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An Analysis of Violence Exposure and Response among Youth in the West Jackson Community as a Correlate of At-Risk Behavior

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Abstract

The growing rate of violence and aggression among children in the West Jackson Community continues to perpetuate a cycle of at-risk behavior. This cycle has contributed to an increase in chronic behavior patterns such as delinquency, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, school failure and incarceration. High levels of exposure to violent and aggressive behavior often characterize youth in this community's elementary and middle school feeder pattern. This study examines socialization patterns among youth in this population to determine their relationship to the present school climate and to determine how exposure to high levels of violence and aggression increases the probability of at-risk behavior among students in the West Jackson Community. In excess of 560 questionnaires were administered to students attending Brinkley Middle School, Powell Middle School, Walton Elementary School and Morrison Academic Advancement Center. The data were collected using the Violence Risk Assessment Inventory (VRAI) and the Bazargan Index of Anger Exposure and Response (BIAER) instruments. These instruments are used as an assessment procedure in the city of Jackson's Mayor's Youth Initiative in its services to students in the Jackson Public School District. The data from the questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, mean, median and standard deviation were completed. This procedure allowed the researchers to determine the participants' demographic composition. Analysis procedures included Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. This data-driven research is applicable to researchers, administrators of schools and programs, curriculum developers, teachers, parents and the communities that house youth with violent and aggressive behaviors. Data is generated to equip districts and agencies to provide population-specific services that will decrease the incidence of at-risk behaviors. Violent and aggressive behavior is discussed in relation to community-specific factors.

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Introduction

The growing rate of violence and aggression among children in the United States has become an increasingly important research topic for educators, social workers, and behavioral scientists. Even before a child is born, violence can have a profound effect upon its life (Prothrow-Stith & Quaday, 1995). Research by the National Institute of Mental Health (2004) has shown that there is a link between violence involving pregnant women and low birth weight babies.

Shore (1997) states that early brain development and the way parents, families, and other caregivers relate and respond to their young children, directly affect the formation of neural pathways. In addition, the ways that these individuals mediate their children's contact with the environment conversely affects behavior. Adams and East (1999) found that maltreated adolescents were more likely to be involved in delinquent behavior, used alcohol and tobacco and had feelings of depression about not having a father in the home. Exposure to violence by these adolescents produces youth without the capacity to meet societal challenges.

The Children's Defense Fund (1997) reports that every day 10 children are murdered, 16 die from guns, 316 are arrested for crimes of violence, and over 8,000 are reported abused or neglected. These data show that annually over three million children are victims of urban environmentalism which refers to the hazards or high-risk factors that today's youth face in the United States (p.15). With the increase in number of violent crimes, it is difficult to establish ways to make the environment safer for today's youth. Violent children usually come from violent homes (Page et al., 1992). The home is an environment in which parents model violence as a means of resolving conflict and handling stress (1992). Mortality rates for adolescents are related to the high-risk

behaviors they practice. The probability of males dying is greater than that of females. Additionally, African-Americans have a greater chance of dying than their Caucasian counterparts.

The number one cause of death for adolescents is motor vehicle accidents. Thirty-three percent of adolescents die as a result of vehicle accidents. Homicide, the second leading cause, has an 18 percent mortality rate among adolescents. It should also be noted that vehicular accidents is the leading cause of death for African-American males. The fourth leading cause of mortality is unintentional injuries. School behaviors such as carrying a weapon, engaging in a physical fight, dating violence, school-related violence, having been forced to have sexual intercourse, and suicide are increasingly high-risk behaviors that adolescents practice (Hamilton Fish Institute, 2004).

The children of the West Jackson Community are in the feeder pattern for environmental violence. This paper considers at-risk behaviors that contribute to the increase in chronic behavior patterns such as delinquency, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, school failure, and incarceration. These high levels of exposure to violent and aggressive behavior often characterize youth in elementary and middle schools. We examine how exposure to high levels of violence and aggression increases the probability of at-risk behavior among students in the West Jackson Community.

