly influenced by violence in the home and being male.

KEY WORDS: Youth; Violence; Attitudes; Home; Community.

Introduction

The physical, psychological, and economic toll of youth violence has initiated a surge in attention surrounding this phenomenon. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), over 500,000 youth ages 10–19 were injured as a result of violence in the year 2002 and ~1 in 10 of the injuries mandated hospitalization or transfer to a trauma center or rehabilitation unit (CDC, 2003). In addition, the psychological safety of youth exposed to violence continues to be a serious risk. Firearms, one of the deadliest means connected to violence, is associated with more than 20,000 youth victims in the year 1998 (Fingerhut & Christoffel, 2002) and is strongly linked to emotional distress and psychological disturbances (Garbarino, Bradshaw, & Vorrasi, 2002). The physical and psychological effects

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of violence produce a financial cost to society. The price tag associated with violence is estimated to be in the billions; according to the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Report on Violence and Health, up to 5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) may be the result of violence related health care cost (WHO, 2003).

With the disconcerting level of violence among young people in this nation, the amount and variety of research addressing this issue is certainly warranted. The concern of youth violence has prompted many investigations focusing on risk factors. The present study will focus on the connection between violence exposure and unhealthy attitudes toward violence as a risk factor for subsequent violent behavior. Comprehensive reviews covering risk factors for youth violence, as cited by Herrenkohl et al. (2001), can be found in other sources: Brewer, Hawkins, Catalano, and Nekerman (1995), Farrington (1998), Hawkins et al. (1998) Lipsey and Derson (1998), and Reiss and Roth (1993).

Research has demonstrated that unhealthy attitudes toward violence are an important risk factor associated with aggressive behavior (Borum, 2000; Markowitz, 2001; Vernberg, Jacobs, & Hershberger, 1999). Therefore, examination of variables that influence the development of violent attitudes among youth can assist efforts that seek to address and prevent youth aggression and violence. One variable shown to influence youth attitudes about violence is their exposure to violence as, demonstrated by Funk, Elliott, Urman, Flores, and Mock (1999) who found that youth who self-identified as a victim of violence reported stronger proviolent attitudes.

Youth can be victimized by violence in a variety of settings and by a variety of means. Herrenkohl et al. (2001) suggest that predictors of violence can be influenced in the multiple domains of family, school, peer, and community. For example, children are more likely to engage in violent behavior when raised by parents who engage in violent behavior, suggesting that such behavior portrays an attitude in support of violence (Farrington, 1991). Additionally, Houston and Vavak (1991) state that family values and attitudes influence the emergence of children’s hostility. Furthermore, exposure to antisocial norms and values among family, peers, and others in the community can negatively impact youth behavior by normalizing violence and modeling an attitude supporting violence actions (Brewer et al., 1995). Other research has suggested that peer associations can have an impact on youth violence by shaping attitudes
about delinquent behavior (Bruinsma, 1992; Matsueda & Heimer, 1987).

Weist and Cooley-Quille (2001) suggest that the potential impacts of violence exposure and involvement at a number of different levels, victim, witness, perpetrator, are considerable. Exposure, either as a witness or victim, is associated with a number of specific, negative mental health, and behavioral outcomes, including increased internalizing disorders (i.e., depression, anxiety) and externalizing behaviors (i.e., aggression), future problems in school adjustment as well as disruption in life-course development. Exposure to violence also is consistently related to later acts of violence and aggression in children and adolescents (Guterman & Cameron, 1997; Weist & Cooley-Quille, 2001). Children who experience violence in the home or community "...are more apt to become aggressive and ... involved in violence..." (Slaby, Barham, Eron, & Wilcox, 1994, p. 447). These studies suggest unhealthy attitudes toward violence as displayed through subsequent acts of violence and aggression. Other studies documenting the effects of violence exposure across different settings, home, school, neighborhood, detail similar aversive outcomes (Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Marcus, Lindahl, & Malik, 2001).

