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A Randomized Violence Prevention Trial with Comparison: Responses by Gender

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ABSTRACT. Using random assignment of students to two intervention groups and a comparison school sample, the researchers evaluated a three-group school-based violence prevention program. The three groups were (1) a whole-school intervention, (2) whole-school, cognitive-behavioral and cultural enrichment training, and (3) no violence prevention. The evaluation yielded significant between-group differences by gender from Times 3 to 4. Males showed no significant across-group differences. Females showed a moderate beneficial effect size for perpetration in group 2. Females also exhibited a large beneficial effect for

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self-reported victimization. Researchers may need to consider gender as a variable for designing inner-city interventions like this. doi:10.1300/J202v06n01_05

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School violence is a widespread and protracted concern affecting youth nationwide. In the 1990s, Schwartz & Elicik (1994) reported that violence in schools had become an epidemic, and according to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Advisory Panel of School Violence (Soriano, Soriano, & Jimenez 1994) "violence is a public health and safety condition which results from individual, social, economic, political, and institutional disregard for basic human needs. . . ."

Interpersonal violence is violence between persons, such as fights, shootings, and stabbings, while personal violence is self-inflicted. African American youth are at a greater risk for violence than any other subpopulation. Homicide was the second leading cause of death among all youth (Soriano et al., 1994).

Violence in schools is a major public health problem in the United States, affecting all youth (Durant, Krowchunck, Keiter, Sinai, & Woods, 1999). The consequences of school violence extend beyond immediate physical harm to long-term psychological and economic damage. Across the nation, 4% of students missed at least one day of class per month because they felt unsafe at school (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 2001). High standards of school achievement are often sacrificed in an atmosphere of violence, disorder, and fear (Cirillo, 1998). Schools are appropriate sites for violence prevention programs when they have a comprehensive and systematic approach to prevention (Catalano, Loeb, & McKinney, 1999).

Examples of successful school violence prevention programs include RIPP (Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways) Program (Farrell, Meyer, & Dahlberg, 1996), PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) Program (Greenberg, Kusche, & Mihalic, 1998), the Bullying Prevention Program (Cunningham & Henggeler, 2001), and the Cognitive/Ecological Approach to Preventing Violence Program (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001). All of these programs

targeted low-income, urban, African American students. A common theme, the acquisition of adaptive and prosocial skills, characterized each program. The programs raised awareness among the students and taught them problem-solving skills. The programs were all culturally based and offered incentives that improved the students' violent behavior.

For several reasons, not all school programs have been successful, according to educators. First, staff in many programs did not target student subgroups well for the most appropriate interventions. Second, they provided materials but provided little emphasis on program implementation. Third, some programs confused methods that worked in the neighborhood with those that worked in the school. Lastly, many programs were unrealistic about the social influences that compelled children to engage in violence (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). The relevance of gender to implementation was not a program design factor.

The Violence Prevention Program of the Violence Prevention Coalition incorporated two intervention components, "whole school" (Group I) and "whole-school plus pull-out" (Group II) program components. To the authors' knowledge this was the first effort to evaluate the two approaches systematically among African American middle school students.

PURPOSE

The Group II intervention described in this study used several critical elements of a promising violence prevention program (Dusenbury & Falco, 1997), including promoting personal and social competencies, using a multifaceted approach, and using ethnic identity or culturally sensitive materials. This intervention used a universal prevention approach, which has been shown to be an effective approach for violence prevention (Stoolmiller, Mark, & Reid, 2000; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). A universal intervention is defined as one that reaches the general population–such as all students in a school (Sloboda & David, 1999). The universal approach is efficient to implement since everyone who wishes to participate has the opportunity to do so, and cost and manpower resources needed for screening are minimal. Program organizers delivered the intervention to students without prior individual assessment aimed at identifying the students who had the greatest potential for violence (Sloboda & David, 1999; Stoolmiller et al., 2000; Sugai et al., 2000).

The primary purpose of this study was to assess gender-specific responses to the three project conditions–two intervention conditions (Groups I and II) and a comparison condition (Group III). One study (Bergsgaard, 1997) showed that violence prevention programs may affect males differently from females. Female aggression may be more covert and less amenable to concrete resolution than the aggression that males exhibit. Further, the developmental pathways leading to violence may be different depending on gender (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998).

