



The nature and relevance of risk and protective factors for violence among Hispanic children and adolescents: Results from the Boricua Youth Study



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: While there exists much literature devoted to identifying risk and protective factors for violence, Hispanic research in this area is still in its infancy.

Methods: The current study provides the most comprehensive study to date on this topic by utilizing data from 1138 Puerto Rican youth who were participants in the Bronx, NY sample of the Boricua Youth Study (BYS).

Results: Relying on a myriad of descriptive and multivariate analyses examining the nature and role of 8 risk factors and 9 protective factors distributed across 6 risk/protective factor domains, the results suggest that cumulative risk factors significantly increase a Hispanic youth's odds of violence participation whereas cumulative protective factors offset this risk to some degree by decreasing the odds of violence participation. These results largely hold across different developmental age groups (ages 5–9 and ages 10–13) and over time (Waves 1, 2, and 3).

Conclusions: These findings have theoretical and policy implications for violence prevention among Hispanic youth.

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Introduction

What factors make some children and adolescents more resilient than others with respect to violent offending? This important theoretical and policy-relevant question appears on its face to be seemingly easy to answer, but documenting the research evidence to support those 'easy answers' is uncommon. To be sure, there has been ample discussion and research attention to documenting risk and protective factors among adolescents, and in particular serious juvenile offenders (see Baglivio, 2009; DeLisi & Piquero, 2011; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Portnoy, Chen, & Raine, 2013), but it is much less common to find such research for samples of children and pre-

adolescents (Farrington, 1995; Wasserman et al., 2003; Welsh & Farrington, 2007a, 2007b; Werner, 1993; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). And, it is even rarer to find such answers for samples of children and adolescents who are of Hispanic ethnicity in a longitudinal manner, although there are a series of recent and important exceptions (see Bersani, 2014; Bersani, Loughran, & Piquero, 2014; Eggers & Jennings, 2014; Jennings et al., 2010; Jennings, Maldonado-Molina, Piquero, & Canino, 2010; Maldonado-Molina, Jennings, Tobler, Piquero, & Canino, 2010; Maldonado-Molina, Reingle, Tobler, Jennings, & Komro, 2010; Piquero, Jennings, Piquero, & Schubert, 2014; Piquero, Bersani, Loughran and Fagan, in press; Reingle, Jennings, & Maldonado-Molina, 2011a; Reingle, Jennings, Maldonado-Molina, Piquero, & Canino, 2011; Reingle, Jennings, & Maldonado-Molina, 2011b; Reingle, Maldonado-Molina, Jennings, & Komro, 2012; for an additional review, also see Jennings & Reingle, 2012).

Acknowledging this neglect in the literature, the current study uses a very unique and important data source, the Boricua Youth Study (BYS), which is a longitudinal study of Puerto Rican youth from San Juan, Puerto Rico and the Bronx, NY. In the current study, we use data from

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the Bronx, NY site only. Specifically, two separate age cohorts (ages 5–9 and age 10–13) were interviewed on three different occasions separated by about a year, to examine issues related to child and adolescent development as well as antisocial behavior (see Jennings et al., 2010a; Maldonado-Molina, Piquero, Jennings, Bird, & Canino, 2009). For purposes of this study, we focus on a range of individual, family, peer, school/neighborhood, biological/neurodevelopmental, and ethnic-specific risk and protective factors to assess how they relate to violence over time. The range of risk and protective factors available in the BYS is extraordinary and includes many of the most commonly-identified risk and protective factors that have been shown to relate to antisocial behavior in primarily US samples (Loeber & Farrington, 1998), but also contain some unique factors that tend to be relevant only to ethnic samples, such as acculturation (see Knight et al., 2009).

With this background information in hand, we focus on the following two research questions: (1) what is the nature and prevalence of domain-specific risk and protective factors among Hispanic youth?; (2) is there a cumulative effect of risk and protective factors, for predicting violence among Hispanic youth? All of these analyses will be carried out with each of the two age cohorts (age 5–9 and age 10–13) and over time (Waves 1, 2, and 3), respectively.

