Method

For each student, a poverty threshold was calculated using 7 items (e.g., ΔF10.1037/0893 Gen. School Id). Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the relation between family cohesion and physical aggression by ethnicity and SES. In the first step, we controlled for intervention status, school, study site, and initial level of physical aggression. In the second step we entered family cohesion, SES, and ethnicity to examine main effects. In the third step we entered interaction terms for family cohesion and poverty and family cohesion and ethnicity. In the final step we entered three-way interactions with gender to examine whether the two way interactions varied across gender.

Results

Participants

Sixth grade students (N=1235; 65% male) from the Multisite Violence Prevention Project, an intervention study carried out in four US cities: Atlanta, GA; Durham, NC; Chicago, IL; and Richmond, VA. Students deemed high risk were selected by teacher nominations on the basis of two criteria: a history of aggressive and disruptive behavior in the classroom, and the students’ relative level of influence on other students. 83% of students were African American/Black, 15% were Hispanic/Latino, 13% were European American/White, and 0.65% were American Indian/Alaska Native. 54% of students had household incomes below the poverty threshold.

Measures

Independent Variable

The Family Relationships Scale (FRS, Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Huesmann, 1997) was used to measure parent-reported family cohesion. 12 items (e.g., “Family members feel very close to one another”) with responses recorded on a 4-point Likert scale (a=.72).

Dependent Variable

The Problem Behavior Frequency Schedule (PBFS; Farrell, Kung, White, Valois, 2000) was used to measure self-reported physical aggression in the past 30 days (α=.80). 7 items (e.g., “Been in a fight in which someone was hit”) recorded on a 6-point scale ranging from “Never” to “20 or more times.”

Moderating Variables

Student-reported ethnicity was dummy coded with African American as the reference group. Hispanic students were grouped into one category, and Caucasian and other ethnicities were grouped into another category.

For each student, a poverty threshold was calculated using the national census data. For this analysis, we used a binary variable indicating that the student was above or below the poverty threshold.

Introduction

Family relationship characteristics, particularly cohesion, are among the more established risk factors for aggression (Gorman-Smith et al., 2001). Little research has examined variation in that relation by ethnic group and by economic status. Evidence for such variation can be found. Gorman-Smith and colleagues (1996) report that higher familial beliefs were linked to lower delinquency in African Americans, but were linked to higher delinquency in Latino males.

Understanding variations in the relation could be important in realizing more effective violence prevention and intervention services for particular subgroups. This study will examine the link between family relationship characteristics and change in aggression, moderated by socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity.

Method

Participants

Sixth grade students (N=1235; 65% male) from the Multisite Violence Prevention Project, an intervention study carried out in four US cities: Atlanta, GA; Durham, NC; Chicago, IL; and Richmond, VA. Students deemed high risk were selected by teacher nominations on the basis of two criteria: a history of aggressive and disruptive behavior in the classroom, and the students’ relative level of influence on other students. 83% of students were African American/Black, 15% were Hispanic/Latino, 13% were European American/White, and 0.65% were American Indian/Alaska Native. 54% of students had household incomes below the poverty threshold.

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For each student, a poverty threshold was calculated using the national census data. For this analysis, we used a binary variable indicating that the student was above or below the poverty threshold.

Analyses

Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to examine moderation of the relation between family cohesion and physical aggression by ethnicity and SES. In the first step, we controlled for intervention status, school, study site, and initial level of physical aggression. In the second step we entered family cohesion, SES, and ethnicity to examine main effects. In the third step we entered interaction terms for family cohesion and poverty and family cohesion and ethnicity. In the final step we entered three-way interactions with gender to examine whether the two way interactions varied across gender.

Results

After controlling for study site, school, intervention condition, and initial physical aggression, there were main effects of poverty and ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino) in predicting physical aggression. (See Table 1)

There was a significant interaction between poverty and family cohesion in predicting physical aggression, such that family cohesion is more strongly related to physical aggression for students below the poverty line. (See Figure 1).

There was a significant interaction between Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and family cohesion in predicting physical aggression such that family cohesion is more strongly related to physical aggression for Hispanic/Latino students. (See Figure 2).

The two-way interactions did not vary as a function of gender.

Table 1. Predicting Physical Aggression (Time 2) by Cohesion Moderated by Ethnicity and SES

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Note: Targeted, Universal, and Combined are controls for intervention status; Coh = Family Cohesion Scale; SES = Socioeconomic status; Hisp = Hispanic; AA = African American.

References


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