METHODS

Participant Recruitment

In year one the researchers recruited 336 students from grades 6, 7 and 8. Between Time 2 (April, 2000) and Time 3 (October, 2001) the eighth grade students graduated to high school. The researchers used grades 6 and 7 (206) for the analysis because these students received two consecutive years of the interventions. In part one of the analysis of Groups I and II, 356 survey responses were from females and 234 survey responses were from males. Enrollment at the intervention school and the comparison school was 640 and 900 respectively. Part two of the analysis included 198 surveys from females and 93 surveys from males. A comparison middle school participated in the evaluation in year two only, and the 117 additional students completed surveys at that Times 3 and 4. During the second program year, Groups I and II were 7th and 8th graders who were part of this two-year summative evaluation.

Student Assignment to Conditions

The researchers used random assignment at the intervention school and a convenience sample at a comparison middle school to evaluate three experimental conditions. Researchers randomly assigned students at the intervention school to Group I or Group II. Random assignment occurred by gender and grade level. Researchers used a computerized random numbers generator function from the Excel spreadsheet computer program to assign a random number to a list of alphabetically ordered student names. Then the researchers sorted the student names in ascending order from small to large random number values. Next, the researchers assigned a value of one for the first half of the students.

These students participated in the Group II condition. Finally, the researchers assigned a value of zero to the remaining student names for participants in the Group I condition. Students at the intervention school participated in each of the two conditions according to the randomized list of names generated through this process. The convenience sample of students (Group III) at the second middle school was students who elected to participate in the evaluation. Group III students at the second site participated in a raffle in exchange for instructional supplies for their completion of the survey.

Experimental Conditions

Group I

Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) staff worked with middle school administrators, faculty, counseling support services, and staff to conduct the whole-school intervention. Two trainers with over 25 years of experience in school psychology and five years of teaching experience presented to teachers and paraprofessionals techniques, strategies, and models identified as part of the whole-school intervention. MSM staff offered the teachers two professional development workshops during year one, and four workshops occurred in year two. The trainers employed social reinforcement through their acknowledgement of constructive input from workshop participants. A primary emphasis of the training was to promote use of workshop information in the classroom by encouraging close adherence–"fidelity"–to the classroom management techniques and models described during the training.

Action Teams

The whole-school intervention involved an action team planning process. Each of the teams performed a different function in year one. Action team committees consisted of School Governance, Pedagogy and Curriculum, Environmental Design, and Behavior Management. Intervention models used in the whole-school intervention consisted of an adaptation of the Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline, a school climate intervention where students act as classroom helpers and management support to teachers (Freiberg 1999; Freiberg, Connell, & Lorentz, 2001). Other models included BASIS (classroom management with organizational consultation support) (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993), and Community Policing Through Envi-

ronmental Design (CPTED) (Department of Justice, 1999). CPTED consisted of making environmental assessments about the safety and security of the school environment. Action team committee members made specific recommendations about ways to minimize violence in the school setting. They identified and monitored measurable objectives to improve school safety, climate, and academics.

Group II

By the end of the evaluation, seventh and eighth grade intervention students had participated in two consecutive program years of intervention sessions. "Pull-out" intervention sessions occurred during the school day for two fifty-minute sessions per week over seven months in the first year of the intervention. The intervention consisted of two ninety-minute booster sessions per week in the second year of the intervention during nine-weeks of curriculum-based violence prevention booster training. The sessions were for two separate intervention groups of 6th and 7th graders in year one who were promoted and continued in the intervention during the 7th and 8th grades in year two. Students earned grades and instructional supplies for their participation in the intervention in conjunction with lessons that their classroom teachers conducted.

MSM health education trainers conducted the violence prevention sessions using the Second Step Curriculum, a program for schools and families designed by the national Committee for Children (Beland, 2000; Frey, Hirchstein, & Guzzo, 2000). Curricula for intervention training materials consisted of, Second Step (Introduction Series [Level I] and year two booster series [Level II]).

Curricula

The Second Step Curriculum is a nationally recognized violence prevention curriculum. The lessons in the Second Step curriculum focused on empathy, impulse control, and anger management. They included role plays in which students acted out non-violent ways to approach conflict. Interventionists also attempted to increase the student's pride in their culture.