With the recent trend of gun related crimes among youth, attitudes toward this type of weaponry should also be noted. Shapiro, Dorman, Welker, and Clough (1998) found, in their investigation of youth attitudes toward guns and violence, that both traumatic and non-traumatic firearm exposure was associated with a greater level of unhealthy attitudes toward guns and violence. Another study revealed an association between a positive attitude toward guns and aggressive behaviors (Martin et al., 2001). Also, Kahn, Kazimi, and Mulvihill (2001) reported youth who felt it was acceptable for children and adolescents to own guns were more likely to come from homes with firearms in them. Sadly, the majority of firearms that students have used for the aggressive acts that lead to violent deaths in schools were obtained from their homes or from friends or relatives (CDC and Prevention, 2003).

A useful theory that can enhance the understanding of the connection between violence exposure and subsequent attitude development is social learning theory. Social learning theory was posited by Bandura (1977) and emphasizes that human thought, affect, and behavior can be modeled vicariously and through direct
experience. When this theory is applied to violence exposure and attitude development in youth, it suggests that both direct victimization, in addition to witnessing violence, can be influential on attitudes toward violence. Bandura (1977) states that emotional responses are often learned through direct experience, but they are also learned through observation. Therefore, attitudes can arise not only from personally experiencing violence but also from witnessing others being hurt through violent acts. Thus, children can learn to model their aggressor’s endorsement of violence and also develop attitudes toward violence vicariously through witnessing the victimization of others.

Therefore, both direct and indirect victimization can influence the development of unhealthy attitudes toward violence. And, as stated earlier, violence exposure can occur in the multiple domains of home, school, and community. Although various social agents play a role in the attitude development of children, the family is the earliest and most sustained socialization influence (Hetherington & Parke, 1993). The attitudes and beliefs of children are influenced directly by the experiences perpetuated by their family, which imparts a filtered view of the norms and values of the larger society (Pillari & Newsome, 1998). Although the influence of the family continues, youth are eventually introduced to new socialization systems such as peers and the community, which provide significant experiences that young people utilize to evaluate their attitudes and beliefs (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001). And, as Catalano and Hawkins (1996) posit in their social development model, strong connections and bonds to prosocial individuals in the family and school are important in the protecting against the development of antisocial behaviors. When positive connections to family are weak or absent, youth are more at risk from the influences of strong peer bonds that can be negative in nature.

Additional information on the impact of violence exposure in the home, school, and neighborhood on youth attitudes about violence can enhance our understanding of violence and subsequent prevention and intervention efforts. It is the aim of this study to investigate how youth attitudes toward violence and firearms are connected to violence exposure among the different settings of home, school, and community. Knowledge of this nature will add to our understanding of how youth attitudes toward violence develop and our capacity for intervention at different system levels.
Method

This study used a self-report survey to collect information on student attitudes toward guns and violence and their exposure to violence in the settings of home, school, and community.

Sample

Students in this survey were recruited as a convenience sample through school principals with the support of guidance counselors, teachers, and other staff. Participating schools were located in two rural counties in Southeast Ohio, which included two middle schools, one high school, and a non-traditional vocational technical high school. The middle schools served grades six through eight, the high school served grades nine through 12, and the vocational school served students in grades 11 and 12.

Schools administered the survey on a chosen day during a common class that occurred throughout the day for students. Three schools utilized the teachers of these common classes to distribute the survey and one school utilized a guidance counselor. All of the personnel administering the survey were given thorough instruction on administration protocol. Students not participating in the class during that time due to lack of parental consent were given an alternate assignment. Additionally, not all students within the school were afforded the opportunity to participate in the study due to logistics of their school schedule; they were not taking the specific class that semester in which the survey was distributed in. Three schools distributed the survey during the late fall of 2000 and one administered the survey in the early winter of 2001. Analyses on the data revealed that no significant differences existed between these administration times.