Literature Overview

A major theme regarding students in the United States is violence and aggression. While the nation experienced a drop in violent crimes during the past few years, criminal activity among adolescents rose to new heights. Violence has become an interwoven segment of America's fabric (Glaze, 2000). According to Hamburg (1997), approximately one million youth between the ages of 12 and 19 suffer injury, loss or death each year and these criminal acts are due to levels of exposure to violence (The National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2003). The National Center for Injury and Control (2004) found that in the year 2002, there were approximately 877,700

injured youth between the ages of 10 and 24 as a result of crime. In the United States, nearly 16 million adolescents including 70 percent to 95 percent of children in outer cities have witnessed some form of violent assault, including robbery, stabbing, shooting, murder, or domestic abuse (Kachur, et al., 1998 & Ayne, Pynoos and Cardenas, in press). This violence is then internalized by children in the United States at an astonishing rate.

There are many definitions of violence and aggression, but all describe an action or exposure. Additionally, these two terms are interconnected, but different. Wood and Johnson (2002) state that youth violence occurs in variant forms, ranging from aggressive verbal offense to physical injury and even death. Mawson (1999) describes physical violence as injuries linked to the use of force and extensively involves assault, homicide, self-inflicted injury and suicide. Bailey (2002) delineates violence as the strong infliction of physical injury and aggression as injurious, intimidating or antipathetic behavior. The *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (1999) summarizes all definitions by stating that violence is a sequence of aggression.

Perry (2004) reports that aggression is not defined as violence. Further, he theorizes that "aggression is a behavior characterized by verbal or physical attack, yet it may be appropriate and self-protective or destructive and violent" (p. 2). He maintains that the human brain mediates all human behavior which includes aggression, fear, violence, ideology, human emotions, behaviors, cognition and social functioning. Therefore, when a child is violent, Perry promotes three points: (1) not all violence is the same, (2) the brain mediates all human behavior and (3) the biological properties of the brain are the result of genotyped and developmental experiences. Furthermore, Mawson (1999) proposed the following theoretical model as alternative:

1) Physical violence is largely a fortuitous outcome of intense stimulation-seeking behavior (SSB), driven in part by activation of the brain catecholamines (CA) noradrenaline and dopamine.

2) Allegedly discrete categories of motor-motivational behavior, including aggression, represent overlapping bands of intensity on a continuous spectrum of SSB.

3) The sensory input derived from SSB is fed back into the central nervous system where it activates brain serotonergic (5-HT) and/or cholinergic Ach) systems, which in turn inhibit CA systems, resulting in a general state of calm (p. 179).

Kotulak (1997) subscribes various forms of aggression among children to brain damage which is linked to bad experiences in the environment. He found that this damage, brought on by stresses such as violence, family dysfunction, neglect and poverty can increase the risk of developing problems of aggression and violence in children. Murphy (2001) states that continuous exposure to environmental violence can affect a child psychologically causing more impulsivity and aggression.

Socialization Patterns of Youth

The study and role of social dynamics as the base and sustenance of violence and aggression in youth may enhance the prevention of these behaviors. According to the Report of the Surgeon General (2003), the dynamics of youth violence change over the life course due to developmental perspectives. In the early-onset trajectory, problem behavior that starts in early childhood gradually increases to more violent behavior before adolescence. In a study of middle and high school students, it was concluded that most violent episodes at school began with minor episodes that were escalated. The study showed that many fights were linked to group affiliation and to adolescents who were physically aggressive or with aggressive tendencies and who were likely to hang around each other (Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, Coe, 2002).

The origin, prevention and treatment of violence and aggressive behavior continue with the family, environment or lack of spiritual or moral development as additional factors in these areas of concern. The Mississippi State Department of Health (1999) reports that the price of family violence is costly. According to Keegan (2002) low-income families frequently live in disadvantaged

neighborhoods with similar traits as those mentioned in the latter. This study contends that children exposed to violence in these disadvantaged communities developed a threatened and disordered perception of their community which leads to anxiety and depression. She contends that research has documented the adverse effects of economic hardship on children in socio-emotional adjustment. This includes impaired peer relations, low self-esteem and antisocial behavior. Bennett and Frasier (2000), studied indicators such as poverty, unemployment and other factors that exert both a direct and indirect effect on children and youth. They contend that chaotic home environments are frequently the end result of the lack of resources often associated with poverty. With the rising rate of single-parent homes, parents are responsible for the dual burden of childcare and economic support. With increased responsibility, they are less likely to contribute to the social and emotional support of the child (2000). There are scholars who support the theory that lack of emotional support can contribute to the high incidence of violence among African-American children and youth. According to Gorski and Pilotto (1993), children from single-parent homes exhibited higher levels of aggressive and antisocial behavior than those living with both parents.