To do this, the intervention incorporated cultural awareness curricula: Growing up Black and Proud (Bell, 1988) in year one and The Journey (Hill, 1998) in year two. The intervention also included Dealing with Anger (Hammond, 1991) videotapes in year two. The videotapes presented methods for developing prosocial skills that negated involvement with violence.

Group II Trainers

The trainers for Group II were African American and represented both genders. Of the six trainers in year one, two were male and four female. Each had bachelor's level training in the social sciences or in one case journalism. Three of the trainers had graduate-level training in public health. Trainers maintained the fidelity of the selected curricula for the program through 1.5 hour weekly lesson planning meetings. Trainers documented the completion of training objectives by listing completed lessons and lesson plan objectives on a service delivery documentation form.

Data Collection

All student research participants had written informed consent from their parents in order to complete the National School and Crime Safety Survey (NSCSS). Students at the second middle school (Group III) acted as an independent comparison sample.

MSM research staff administered the NSCSS survey in October, 1999 and April, 2000 of year one and again in October, 2000 and April, 2001 of year two. This resulted in four survey assessments (Times 1-4). The survey assessments occurred at the second middle school, however, at times 3 and 4 only. NSCSS survey items consisted of sociodemographic questions about gender and grade level along with three self-report subscale measures of violence. The behavioral measures employed three scales: Motivation to Fight (MTF), Common Perpetration (CP), and Common Victimization (CV) scales. The MTF scale was a six-item attitudinal scale that included the following statements: Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. I would probably get into a fight if someone: shoved me, tried to start a fight with me, bullied me, spread rumors about me, disrespected or insulted me. The CP scale stated: In the past 30 days, how many times have you done any of the following to someone? (Two examples of six items.) hit, punched, or slapped you; kicked or tripped. The CV scale stated: In the past 30 days . . . how many times has someone done any of the following to you: hit, punched, or slapped you; kicked or tripped you? (Kingery, Minogue, Murphy, & Coggeshall, 1998).

Research Design and Data Analysis

The researchers used two levels of analysis in this study. The first was a longitudinal analysis using survey data for Groups I and II for three measurements (April [Year 01], October, and April [Year 02]). The second was a post-test or after only evaluation design using Groups I-III for two points in time (October, and April [Year 02]). Although conceptually the analysis was summative across the whole two-year period by following the same cohort of students in the intervention school conditions, the investigators did not use responses from Time 1. This was because insufficient categorical data was available at the Time 1 survey assessment to distinguish intervention and comparison groups. Thus, Time 1 survey data were a constant at the intervention school for the whole school condition and "pull-out" services condition. Neither one of these groups had participated in an intervention at Time 1.

In the second analysis, Group III was also part of a post-test or after-only evaluation. Comparison school students (Group III) were not available for assessment at Time 1 or 2; thus minimizing contamination from the administration of the survey. The post-test only design addressed two issues. First, research methodologists (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Murray, 1998) have reported that a post-test only evaluation design (i.e., occurring after the intervention for all conditions) can be a rigorous methodology for assessing program effectiveness with multiple conditions assuming that the research design used in the analysis employs random assignment. This approach also assumes that the analysis bears sufficient sample size to disburse sources of bias (e.g., selection and differential maturation and history) equally across study conditions.

Data analysis consisted of a simple frequency count by time, group, and gender; measures of the psychometric properties of the scales, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA); and univariate analysis of variance procedures. To establish the reliability of three subscales, researchers computed internal consistency coefficients. MANOVA and univariate analyses were aggregated across Times 2 to 4 for the Groups I and II analysis and across Times 3-4 for the Groups I, II, and III analysis. The researchers used a one-tailed test of significance with a significance criterion of $p < .05$. The investigators considered a p-value of $>$ .05-.1 to be noteworthy. The authors conducted this analysis for the combined responses from male and female students, males only and females only.

RESULTS

Times 2, 3, and 4 by Groups I, II

The number of respondents involved in the longitudinal evaluation at the site where both Groups I and II participated in violence prevention services appears in Table 1 by gender. The mean age of the student respondents was 12.77 with a standard deviation of .851.

