

FIGHTING

Foney, D. M. and M. Cunningham (2002). "Why Do Good Kids Do Bad Things? Considering Multiple Contexts in the Study of Antisocial Fighting Behaviors in African American Urban Youth." The Journal of Negro Education 71(3, Juvenile Justice: Children of Color in The United States, (Summer)): 143-157.

OVERVIEW

Most research done on antisocial fighting behaviors (physical aggression against someone else) is studied from the majority (White dominant) culture. Females and minority populations have been left out of this research. Those conducting research have to think about the interaction between youth and their multi-layered, unique environments. The social contexts in which teens participate are family, neighborhood, peers, and school. Each of these environments requires coping strategies, some positive (adaptive) and others negative (maladaptive), depending on the connotation. Sometimes antisocial fighting behavior is a coping response. All of these behaviors are of importance because antisocial fighting behavior often leads minorities and males into the juvenile justice system eventually. Two approaches have been applied to analyze this problem, social learning and ecological perspectives. Social learning looks at how the behavior is initially learned from the environment and how the environment supports the behavior. Ecologists look at specific settings that impact the youth, and this project will look at the settings that have direct contact with the youth. This study aims to look at the social contexts (family, neighborhood, peers, and school) that influence antisocial fighting behaviors in an attempt to find the source and stressors.

There are four hypotheses around fighting behavior and multiple contexts: (1) that negative contexts and antisocial fighting behavior will be related, (2) perceived parent hassles might neutralize negative effects of a negative family environment, (3) when all four negative contexts are combined, antisocial fighting behaviors will be influenced, and (4) males participate in more fighting behaviors than females.

DESIGN

Eighty-eight high school students were voluntary participants in a questionnaire or a questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire measured family environment, neighborhood danger (quantity of business, signs and traffic, teen hangouts, and condition on neighborhood), negative peer influence, school factors, youth independence or home/family hassles, and antisocial fighting behaviors.

FINDINGS

Negative peer influence is directly related to antisocial fighting behaviors, so the more negative peer influences, the more likely youth are to display antisocial fighting behaviors. There is no connection between a negative family environment, dangerous neighborhood, or negative school environment.

The more negative the family environment, the fewer hassles (parent monitoring) reported by students. Yet, neither high nor low parent hassles does not impact fighting behaviors when young people had a negative family environment.

When all of the contexts (family, school, neighborhood, and peers) are negative and increase in negativity, so does antisocial fighting behaviors.

Males participate in more antisocial fighting behavior than females.

Males expressed more negative family, school, and neighborhood atmospheres than females.

The only factor connected to antisocial fighting behaviors in females was negative peer influence.

More home/family hassles (parental monitoring) was connected to lower fighting behaviors in males.

Students reported more personal and family hassles when in more positive family environments.

Perceived independence levels differed between single parent and dual parent families.

Youth from two-parent families reported more fighting behaviors, as well as youth from divorced or separated families, when compared to single parent or married families.

CONCLUSIONS

There are significant risk and stress factors facing female and non-White youth that make their experiences unique when compared to majority youth. When those factors are ignored, or the perception of those factors underexamined, it is difficult to predict what will lead to antisocial fighting behaviors. This study finds that contexts direct involving youth (family, neighborhood, peers, and school) have an impact. Peers and family have a larger impact than neighborhood and school.

CRITIQUE AND EVALUATION

All of the participants are volunteers who participated with hopes of winning a prize. The data is self-reported data. There might be a difference in what actually happens in home or in fighting and what the youth have reported. The participants are a subset of the whole population because they are from the same high-achieving school.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

What are we doing as adults to provide alternative support systems for teens?

How can we teach coping strategies to youth?

IMPLICATIONS

If we are able to predict what leads to increased fighting behaviors, we might be able to help youth avoid the juvenile justice system. As youth become involved in the justice system, their life course and opportunities are subject to change and become more limited. Since we know that aggressive behaviors are precursors to the justice system, we should be working to provide support systems and teaching coping strategies to youth whose behavior might be misinterpreted due to race or gender.

Tamecia R. Jones cCYS