Many youth develop physical and social problems as an outcome of their exposure or personal involvement to crimes. Family violence produces a continuous cycle of violence and at-risk behaviors. According to Woods (1999), children and youth who are exposed to violence in a family may or may not be violent, but their means for resolving conflicts are violent or aggressive. Whether problems exist with the family or outside the family, youth are experimenting with substance abuse which can lead to behavior that places them at risk. Woods continues to discuss the relationship between incarceration and drugs or alcohol and violent offenses. Lowry and Cohen (1999) studied the association between substance use and the availability of illegal drugs at school utilizing the 1995 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The findings were that tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use and availability of illegal drugs on the school campus are associated with school

violence. Some youth are users of drugs and alcohol, while others are victims of family use, thus acting out their frustrations.

When a youth experiences frustrations or unresolved issues, bullying occurs. This deliberate and belligerent pursuit generates fear. Bullying takes the form of individual or group activity such as verbal, physical or relational. The most common form of bullying is verbal which includes rumors, gossiping, name-calling teasing or verbal challenges. The physical facet of bullying involves fights, physical assaults, demonstrations of physical supremacy while, relational bullying involves coalition-building or ostracism (Farmer, 2000).

Bullying, a coping or competitive mechanism, stems from the need to manage internal behavior in relation to external forces which are factors in the environment. A study by Fryxell (2000) examined anger among elementary students and concluded that cumulative and negative experiences at home, in school and with peers affect the frequency and intensity of anger experienced at school. School factors, according to Fryxell, were as important as family factors in contributing to anger. Additionally, the study concluded that children who experience stress and anxiety at school tend to be angry.

Chronic Behavior Patterns in Youth

Chronic Behavior Patterns are defined as the continuous shaping of the conduct of juveniles by environmental or familial factors. Youth whose violence starts before puberty are likely to become chronic violent offenders. The Rochester survey revealed self-report and arrest studies by Tolan & Gorman-Smith (1998) and Tracy & Kempf-Leonard (1996) found few of serious violent youth are accountable for the majority of serious violent crime. Chronic offenders, though representing less than 20 percent of all serious violent offenders, accounted for 75-80 percent of self-reported violent crimes (Huzinga et al., 1995).

According to the Hamilton Fish Institute (2004), most violence among youth, particularly in schools, is committed by a small group of chronic offenders who are also involved in the criminal justice system. In an examination of violence among youth in schools, the CDC Media Relations (2004) offers these facts with regard to youth violence in the United States:

- 65 percent of school-associated violent deaths were students; 11 percent were teachers or other staff members; 23 percent were community members who killed on school property.
- 83 percent of school homicides and suicides were male.
- 28 percent of the fatal injuries happened inside the school building; 36 percent occurred outside on school property; 35 percent occurred off campus.

In an assessment conducted by the CDC's Youth Behavior Risk Survey (YRBS) of students in grades 9-12, the data revealed that 8.3 percent of high school students possessed a weapon (e.g., gun, knife, or club) during the thirty days preceding the survey. This figure is down from the previous 26.1 percent in 1996. Nationwide, 14.8 percent had been in a physical fight on school property one or more times during the school year. Overall, male students (20 percent) were significantly more likely than females (8.6 percent) to have been in a physical fight on school property.

Violence and aggression has become all too familiar in television and media. However, it is most often played out in the streets of impoverished urban communities. In the 1990s, homicide became the second leading cause of death for adolescents. It became the leading cause of death among African-American males (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). More specifically, homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American men between the ages of 15-34 and women between the ages of 25-34. According to Joy Mockbee (1996), national coordinator for the American Medical Student Association, violence stems from a combination of factors that can be found in the inner-city neighborhoods. The high concentration of poverty, drugs, witnessing

violence and crime can come together to create an overwhelming amount of stress for persons living in that environment.