Times 3 and 4 by Groups I, II, and III

The number of respondents involved in the post-test only evaluation for Groups I, II, and III across the two sites by gender also appears in Table 1. When comparing the whole-school students (Group I) against students with additional pull-out violence prevention services (Group II) at the site, the analysis yielded no significant findings for Motivation to Fight (MTF), Common Victimization (CV), or Common Perpetration (CP). This was true for the analysis of responses from males and females combined, females only, or males only.

Times 3 and 4 by Groups I, II, and III

The number of respondents involved in the post-test only evaluation for Groups I, II, and III across the two sites by gender also appears in Table 1. The two-year summative outcome analysis included 140 students who participated in the Time 3 survey assessment and 151 who participated at Time 4. Of the 140 students participating in the evaluation at Time 3, 96 were female and 44 were male. Time 4 involved 102 females and 49 males. The whole-school intervention had 24 student participants at Time 3 and 35 at Time 4. In the Group II condition, 19 students participated in the Time 3 survey and 37 students participated

TABLE 1. Number of Students by Gender and Time of Survey

	Group I		Group II		Group III	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Time 2	46	56	52	52		
Time 3	6	13	12	12	26	71
Time 4	16	21	17	18	16	63

in the Time 4 survey. For Group II, the percentage of males in the sample was 31.5% at Time 3 and 43.2% at Time 4. The percentage of males in the sample was 50.0% at Time 3 and 48.6% for Group I at Time 4. The comparison school (Group III) had 97 participants at Time 3 and 79 participants at Time 4. The percentage of males in the sample for this condition was 31.4% at Time 3 and 32.5% at Time 4.

Internal consistency reliability coefficients were acceptable (i.e., an alpha coefficient approaching .80) for the dependent measures in the study. Internal consistency coefficients for the three dependent variables were MTF = .79 (5 items), CP = .86 (6 items), and CV = .81 (5 items).

The aggregated analysis of intervention effects showed the following outcomes for the identified measures. Combined and gender-specific analyses revealed different responses to the intervention depending on the gender of participants and analytical design.

Analysis for Both Genders (Groups I and II) Across Times 2, 3, and 4

The longitudinal study for the intervention across Times 2, 3, and 4 yielded no significant multivariate mean differences over time for Groups I and II (Pillai's Trace F = .884, df = 15, df error = 945, $p < .58$). No significant differences were evident for Group I versus II across times 2 to 4 regardless of whether the analysis was for males and females combined, males separately, or females separately. The univariate analysis yielded nonsignificant effects for all three dependent variables-MTF ($p < .55$), CV ($p < .64$), or CP ($p < .50$).

Analysis for Both Genders (Groups I, II, and III) Across Times 3 and 4 (After Only Design)

The multivariate analysis of variance involving the three dependent variables, Motivation for Fighting Scale, Common Perpetration Scale, and Victimization by Common Aggression Scale, yielded a significant one-tailed difference among the three groups (Pillai's Trace F = 5.03, df = 15, df error = 855, $p < .0005$). Further, the one-tailed univariate analysis showed significant differences among Groups I, II, and III means for all three dependent variables for males and females combined. Mean student survey responses showed a small reduction in Motivation to Fight for the whole-school students, but virtually no change in the other two groups for these students. The difference was statistically significant. Students in the "pull-out" group, including cultural enrichment and behavioral reinforcement, plus whole-school condition (Group II) decreased their mean self-reported violence–either as victims or as perpetrators.

Further, findings from the summative evaluation revealed several key univariate findings for males and females combined. Cohen's D, a measure of the magnitude of differences between groups in practical terms, varied from small to large among the three dependent variables (Cohen, 1988). Between-groups comparisons on the MTF variable produced a significant difference between Groups I, II, and III from Times 3-4. The direction of change was unfavorable for Group I. Mean differences between Groups I, II, and III for the CP and CV variables were significant and in a beneficial direction as well (refer to Table 2).

Males Only Findings

The authors conducted the multivariate and univariate analyses for all three dependent variables-the MTF, CP, and CV Scales. None of the one-tailed tests for between-groups effects for any of the variables were significant ($p < .05$) or noteworthy ($p > .05$ and $\leq .1$) for males. Multivariate results for males were not significant (Pillai's Trace F = 1.9, df = 15, df error = 261, $p < .25$). Neither were the univariate tests of the dependent variables: MTF ($p < .81$), CV ($p < .57$), and CP ($p < .28$). The number of participant responses in the analysis were as follows: n = 44 at Time 3 and n = 49 at Time 4 for males (refer to Table 1).

