

Attachment 7

Extended literature review

The incidence and severity of juvenile violence and aggression appear to be on the rise (CDC, 1998). The past decade revealed increases in adolescent offenses, arrests, and weapons violation. Although teenagers are only 10% of the population, they constitute about 20% of violent crime perpetrators (Snyder & Sickmond, 1995) and 25% of violent crime victims (Allen-Hage & Sickmond, 1993). Youth violence and aggression have profound detrimental emotional, physical, and economic effects on the victims, aggressors, and larger community (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1994), and take up a considerable portion of resources devoted to social, mental health, special education, and juvenile justice services (Melton & Hargrove, in press; Melton & Spaulding, 1998). Therefore, preventing the onset, and reducing the amount, of youth violence and aggression are national priorities (USDHHS, 1990).

Aggression and violence are thought to have roots in childhood and progress with age, the result of a combination of personal attributions and reinforcing social environments (Fraser, 1996). For some youth, aggressive behavior begins at younger ages and is related to family socialization and peer rejection (Loeber et al., 1998; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998; Patterson et al., 1991). For others, aggressive behavior is first displayed during early adolescence and is related to the physical, psychological, and social changes during that time (Loeber & Hay, 1997). The prevalence of aggression and serious violence tends to increase through adolescence, peak in late adolescence or early adulthood, and then decrease with age. Although similar, factors related to aggression and emerging violence in adolescence only partially overlap, suggesting that violence may rest on the accumulation of additional risk factors (Loeber et al., 1997). Thus, preventing early aggression may help curb adolescent violence over time. There are

several factors related to adolescent aggression and violence that may be amenable to change. These include adolescent attitudes and expectations, adolescent social skills, and adult expectations and involvement.

Youths' perceptions and attitudes are linked to adolescent aggression and violence. For example, attitudes accepting of aggression and deviant behavior are highly related to actual deviant behavior and delinquent peer affiliations among early adolescents (Bosworth et al., 1999; Cotton et al., 1994; Erdley & Asher, 1998; Huesmann & Guerra, 1997; Snyder et al., 1986; St George & Thomas, 1997). In addition, attitudes toward school and perceptions of adult expectations for academic engagement are related inversely to aggression and deviant behavior among middle school students (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000; Simons et al., 1994; Vazsonyi & Flannery, 1997). Accordingly, the proposed intervention aims to target early adolescents' attitudes, expectations, and intent regarding aggressive and deviant behaviors, academic engagement, and interpersonal interactions.

Adolescent skills and competencies are also related to adolescent aggression and violence. In elementary school, low academic achievement, delinquent peer affiliations, and behavior problems put children at risk for future antisocial behavior in adolescence (Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000; Lewin, Davis, & Hops, 1999). Other research has shown that poor social competence and problem solving are linked to adolescent aggression and violence (Eccles et al., 1997; Fenzel, 2000; Fraser, 1996; Lockman et al., 1991). Similarly, poor self- or anger-control has been related to aggressive behavior among early adolescents (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1994; Griffen et al., 1999; Olweus, 1991; Pulkkinen, 1987). Social skill development is particularly important during the early adolescent

transition period when peer group affiliation becomes increasingly important and influential. Social skills can enable youth to make and maintain friends and better manage interpersonal relationships. Accordingly, the proposed intervention aims to enhance early adolescents' social skills, including problem solving, communication, resolution, and self control, to improve their intent/motivation and skills related to academic engagement, interpersonal relations, and prosocial (non-aggressive and deviant) behavior.

In addition to addressing aggressive and deviant behaviors, the study is also concerned with academic engagement, both as it relates to aggressive behavior and as an important outcome in its own right (Simons-Morton, Crump, in press). Trying hard in school is important because only by trying can youth succeed and not trying is by definition antisocial. Not trying frequently leads to underachievement, failure, and bad behavior at school. Clearly, despite the many problems in many middle schools, staying in school is a clear priority and youth who try hard are more likely to stay in school than those who quit trying. Also, commitment to school is inconsistent with violent and antisocial behavior. There is substantial literature linking aggression and academic achievement (Feldhusen, Thurston, & Benning, 1970; Gagnon & Conoley, 1997; Lewin, Davis, & Hops, 1999). Academic achievement is largely the product of ability, which cannot be addressed in this research, and partly motivation, which can and will be addressed in this research. Academic engagement is one aspect of achievement motivation that is meaningful and possibly malleable and may provide a better indicator of commitment to conventional social values than academic achievement, which is somewhat dependent on ability and previous academic history. Some researchers have

targeted the related constructs, school valuing and academic motivation (Berndt & Miller, 1990; Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984). The current research will target early adolescents' school valuing and appreciation of adult expectations regarding academics as well as behavioral and interpersonal obstacles to academic engagement to increase intent/motivation and social competence related to academic engagement.