Violent and aggressive behavior in schools has become more volatile in the past few years. These behaviors can be offensive or victimizing and there is no single factor that can foretell who is disposed to aggressive and violent behaviors, however, in-depth studies over a long period of time have established developmental pathways that lead to behavior problems. It is well documented that conditions in the home and the impact of the school and community help to establish these behavior problems. Therefore, each entity - the home, school and community - must join forces to represent a network of social structures and organizations that can be important deterrents to engaging in violent and social behavior.

Study Design and Method

The design of our research is motivated to determine if the prevalence of at-risk behavior among middle and elementary school students in the West Jackson Community is correlated with increased exposure to violence and aggression. The data were collected using the Violence Risk Assessment Inventory (VRAI) and Bazargan Index of Anger Exposure and Response (BIAER). The design applied to ascertain basic demographic characteristics of the population, included frequencies, mean median and standard deviation. Statistically, Pearson's Correlation Coefficients are utilized to determine the relationship between at-risk behaviors (i.e., drug and alcohol abuse, fighting, carrying weapons), exposure to violence and aggression. The data from the questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Sample

The sample used in this study was composed of elementary and middle school aged students from the West Jackson Community. A total of 562 African-American students from four schools were selected. The sample included 300 males and 262 females. The West Jackson Community was

chosen specifically due to the high incidence of crime and low socio-economic status of children and families in this area. The four schools included Morrison Academic Advancement Center, Brinkley Middle School, Powell Middle School, and Walton Elementary School. According to the Mississippi Department of Education (2004), only Walton Elementary scored at a Level 4-Exemplary Achievement. Both Powell and Brinkley Middle Schools reported levels 2-Under-Performing status, while Morrison Academic Advancement Center reported a level 1-Low-Performing status, for two consecutive years. Thus, it is assumed that the incidences of violence and aggression will more likely play an integral part in the at-risk behavior among youth in this community. The questionnaires were obtained through the Mayor's Youth Initiative, which is an agency that specializes in services to youth in the city of Jackson.

Measures

Violence Risk Assessment Inventory (VRAI)

The Violence Risk Assessment Inventory (VRAI) was developed by the Family Community Violence Program at Central State University. This scale measures responses from a timeframe ranging from three months to six months. The VRAI scale included 23 items used to measure youth's involvement in physical fights, drugs, alcohol, anger, theft, and exposure/possession of weapons. Responses were derived from a Likert-type scale ranging from "N-No" to "4-four or more times."

Bazargan Index of Anger Exposure and Response (BIAER)

The Bazargan Index of Anger Exposure and Response (BIAER) was developed by Dr. Shahrzad Bazargan of Charles R. Drew University. The BIAER scale included 17 items measuring responses of youth exposed to various levels of anger, either directly or indirectly. To evaluate participant performance, the Family and Community Violence Prevention Program uses both

instruments. Central State University has reported that this program has generated data-proven success rates in the reduction of violence among youth.

Table 1.1 Indicators of Physical Violence Involvement

	Fought with a group of friends		Physically fought someone I knew		Physically fought someone you did not know		Carried a weapon in public	
No	369	65.7%	249	44.3%	340	60.5%	447	79.5%
Once	77	13.7%	138	24.6%	84	14.9%	49	8.7%
Twice	43	7.7%	50	8.9%	44	7.8%	18	3.2%
Three Times	20	3.6%	32	5.7%	23	4.1%	8	1.4%
Four or More	52	9.3%	93	16.5%	71	12.6%	40	7.1%

N=562

Table 1.2 Indicators of Physical Violence Involvement

	Fought with a group of friends	Physically fought someone I knew	Physically fought someone you did not know	Carried a weapon in public
Mean	**1.76**	**2.25**	**1.93**	**1.47**
Median	**1.0**	**2.0**	**1.0**	**1.0**
Std. Deviation	**1.28**	**1.47**	**1.4**	**1.28**

Table 1.1 and 1.2 report results across four categories of involvement in physical violence. For students in the sample, 13.7 percent (77) had fought with a group of friends against another group of people at least once. The data also reveal that collectively, between the categories, 34.3 percent of (192) students reported that they had fought with a group of people against another group of people.