Females Only Findings

The analysis further revealed that for females the multivariate analysis of variance using the three combined dependent variables produced a significant one-tailed difference among the three groups (Pillai's Trace F = 4.9, df = 15, df error = 576, $p < .001$). The one-tailed univariate

TABLE 2. Combined Male and Female Data for All Subscales, Univariate Test (After-Only Analysis)

Subscales	P-Value	F-Value	DF	Cohen's D
Motives	.017	4.90	5	0.4
Victimization	.0005	8.90	5	0.5
Perpetration	.056	3.60	5	0.3

analysis revealed significant findings for two out of three dependent variables for females: CV ($p < .0005$) and CP ($p < .0135$).

The number of survey responses from females in the evaluation were n = 96 at Time 3 and n = 102 at Time 4. Cohen's D was large (D = .7) for Common Victimization and moderate (D = .5) for Common Perpetration. The mean values for Motivation to Fight (MTF) and frequency of violent victimization (CV) and violent perpetration (CP) appear in Figures 1-3. For victimization and perpetration scales, females in the intervention group showed a decrease in the mean value for CP and CV. Figure 1 shows that among females the mean perceived likelihood that they would engage in violence (Motivation to Fight) decreased for Group I. There was no significant across group difference ($p < .067$) on the measure. Figure 2 shows that among females the frequency of CV decreased for Group II and increased for Group I and the comparison group (Group III). Figure 3 shows that among females, mean CP decreased for the "pull-out" whole-school and cultural enrichment group (Group II) while increasing for Groups I and III.

The intervention effect (Cohen's D = .7) was large for the victimization variable. Among females, mean self-reported perpetration increased for the whole-school (Group I) and comparison school students (Group

FIGURE 1. Increased Tendency to Fight Among Females in Combined Condition

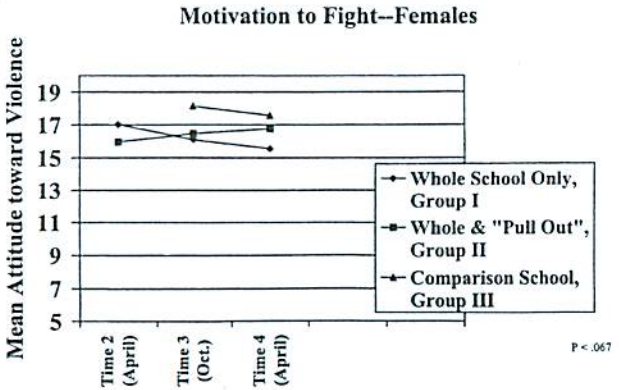


FiGURE 2. Decreased Victimization in Combined Condition Only

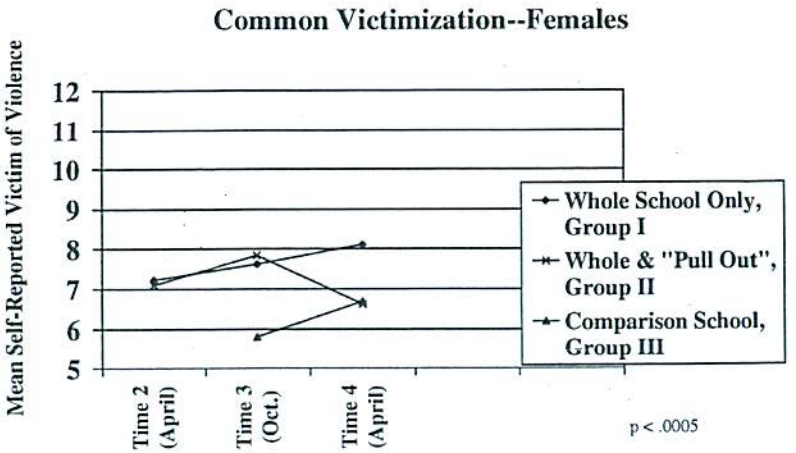
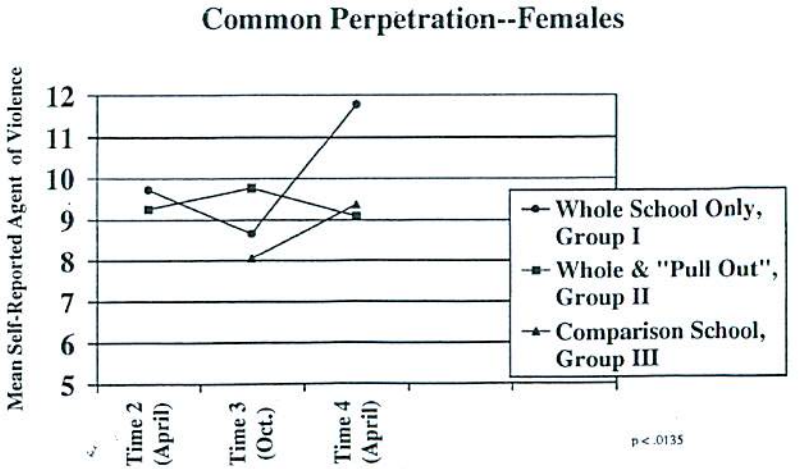