Parental permission for students to participate was secured through a consent form indicating the nature of the research. Students who were over 18 years of age were considered adults by the school and were able to sign their own consent form, with most of these subjects attending the non-traditional vocational high school. Both students and parents were instructed on the nature of the survey, were informed that participation was voluntary, and that the survey reports would be anonymous. In addition, at the time the survey was conducted, students were instructed that they could discontinue the survey at any time. Instructions were written on the
cover sheet of the survey, but were also given verbally to subjects prior to their beginning the survey. Upon completing the survey, students placed their survey in an unmarked brown envelope and sealed it before being collected. This was to ensure student anonymity from the survey administrator. The Institutional Review Board at Ohio University, Athens, OH, USA reviewed the protocol and permission forms prior to approving the study.

All four schools were classified as rural on the basis of the Ohio Department of Education’s 1996 school typology system, which defines rural districts as “very low density, high or moderate percentage agricultural property” (Ohio Department of Education, 2003). This typology of districts was developed in order to provide a rational basis for making data driven comparisons of “like” districts.

Measures

Demographics. The demographic information included age, gender, race and ethnicity, number of people in the home, and parent composition in the home.

Attitudes toward Guns and Violence. Youth reports of violence-related attitudes were measured through the Attitudes toward Guns and Violence Questionnaire (AGVQ). The AGVQ, developed by Shapiro (2000), is a 26-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure attitudes concerning guns, physical aggression, and interpersonal conflict in youth. According to the manual, each question is a statement related to some aspect of violence, guns, or conflict behavior, measured on a 3-point Likert-type scale with the response options of Agree, Not Sure, and Disagree. Items that involve antiviolence are reverse scored so high scores indicate violence proneness. The AGVQ has the ability to produce a total score, a validity indicator, and four subscales (Shapiro, 2000, pp. 1–2):

1. Total score—a global measure of attitudes favorable or unfavorable to violence and guns.
2. Inconsistent responding score—a validity indicator.
3. Aggressive response to shame subscale (AR)—assesses a two-part dynamic consisting of (a) sensitivity to disrespect from others, and (b) a belief that violence repairs damage to self-esteem.
4. Comfort with aggression subscale (CA)—assesses an undisturbed acceptance of the occurrence of violence in everyday life.
5. Excitement Subscale (EX)—measures the sense that guns are intrinsically exciting, stimulating, and fun.
6. Power/safety subscale (PS)—measures the degree to which guns and violence are seen as a means of preserving personal safety and experiencing feelings of power.

The internal consistency of the scale is estimated at .82, with subscales ranging from .73 to .87 (Shapiro, 2000). The Total AGVQ Score in the present study received a Cronbach’s Alpha of .84 when inconsistent scores were removed. The subscale reliabilities, with inconsistent scores removed, for the present study are as follows: CA = .79, Shame AR = .86, PS = .74, and EX = .75.

Setting of Violence Exposure: Home, School, Neighborhood. The setting of violence exposure questions were captured through the Life Experiences Survey (LES)©, which examines recent (26 items) and past (12 items) violence exposure. The LES was originally developed in a study by Singer, Anglin, Song, and Lunghofer (1995), which examined six types of recent and past violence exposure: (1) threats, (2) slapping/hitting/punching, (3) beatings, (4) knife attacks, (5) gun violence, and (6) sexual abuse. In this study, only data from the 26 recent violence exposure questions were collected. Additionally, only 18 out of 26 recent violence exposure questions that specified the setting of violence were utilized for analysis purposes. These 18 recent violence exposure questions captured type of violence both by setting (home, school, and neighborhood) and by their status (victim or witness). Violence exposure was measured by asking youth to report violence they had experienced personally or had witnessed. Students were asked not to include things they may have seen or heard about or from other people or from TV, radio, the news, or the movies.

The LES used a 4-point Likert scale to capture responses. Response categories were never = 0, sometimes = 1, very often = 2, and almost every day = 3. For each setting, students were asked to report how often they had been victimized and/or witnessed three violent events (threat, slap/hit/punch, and beating). Each setting of home, school, and community had six questions; each was utilized as
a separate scale with scores that ranged from 0 to 18, a higher score indicating greater violence exposure (for example, see appendix for home violence scale questions). The reliability of the scales (with AGVQ inconsistent scores removed), indicated through Cronbach’s Alpha, is as follows: home violence, .84, school violence, .70, and neighborhood violence, .79. The LES scale has demonstrated reliability in a large study (Singer et al., 1999), in addition to other studies involving rural youth (Slovak, 2002; Slovak & Singer, 2001, 2002).