Methods

Participants

Longitudinal data were collected from 1138 Puerto Rican youth living in the Bronx, New York, who participated in the Boricua Youth Study [BYS; (Bird & Canino, 2000)] between summer 2000 and fall 2004 (Bird et al., 2006a; Bird et al., 2006b). Each of the three interviews was conducted in the youth's homes by trained interviewers, and different interviewers interviewed the children and parents simultaneously in separate areas of the home. The survey questionnaires were administered using ACASI methods, and versions of the electronic survey were available for completion in both Spanish and English (the participant could elect to complete either version of the survey). The probability sampling process yielded 1414 eligible participants, of whom 1138 were interviewed (completion rate of 80.5%). Sample retention in the two annual follow-ups was above 85% and missing data was less than 4%. In addition, approximately 51.3% of the age 5–9 cohort and 52.2% of the age 10–13 cohort were male youth. More information regarding the data collection procedures (Bird et al., 2006; Bird et al., 2006) as well as results from several other delinquency-focused investigations exist elsewhere (Jennings et al., 2010; Jennings, Maldonado-Molina et al., 2010; Maldonado-Molina, Jennings et al., 2010; Maldonado-Molina, Reingle et al., 2010; Maldonado-Molina et al., 2009; Reingle et al., 2011).

Measures

Dependent variable: violence

The approximately 30 items comprising the original delinquency scale used in prior BYS publications (e.g., Maldonado-Molina et al., 2009) were based on a common self-report delinquency measure (Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985). Each question asked the youth to respond as to whether they committed the particular act in the prior year (yes/no). For the current study, we limited our focus to only the items that measured violence. Specifically, there were 5 items representing involvement in violence in the past year that were asked to the younger children (ages 5–9), and these items were assessed via the following questions: “have you hit, slapped, or shoved a teacher or another grown-up at school?”; “have you hit, slapped, or shoved other kids or gotten into a physical fight with them?”; “have you on any occasion carried a weapon with you? By weapon I mean something like a knife?”; “have you snatched someone's purse or wallet or picked someone's pocket?”; and “have you thrown rocks or bottles at people?”. Similarly, there were 8 questions measuring violence in the past year that were

asked to the older children/early adolescents (ages 10–13), and these questions included: “have you carried a weapon?”; “have you snatched someone's purse or wallet or picked someone's pocket?”; “have you attacked someone with a weapon or to seriously hurt or kill them?”; “have there been any occasions in which you have hit someone on purpose to hurt them?”; “have you used a weapon, force, or strong-arm methods to get money or things from people?”; “have you thrown objects at people that could have hurt them, such as rocks or bottles?”; “have you been involved in a gang fight?”; and “have you had, or tried to force someone to have, sexual relation with you against their will?”. The “yes” responses to each item were summed to create a “variety” scale (Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981) based on the 5 items for the younger children (ages 5–9) and the 8 items for the older children/early adolescents (ages 10–13). Due to the rarity of violence generally and the skewness, the violence variety indexes were dichotomized to represent (yes/no) for involvement in violence.

Independent variables

Demographics. Age was a continuous measure representing the youth's age at the time of the interview. Gender was a dichotomous measure where 1 = males and 0 = females.

Risk & protective factors

All of the risk and protective factors across the 6 risk and protective factor domains (individual, family, peer, school/neighborhood, biological/neurodevelopmental, and ethnic-specific) are coded as 1 (presence of risk/protective factor) or as 0 (absence of risk/protective factor). Additional details on the measurement of these risk and protective factors can be found elsewhere (Maldonado-Molina et al., 2009).

Individual risk & protective factors. Individual risk factors include pro-delinquent attitudes and being neglected. Comparatively, individual protective factors include not being impulsive, having high academic achievement, not having been physically abused, and not having been sexually abused.

Family risk & protective factors. Family factors that were considered include poverty (risk factor), having an unemployed head of the household (risk factor), and having a positive parent-child relationship (protective factor).

Peer risk & protective factors. Having delinquent peers and having positive peer relationships were the peer risk and protective factors, respectively.

School/neighborhood risk & protective factors. School/neighborhood risk was assessed with one risk factor measuring exposure to violence (e.g., direct and indirect exposure to violence) and one protective factor representing that the youth was attending a school with a positive school environment.

Biological/neurodevelopmental risk & protective factors. There were a series of biological/neurodevelopmental risk and protective factors including having been a low birth weight infant (risk factor), having experienced prenatal complications (risk factor), having experienced perinatal complications (risk factor), and not having exhibited an early developmental delay (protective factor).

Ethnic-specific risk & protective factors. Being acculturated and reporting no cultural stress were included as ethnic-specific risk and protective factors, respectively.

Cumulative risk factor index. This index included a compilation of all risk factors from the 6 domains as described above, including pro-delinquent attitudes, neglect, poverty, unemployed head of household,

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