Additionally, 24.6 percent (138) reported having physically fought someone they knew. The data also revealed that 16.5 percent (93) reported having physically fought someone they knew four or more times. It is also interesting to note that the occurrence of physical violence was not isolated to mere acquaintance. When asked if one had physically fought someone they did not know, the responses revealed that 14.9 percent (84) had at least once, while 7.8 percent (44) reported twice, 4.1

percent (23) reported three times and 12.6 percent (71) reported four or more times. In assessing the percentage of students who had physically fought someone they did not know, 39.4 percent (222) would account for this total population. Students were also assessed to determine if they had carried a weapon to school or on the streets. Physical violence is often accompanied by use of weapons. Almost 20 percent of the sample reported having carried a weapon to school or on the streets at least once. For clarity, 8.7 percent (49) carried once, 3.2 percent (18) twice, 1.4 percent (8) three times, and 7.1 percent (40) four or more times.

2.1 Indicators of At-Risk Exposure

	Been with someone selling drugs		**Been offered drugs or alcohol**		**With someone smoking weed**		**Drank alcohol or been drunk**	
No	396	70.5%	350	62.3%	329	58.5%	368	68.5%
Once	47	8.4%	68	12.1%	67	11.9%	64	11.4%
Twice	21	3.7%	33	5.9%	32	5.7%	27	4.8%
Three Times	16	2.8%	18	3.2%	19	3.4%	24	4.3%
Four or More	82	14.6%	93	16.5%	115	20.5%	79	14.1%

N=562

Table 2.2 Indicators of At-Risk Exposure

	Been with someone selling drugs	**Been offered drugs or alcohol**	**With someone smoking weed**	**Drank alcohol or been drunk**
Mean	1.82	1.59	1.96	1.93
Median	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Std. Deviation	1.46	1.51	1.61	2.6

The data also suggest that students in the West Jackson Community will experience increased levels of exposure to drug and alcohol abuse. Presumably, exposure to high levels of drug and alcohol abuse will desensitize students to the long-term hazards of its use. Table 2.1 summarizes

the proportion of sample respondents belonging to four drug exposure categories. Approximately 15 percent (82) stated that they had associated with someone selling drugs at least four or more times. Collectively, 29.5 percent (166) said that they had been with someone selling drugs. Furthermore, 16.5 percent (93) had been offered drugs or alcohol while, 20.5 percent (115) had been with someone smoking marijuana at least four or more times. Indicators of alcohol experimentation and abuse revealed that 11.4 percent (64) said that they had drank alcohol or been drunk, while 14.1 percent stated that they had drank alcohol or been drunk at least four or more times.

Table 3.1 At-Risk Behavior Indicators

	Taken something that didn't belong to me		**Damaged or destroyed school property**		**Been away from home without permission**		**Argued with my parents or guardians**	
No	362	64.4%	429	76.3%	362	64.4%	341	60.7%
Once	85	15.1%	42	7.5%	55	9.8%	84	14.9%
Twice	29	5.2%	30	5.3%	32	5.7%	41	7.3%
Three Times	24	4.3%	10	1.8%	26	4.6%	19	3.4%
Four or More	62	11%	50	8.9%	87	15.5%	76	13.5%

N=562

Table 3.2 At-Risk Behavior Indicators

	Taken something that didn't belong to me	**Damaged or destroyed school property**	**Been away from home without permission**	**Argued with my parents or guardians**
Mean	**1.82**	**1.59**	**1.96**	**1.93**
Median	**1.0**	**1.0**	**1.0**	**1.0**
Std. Deviation	**1.35**	**1.23**	**1.5**	**1.42**

In order to assess the level of involvement of at-risk behavior among students in this population, respondents were surveyed to determine their level of involvement in those types of behaviors. The results in Table 3.1 suggest that 15.1 percent (85) reported that they had taken something that did not belong to them without paying for it at least once. Approximately, 9 percent (50) reported that they had damaged or destroyed school property and 15.5 percent (87) said that they had been away from home without permission.