Data Collection

Data was collected during the winter of the 2000–2001 school year. Surveys were administered to students during school by their teacher or guidance counselor.

Statistical Analyses

The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between the setting where youth were exposed to violence and the impact on their attitudes toward guns and violence. Hierarchical multiple regression was used conducted to determine the relative contribution of violence exposure setting in the prediction of youth attitudes toward violence as measured by the AGVQ subscales.

Results

There were 477 usable surveys collected from participants in grades 6 through 12. Total population in these schools during the 2000–2001 school year was ~1,400 students. Thus our response rate, averaged across all four schools, equaled slightly over 34%.

For the purposes of this study, those respondents with an AGVQ inconsistency score of 7 or above were removed. According to Shapiro (2000), “when the INC score is 7 or higher, there is an 81% likelihood that the responses are not related to the content of the items” (p. 11). The number responding inconsistently according to this standard totaled 34, which left the total number of respondents left for analyses at 443 students.
Demographics

The average age of students in the sample was 15.3, range 11–19. There were 269 (54.5%) females, and 216 (45.3%) males; students were predominately white (96%). The next largest racial category reported by students was other (2.2%). Slightly over 1% of subjects identified themselves as Black (1.3%).

Most students in the sample lived with mother and father (63.8%); the next largest category lived with mother only (23.6%). The average number of people the students reported in their home (including self) was 4.12. There were 149 students in grades 6 through 8 and 299 in grades 9 through 12.

Violence Exposure

Students' reports of violence exposure by setting within the past year to are shown in Table 1. In general, reports of witnessing violence were greater than victimization within the past year. School was the setting where students reported experiencing the greatest amount of violence, both as victim and witness. Over 80% of students reported witnessing someone being threatened or someone being slapped, hit, or punched and over 70% witnessed someone getting beaten up in this setting. In addition, three in seven students reported being threatened at school.

The neighborhood was the next most likely place to experience violence. Approximately one-half of the students reported witnessing someone being threatened or someone being slapped, hit, or punched in this setting. Sadly, the setting reported as highest for getting beaten up was the home, with 1 in 12 reporting this event in this setting.

Males generally reported higher levels of violence than females. In addition, younger students reported higher levels of violence exposure overall in their home and in school compared to older students. Older students reported greater levels of exposure in the neighborhood.

Data Analysis

To examine the impact of demographics and violence exposure setting variables on the attitudes toward guns and violence subscales, a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violent event</th>
<th>Total sample (N = 448)</th>
<th>Male (n = 199)</th>
<th>Female (n = 248)</th>
<th>Grades 6–8 (n = 149)</th>
<th>Grades 9–12 (n = 299)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threatened in neighborhood</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness someone else threatened in neighborhood</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slapped/hit/punched in neighborhood</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness someone</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slapped/hit/punched in neighborhood</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaten up in neighborhood</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness someone beaten up in neighborhood</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened at school</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness someone else threatened</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slapped/hit/punched at school</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness someone slapped/hit/punched at school</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaten up at school</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness someone beaten up at school</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>71.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threatened in the home</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness someone threatened in the home</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slapped/hit/punched in the home</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness someone slapped/hit/punched in the home</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaten up in the home</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness someone beaten up in the home</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
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</table>
number of regression analyses were conducted. A separate hierarchical multiple regression was performed for each AGVQ subscale (AR, CA, EX, PS) to determine the amount of influence exerted by the demographics of age and gender (first block) and setting of violence exposure—home, school, and neighborhood (second block). For each regression, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was assessed to determine the level of collinearity among the predictor variables. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1992), a VIF value above 10 is cause for concern. None of the predictor variables in the following regression analyses reached a VIF of above 10.