FIGURE 3. Females in Group II Maintained Lower Self-Reported Violence Compared to Peers in Group I or III



III) as shown in Figure 3. Female students in the combined "pull-out" training in Second Step, cultural enrichment, and behavioral reinforcement condition (Group II) decreased in their mean self-reported frequency of violent perpetration.

DISCUSSION

The implications of this study were varied according to the type of evaluation conducted and gender of the students. The whole-school intervention outlined here appeared to be most effective for reducing violent perpetration when coupled with individually-based training in violence prevention skills, cultural enrichment, and in-session behavioral reinforcement of prosocial skills. The after-only statistical analysis (Groups I, II, and III) yielded this result. Comparison of Groups I and II for a three month longer period of analysis, both at the intervention school, did not produce this finding, indicating contradictory results. Comparing Groups I and II did not yield any between-group differences over time. Some contamination of the intervention may have occurred in light of the overlap in Groups I and II services since they occurred at the same location. Females in the study may have responded more favorably to the intervention than their male peers although the finding depended on the analytical design used in the evaluation. This was true when the students reported being victims of violence and when they initiated violence towards others. Effect sizes for two of the dependent variables in the study, measures of the self-reported frequency of violence, were respectable suggesting that the observed changes in violence among females were not only statistically but practically significant. Contrary to effects that the researchers hypothesized, the greater effectiveness of the combined approach for African American females was an unexpected finding and inconsistent with previous studies involving participants from multiple cultures, white, African American, and Hispanic (Grossman, Neckerman, Koepsell, Liu, Asher, Beland, & Rivera, 1997).

Limitations

Limitations of the study included the self-report method by which the researchers collected information on the dependent variable. Measures of intervention contamination could have been useful. Since Grossman et al. (1997) reported increases in neutral and prosocial behavior for direct observation but not for teacher and parent ratings, direct observation may be indicated for additional studies in this area. In that study males decreased their violent behavior more than females, and the difference was attributed to the fact that females may be more clandestine in the way that they express violence. Further, the gender differences that the researchers noted in the Grossman study were evident for direct observation but not for self-report.

Conclusions

This study partially supported the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral curriculum-based and cultural enrichment approach for reduction of violence in a school setting when complementary intervention modalities are employed in tandem at the same site. The effectiveness of the whole-school intervention was questionable when implemented alone without the other cognitive-behavioral intervention elements. Future studies of the effectiveness of school-based programs like this may benefit from incorporating a larger sample matched across assessments.

Another approach like this that is worthy of empirical evaluation is male socialization programs that re-define male gender roles associated with violent behavior. This tactic has shown promise at the college level (Hong, 2000). Research-based computer software for programmed violence prevention like the SMART (Students Managing Anger and Resolution Together) Talk Program may also be a practical alternative for reinforcing violence prevention skills among males or females (Bosworth, Espelange, DuBay, Daytner, & Karageorge, 2000). Parallel with the purpose of this study, some researchers have reported that positive support from fathers may facilitate school-based violence prevention programs (Artz & Riecken, 1997), also suggesting that gender may be an important consideration across settings in this area of investigation.

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