Table 4.1 Violence Exposure Indicators

	Held a real gun in my hands		**Held a real gun in my hands without my parents permission**		**Someone in my family has gotten into a physical fight**		**Seen family members settle arguments by fighting**	
No	313	55.7%	424	75.4%	272	48.4%	290	51.6%
Once	75	13.3%	39	6.9%	73	13%	80	14.2%
Twice	48	8.5%	29	5.2%	41	7.3%	52	9.3%
Three Times	20	3.6%	14	2.5%	30	5.3%	29	5.2%
Four or More	106	18.9%	56	10%	146	26%	111	19.8%

N=562

Table 4.2 Violence Exposure Indicators

	Held a real gun in my hands	**Held a real gun in my hands without my parents permission**	**Someone in my family has gotten into a physical fight**	**Seen family members settle arguments by fighting**
Mean	2.16	1.67	2.47	2.27
Median	1.0	1.0	2.0	1.0
Std. Deviation	1.56	1.30	1.69	1.58

Table 4.1 reports on exposure to violence. Students in this population apparently have had experience with high levels of violence and aggression. Violence exposure indicators revealed for the sample, 26 percent (146) had witnessed a family member in a physical fight four or more times.

Additionally, 19.8 percent (111) said that they had seen family members settle an argument with physical violence four or more times. Almost half the sample, 48.5 percent (272), reported witnessing family members settle an argument with physical violence. Youth in the West Jackson Community have also experienced a high incidence of criminal homicide with the use of firearms. Table 4.1 indicates that 18.9 percent (106) reported having held a real gun at least four or more times. In cumulative form, 44.3 percent (249) reported having held a real gun in their hands.

Table 5.1 Anger Response Indicators

	Been mad enough to fight		**No way out of situation without using violence**		**So angry I acted without thinking**		**So mad I thought I would lose control**	
No	197	35.1%	342	60.9%	310	55.2%	242	43.1%
Once	92	16.4%	70	12.5%	59	10.5%	97	17.3%
Twice	41	7.3%	44	7.8%	54	9.6%	43	7.7%
Three Times	44	7.8%	33	5.9%	39	6.9%	42	7.5%
Four or More	188	33.5%	73	13%	100	17.8%	138	24.6%

N=562

Table 5.2 Anger Response Indicators

	Been mad enough to fight	**No way out of situation without using violence**	**So angry I acted without thinking**	**So mad I thought I would lose control**
Mean	2.88	1.97	2.21	2.53
Median	2.0	1.0	1.0	2.0
Std. Deviation	1.72	1.44	1.57	1.65

As would be expected, a significant number of students in this sample reported using physical violence and aggression to resolve various situations. Table 5.1 reports on sample proportions across four anger response categories. Approximately 33.5 percent (188) reported being mad enough to fight at least four or more times. It is also significant to note that 24.6 percent (138) felt that the

intensity of their anger would cause them to lose control. In addition, 17.8 percent (100) said that they were so mad, they acted without thinking at least four or more times.

Table 6 Pearson's Correlation for Physically Fought Someone I Knew

Fought with a group of friends **.471**** **.000**	**Fought someone I did not know** **.564**** **.000**	**Been with someone selling drugs** **.448**** **.000**	**With someone smoking weed** **.466**** **.000**	**Been offered drugs or alcohol** **.437**** **.000**
Drank alcohol or been drunk **.267**** **.000**	**Argued with my parents or guardian** **.260**** **.000**	**Damaged or destroyed property** **.353**** **.000**	**Use a weapon like knife, stick, bat in a fight** **.346**** **.000**	**Someone in my family has gotten into a physical fight.** **.439**** **.000**
Been so mad I thought that I would lose control **.434**** **.000**	**Someone in my family has gotten into a physical fight.** **.439**** **.000**	**Seen family members settle an argument by fighting** **.356**** **.000**	**Felt that there was no way out of a situation without using violence** **.355**** **.000**	**Been so angry I acted without thinking** **.355**** **.000**
Held a real gun in my hand with permission from parent/guardian **.407**** **.000**	**Carried a weapon to a public place like to a school or store** **.292**** **.000**	**Taken something that didn't belong to me without paying for it** **.411**** **.000**	**Held a real gun in my hands** **.445**** **.000**	**I say mean things to other people.** **-.232** **.000**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 reports Pearson's Correlation Coefficients between violent tendencies and at-risk behaviors. The results suggest that there are significant relationships between those students with physically violent tendencies and various at-risk behaviors. The data revealed that those students who fought others they knew showed data association to fighting students they did not know (.054, $p<.05$). Furthermore, this same population, was likely to interact with students who smoked marijuana (466, $p<.05$). It is also relevant to note that this population of students who had physically aggressive tendencies had also seen a family member use physical aggression (.439, $p<.05$) or settle an argument by fighting (.56, $p<.05$). Students who exhibited physically violent tendencies were also likely to be associated with various at-risk and delinquent behaviors. The indicators in this table show that these students had problems controlling their anger (.434, $p<.05$) and often reverted to the standard set in their immediate environment.