For the AR subscale, after controlling for demographic variables, the setting of violence variables explained 8.2% ($p < .05$) of the variance in the AR score (see Table 2). Together, demographics and the setting of violence variables explained 14.6% ($p < .05$) of the variance in the total AR subscale score. Significant variables ($p < .05$) in the second model included gender, violence in the home, and violence in the neighborhood.

For the CA subscale, after controlling for demographic variables, the setting of violence variables did not explain a signifi-

### TABLE 2

Hierarchical Multiple Regression with Aggressive Response to Shame Subscale: Relationship to Violence Exposure Setting Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>2.70E-02</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>2.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3.40E-02</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home violence</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School violence</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Violence</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjusted $R^2 = .064$ for Step 1; $DR^2 = .082$ for Step 2 ($p < .05$).

* $p < .05$. 
cant amount of the variance in the CA score (see Table 3). The first model, which included only demographic variables, was significant in explaining 23.6% ($p < .05$) of the variance in the CA subscale score. Significant variables ($p < .05$) in the second model included gender.

For the EX subscale, after controlling for demographic variables, the setting of violence variables explained 5.5% ($p < .05$) of the variance the EX score (see Table 4). Together, demographics and the setting of violence variables explained 14.8% ($p < .05$) of the variance in the EX subscale score. Significant variables ($p < .05$) in the second model included gender and violence in the home.

For the PS subscale, after controlling for demographic variables, the setting of violence variables explained 3.9% ($p < .05$) of the variance the PS score (see Table 5). Together, demographics and the setting of violence variables explained 4.6% ($p < .05$) of the variance in the PS subscale score. Significant variables ($p < .05$) in the second model included violence in the home.

### TABLE 3

Hierarchical Multiple Regression with Comfort with Aggression Subscale: Relationship to Violence Exposure Setting Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.46 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.11 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.46 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home violence</td>
<td>3.76E-03</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School violence</td>
<td>2.81E-02</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Violence</td>
<td>6.08E-02</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjusted $R^2 = .236$ for Step 1; $DR^2 = .00$ for Step 2 ($p < .05$).

*p < .05.
### TABLE 4

**Hierarchical Multiple Regression with Excitement Subscale (EX): Relationship to Violence Exposure Setting Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3.59E-02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>4.41E-02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home violence</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.18*</td>
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<tr>
<td>School violence</td>
<td>5.45E-02</td>
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<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood violence</td>
<td>1.63E-02</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjusted $R^2 = .093$ for Step 1; $DR^2 = .055$ for Step 2 ($p < .05$).

*p < .05.

### TABLE 5

**Hierarchical Multiple Regression with Power/Safety Subscale: Relationship to Violence Exposure Setting Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>B</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>School violence</td>
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<td>Neighborhood violence</td>
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Adjusted $R^2 = .007$ for Step 1; $DR^2 = .039$ for Step 2 ($p < .05$).

*p < .05.
Limitations

Due to the nature of recruiting respondents, this was a convenience sample and thus lends itself to the limitations inherent in this sampling technique. Therefore, this sample may not be representative of this rural school population, the school youth population in general, youth exposure to violence in different settings, or their attitudes toward firearms and violence. Therefore, due to sampling techniques the external validity and generalizability of the study are limited. There is a need for more research among larger populations of youth in all types of communities on the topic of violence exposure and attitudes toward violence to address this limitation.

Furthermore, since this study is based on self-reported data, it may not provide a valid indicator of attitude or violence exposure; however, the self-reporting approach is considered acceptable if there is no significant reason to conceal their true feelings (Eiser & van der Plight, 1988; Henderson, Morris, & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987).

Discussion and Implications

Males in this study report higher levels of violence exposure compared to females, which is consistent with the research reviewed in the Surgeon General’s Report on youth violence (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). In addition, younger students reported more violence exposure compared to older students. This finding is consistent with the National Center for Educational Statistics (1995) that younger students were more likely to be victimized and worry about crime compared to older students. Additional sources indicate that middle schools are more likely to experience some types of violence than high schools (Banks, 1997; Crosse, Burr, Cantor, Hagen, & Hantman, 2001). These similarities assist in strengthening the external validity of this study’s limited convenience sample.