Parents, of course, are children's primary socializing agents, central in all aspects of adolescent development, including the formation of attitudes and behaviors related to academic engagement and aggression. Research has found that supportive and involved parenting was related to positive adjustment in early adolescents' transition to middle school (Bronstein et al., 1996; Lord et al., 1994). Other authoritative parenting practices such as monitoring, involvement, and positive relationship quality consistently show associations with low levels of delinquent behaviors including aggression across pre-adolescence and adolescence (Baumrind, 1991; Griffin, Scheier, Botvin, Diaz, & Miller, 1999; Orpinas, Murray, & Kelder, 1999; Snyder, Dishion, & Patterson, 1986; Vazsonyi & Flannery, 1997). In previous prospective research we found that authoritative parenting behaviors (latent variable) were negatively and directly associated with aggression and also indirectly associated with aggression through negative association with problem behaving peers (Simons-Morton, Hartos, Haynie, in press). Because active parental involvement in aggression prevention is important for early adolescents' success (Eccles et al., 1997; Elias et al., 1985; Howard et al., 1999), the current project will include a parent component designed to encourage parents to reinforce and enhance early adolescents' attitudes and behaviors towards academic engagement and against aggression. Hence, the proposed parent intervention is guided by the authoritative

parenting conceptual (Darling, Steinberg, 1993; Simons-Morton, Hartos, Haynie, 2003) that suggests that within the context of parenting goals and the long history of parent-child relations, parenting behaviors remain important during adolescence. The aims of the parent intervention are to influence parent attitudes, expectations, and involvement, particularly as related to the reinforcement and promotion of adolescent's school engagement and prosocial (non-aggressive or deviant).

Adult mentors can also play an important role in adolescent development. Adult mentor relationships have been identified as contributing to resiliency among high-risk children and adolescents (Rhodes, 1994; Rogers & Taylor, 1997). Program evaluation studies have found that mentoring can significantly reduce violent behavior and drug use as well as improve academic achievement, school attendance, and family and peer relationships (Sipe, 2002; Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002). Frequent contact with mentors appears to be key for bringing about change in children's and adolescents' attitudes and behaviors (Jekielek et al., 2002). However, the small body of existing evidence on the effectiveness of mentoring is based on one-on-one mentoring programs, specifically Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Furano, Roaf, Styles, & Branch, 1993; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Roaf, Tierney, & Hunte, 1994; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1996). Though ideal in the provision of truly individualized attention to youth by mentors, one-on-one mentoring is not practical for many programs given the difficulty in recruiting and retaining sufficient mentors, largely because too few acceptable and qualified mentors are available for traditional mentoring approaches (Herrera, Vang, & Gale, 2002). Hence, there is a great need for practice models that efficiently capture the benefits of adult mentoring.

School-based mentoring programs may provide a cost-effective way to provide many of the benefits of community-based programs (Herrera, Vang, & Gale, 2002). School-based programs make sense because they have sustained contact with a majority of children. However, curriculum-based violence prevention programs in schools are difficult to implement, compete with other academic demands, and may not meet the needs of individuals (Maggs, Frome, Eccles, & Barber, 1997). However, highly individualized school-based approaches may not be cost effective. After-school programs can be more flexible in their approach to individuals but have a number of logistical challenges including getting at-risk adolescents to attend regularly.

Although understudied, group mentoring provides a promising school-based alternative to traditional mentoring approaches. This approach may be more feasible logistically and financially in ‘the real world.’ A recent investigation indicated that although the perceived closeness of youth-mentor relationships may not be as substantial in group-mentoring programs, teaming mentors or groups of mentors with pairs or groups of youth is beneficial to the children and adolescents (Sipe, 1996). While mentoring can provide a number of positive benefits, one of the most important is the establishment of positive relationships with the youth. The absence of adult involvement in youths’ lives is a commonly noted concern. Due to the nature of modern public education, many youth can advance through middle school without substantial connection with any teacher or other adult at school. The key feature of the proposed intervention is the frequent involvement of positive, non-parental mentors in small group activities. Accordingly, adult mentors will serve as role models, adult guides, and trainers whose engagement may shape youths’ perspectives, teach problem-solving skills, and motivate thoughtful behavior and

positive social interactions. The proposed intervention will be one of the first to investigate the effectiveness of weekly group mentoring to enhance early adolescents' intent/motivation and social competence over the course of a 9-month school year in a randomized trial. By meeting with small groups of at-risk students during school time on a weekly basis, the current intervention will be more cost effective, and activities can be better tailored to meet the needs of individuals in the groups while substantially increasing the likelihood participants will be present for the majority of the activities.

Intervention development should be carefully linked to early adolescents' development (Maggs et al., 1997). Early adolescents experience rapid physical, psychologically, social, moral, and academic transitions; increases in problem behaviors; and decreases in self-esteem, attachment, and achievement motivation (Eccles et al., 1997; Chung et al., 1998; Seidman & French, 1997). In a survey of 3rd through 5th graders, Embry and colleagues (Baumrind, 1996) found that 15% of the children had been sent to the office for disciplinary problems, 13% tried to start a fight, 27% hit someone, and 12% reported being threatened with a gun or knife within a week's time period. In surveys of middle school students, 20-34% have reported being in a physical fight (Malek et al., 1998; St. George & Thomas, 1997); around 8% report frequently displaying behaviors such as teasing, name-calling, threatening (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999); and 3-24% report carrying a weapon to school (Bailey et al., 1997; Cotton et al., 1994; DuRant et al., 1999; Kingery et al., 1998). Students who misbehave in elementary school are more likely to engage in problem behavior during middle school (Elias, Gara, & Ubriaco, 1985), and the first year of middle school appears to be a particularly significant year developmentally and behaviorally. Sixth grade may be a

particularly important time to intervene with youth as they encounter secondary education for the first time, experience increased independence, are exposed to older youth and a dynamic youth culture, and explore new ways of thinking about their identities, their future, and their behavior. Thus, it is timely to intervene during this transition period while attitudes and behaviors are malleable and before negative developmental and behavioral trajectories are established (Simons-Morton et al., 2002; Simons-Morton, Haynie, 2003).