Conclusions

This paper set out to determine if the increased level of violence and aggression in the West Jackson Community would contribute to the increased level of at-risk behavior for students in this area. In order to assess the population and their exposure to violence and aggression, the Bazargan Index of Anger Exposure and Response (BIAER) was used in addition to the Violence Risk Assessment Inventory (VRAI).

As we began to evaluate this problem from its origin, it is interesting to note that 86.5 percent (486) of this population said that they had been called names they did not like. Surely, we have all been called names, but what makes this situation any different? The significance for this situation is determined by how the students feel and respond to the words used toward them. Almost half the population at 43.1 percent (242) said they feel mad or angry when they are called names they did not like. Furthermore, in assessing the frequency of this behavior, 13.9 percent (78) said that people say mean things to them all the time, while another 11.6 percent (65) reported this behavior occurs most of the time.

When these actions become a part of the socialization patterns for this population, they can extend beyond harmless teasing. As a result, students in this population begin to say mean things to other students. In large part, the level of conformity may often occur as a mode of adaptation. According to the data, 15.8 percent (89) said that they say mean things to other people all of the time, while 11.6 percent (65) reported repeating this behavior most of the time. Most importantly, when these negative exchanges occur, 41.3 percent (232) said they feel nothing. In addition, another 21 percent (118) said that it makes them happy when they use these negative statements toward other people. This pattern of negative socialization becomes a large part of the socialization pattern where negative statements are used as a source to vent frustration and anger while masking their own issues of insecurity. This learned behavior is a direct reflection of the environment and community at

large. Media and television violence will have a direct influence on any adolescent environment; however, for an environment inundated with violence and aggression, students become desensitized to the harmful effects of this situation.

The socialization process for this environment is created as 43.6 percent (245) of the population reported that people around them use mean words all of the time. Another 19.8 percent (111) said that people around them use mean words most of the time. This behavior goes even deeper as 63.7 percent (358) agree that it is okay to have angry feelings. Whereas, we see these attributes as negative, the youth of this population began to use these attributes as a means to gain respect in an aggressive environment. Large-scale conformity continues as youth of this population begin exhibiting aggression ranging from lower level name-calling to high-level physical assault.

In communities like the West Jackson area, crime and at-risk behavior is disproportionately displayed in the lives of youth on a daily basis. Schools in this area will find recruitment of quality teachers a difficult task as local media and news portray the daily acts of violence from these same streets. In the past, schools were considered safe havens for youth to learn and explore. Current trends will force districts to modify policies on school safety. This is particularly true of urban areas with metal detectors, security officers and police (liaison) officers in the buildings. The data confirmed that the students in this area are not only exposed to high levels of violence in the schools, but many will also find it in the home. This consistent reinforcement of crime and delinquent behavior will have damaging long-term effects on youth in the response to aggressive behavior. This study attempted to show that students in this population become desensitized to the severity of physically aggressive behavior.

Aggressive and violent behavior in school by students is in a sense self-limiting as it will ultimately lead to suspensions. Fear of school failure can often create a level of stress, which leads to other at-risk behavior such as drug and alcohol abuse. Peer pressure will carry a heavy price as

these students deal with a variety of family and community stressors, in addition to coping with the high level of violent encounters. As the stress levels increase, students begin to connect with other students who share problems and issues at the same or similar levels.

There is a tremendous need for additional research that will guide understanding of concealed and overt risk factors for serious youth violence and aggression. There is a need for more tools related to assessing these risk factors. Additional research is needed to address specific forms of youth violence and resiliency in children and youth.

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