Youth reports of violence in this study demonstrate that they are exposed to high levels of violence in many settings. According to the Surgeon General’s Report on youth violence (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), which provides an in-depth examination of this phenomenon of youth violence, the home, school, and community can function either as risk or protective factors. The
risk and protective factors among these different settings will vary depending upon individual characteristics, interaction with the environment, and period of development. This is consistent with the ecological perspective, which "views people not as passive reactors to their environments but rather as dynamic and reciprocal interactors with those environments," (Zastrow, 2004, p. 55). When examining the impact of home, school, and community violence on youth attitude development, the use of the ecological perspective can help to identify target systems for intervention (Kirst-Ashman, 1999).

School appeared to be the place youth are most likely exposed to violence as either a victim or witness. Again, this finding is supported by two previous studies of this nature and strengthens the external validity of the findings (Slovak & Joseph, 2001; Slovak & Singer, 2002). Since school is the setting where youth are found in greater concentration compared to home or neighborhood, this opportunity for increased interaction can heighten crime and violence in this setting. This is aligned with research contending schools with larger number of students report more crime and violence than smaller schools (Gottfredson, 2001) indicating that student density can play a role in violence. However, exposure to violence at school did not demonstrate any association to the attitudes toward violence subscales, possibly demonstrating the commonality of and desensitization to violence exposure in this setting.

After school, the neighborhood was the next setting where youth were mostly likely to report violence exposure. This challenges the stereotype that youth violence is negligible in rural communities. Additionally, violence experienced in the neighborhood had an impact on youth reports of aggressive response to shame, demonstrating the importance of this environment in shaping attitudes toward violence and the need for community based interventions.

While school and the neighborhood appear to be dangerous environments, it is distressing to report the most severe form of violence captured in this survey, being beaten up, is mostly likely to happen to a child in their own home. Nearly one million children were found to be victims of child abuse is 2001; this number increases dramatically when one takes into account allegations not investigated and unreported victimization (National Clearing House on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003). Violence experienced in the home negatively impacts youth; personal victimization and witnessing marital violence have been associated with many negative psychological
outcomes among children (Fanularo, Kinscherff, & Fenton, 1992; Peled, Jaffé, & Edelson, 1995).

Furthermore, although home violence in general was reported at lower levels compared to the school and neighborhood, it demonstrated the largest impact on youth attitudes. The present study suggests a relationship between violence in the home and negative attitudes toward guns and violence, supporting the literature that violence in the home is associated with negative psychological outcomes for youth. When the influence of violence exposure setting variables were examined to determine their influence on attitudes toward guns and violence, home violence was the prominent variable shown to significantly impact three of the AGVQ subscales (ARS, EX, and PS). As early as 1987, Pynoos, Frederick, Nader, and Arroyo suggested that a child's reaction to trauma was impacted by factors such as proximity to the violent event and the child's relationship to the victim. It has been suggested that violence between family members can be more destructive compared to violence in the school and neighborhood (Litrownik, Newton, Hunter, English, & Everson, 2003). The significant contribution of home violence on reported attitudes in this study further acknowledges this observation and supports intervention at the family system level.

The demographic of male also demonstrated an impact on reported attitudes in this investigation by its significant association with higher levels of the ARS, CA, and EX subscales. In addition, being male was the strongest of the significant predictor variables. Other research has also indicated that males possess worse attitudes about violence compared to girls (Hausman, Spivak, & Prothrow-Stith, 1994, 1995). This is not unusual when taking into consideration that males are more often the victims and perpetrators of violence and aggression (Pratt & Greydanus, 2000).

According to Shapiro (2000), "the AGVQ subscales provide information about why some young people are attracted to guns and violence" (p. 14). He notes that attitudes favorable to violence involve the idea that fighting can repair an injured self-esteem, a broad comfort with violent behavior, the notion that firearms and violence are thrilling and stimulating, and the impression that guns and violence supply power and safety. With this in mind, it is important to reflect on how violence experienced and modeled in the home can influence these beliefs. The dynamics of violence in the home can impact the development of a young person's outlook on violence by
normalizing both the antecedents and outcomes of aggressive physical and verbal interactions.

Often first occurring in the isolated home setting, violence is fundamentally a learned behavior that ultimately reaches far outside this locale to impact others and society (Pratt & Greydanus, 2000). As a child ages, the influential role of the family is still significant but largely replaced by peer influences (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Reviewed earlier, the ecological perspective along with the social learning theory and social development model help us to understand why the home appears to be the primary target for early intervention. Intervention within the family system can focus on building prosocial behaviors, attitudes, and connections. While intervention should occur at the earliest possible environment of the home, this setting is the most difficult to access when attempting to address youth violence; the first encounter youth have with violence programming will most likely be in the school setting. While programmatic efforts reaching young people in schools can be valuable, the family system that perpetuates and models violence is still operating to influence how youth perceive violence. Therefore, building and enhancing prosocial bonds with peers and school is an important focus of prevention and intervention programming in the schools to help address negative family influences that may be operating.

When discussing programmatic efforts to impact youth violence, the propensity of males to be perpetrators and victims of violence in our society (Pratt & Greydanus, 2000) must be addressed. Compared to girls, boys have historically been exposed to more violence and sanctioned male role models are more aggressive; thus, the impact of social learning and role models should not be ignored (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Violence prevention programming should be geared toward the ways in which boys experience violence and their different ways of expressing aggression compared to girls (Lober & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998). In addition, the influence of family and societal role models on the attitudes of boys is a significant area that requires further scrutiny.

Shapiro (2000) states that violent prone attitudes do not necessarily imply that violent behavior has occurred or will occur without certain environmental stimuli. Whether or not violence has or will occur should not detract from the usefulness of the concepts measured through these subscales when planning violence intervention
efforts with youth. It is evident that the home environment can impact youth attitudes toward guns and violence, which suggests the importance of intervention at the family system level.

Conclusion

Overall, students in this sample reported disturbing levels of violence in their home, school, and community. The influence of this violence exposure in different settings was examined to determine the differential impact on student attitudes toward guns and violence. This study contributes to our understanding of violence by examining how unhealthy attitudes toward violence are associated with violence exposure in the home, school, and neighborhood. Attitudes measured by the AGVQ have not previously been utilized in this manner and therefore provide a unique contribution to our exploration of youth violence. The findings of this study support previous research on the influence of family in the development of unhealthy attitudes toward violence, which have been associated with subsequent violent behavior.

The impact of violence exposure setting variables was significant in three out of four subscales, with home demonstrating the strongest contribution of these variables. Although explaining minimal variance, the impact of home violence exposure on youth attitudes toward guns and violence is valuable knowledge that adds to our understanding of youth attitude development. One explanation for the nominal contribution of violence exposure in explaining attitudes toward guns and violence is the recent nature of reported violence exposure. Students were asked only to report their violence exposure within the past year, which may have minimal impact on attitudes toward violence and firearms that have taken years to develop. To better indicate the impact of violence exposure on student attitudes, future research should take into account the cumulative impact of violence exposure among different settings on youth attitude development. In addition, the impact of violent television viewing on youth attitudes is an important variable that was not assessed by the present study. Lastly, the culture of guns and hunting in rural areas may have minimized these results.

Despite shortcomings, the present investigation contributes to a growing body of literature attempting to better understand the
complex phenomenon of youth violence. By concentrating on settings influential to violent attitude development among youth, this study supported previous research that violence exposure in the home is an important variable that requires further investigation when attempting to explain youth attitudes toward guns and violence.

Appendix

(LES questions regarding home violence)

1. How often over the past year did anyone at home tell you they were going to hurt you?
2. How often over the past year did you see someone else at home being told they were going to be hurt?
3. How often over the past year have you yourself been slapped, punched, or hit by someone at home?
4. How often over the past year have you seen someone else being slapped, punched or hit by someone at home?
5. How often over the past year have you been beaten up at home?
6. How often over the past year have you seen someone else getting beaten up at home?

References


