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HOPELESSLY DISADVANTAGED LIKE YOU: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DISADVANTAGED YOUTH IN MOBILE AND MEDELLIN

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Colleen E. Wynn

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Western Kentucky University
2011

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Professor Pitt Derryberry

Approved by

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ABSTRACT

Much research has examined hopelessness among impoverished urban neighborhoods in the U.S. This research has addressed many dimensions of hopelessness, including variation by race, associations with violence, as well as the origins of hopelessness. However, little research has focused on comparing the variation of these effects by country (i.e., comparisons of the urban disadvantaged experience in the U.S. with the urban disadvantaged in developing countries). Using two unique data sources, the Mobile Youth Survey (MYS) and a similar survey of disadvantaged adolescents in Medellin, Colombia, this study aims to comparatively examine the process of hopelessness among the "truly disadvantaged" at home and abroad.

Keywords: Hopelessness, Concentrated Disadvantage, Adolescent Urban Experience, Mobile Alabama, Medellin Colombia

Dedicated to those who have supported me for the past 21 years and to the disadvantaged adolescents of Mobile and Medellin

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INTRODUCTION

Hopelessness, or feelings of limited possibilities for the future, affects future life chances of individuals, and therefore is an area that needs further exploration. The hopelessness one experiences causes them to make certain choices that will in turn profoundly affect risky behaviors, family disruption and even suicide (Bolland et al., 2007, Bolland, 2003, Bolland et al., 2001, Durant, et al., 2004). Previous research on hopelessness has often focused on adolescents living in disadvantaged contexts, primarily within the United States. These studies have discovered that increased levels of hopelessness result in a high probability of risky behaviors (suicide, use of drugs & alcohol, violence, etc.) demonstrated by youth respondents. These behaviors have been explained by researchers through hopelessness, but also through the role which family plays in the respondent's life and the community wherein individuals reside.

Thus, hopelessness is an important concept to examine in impoverished areas because it can be used as an indicator for future risk behaviors (Bolland et al., 2007, Bolland, 2003, Bolland et al. 2001, Durant, et al 2004). However, hopelessness is not a universal experience for those living in poverty (Bolland et al. 2005), and the ability of researchers to discover family and community factors which best "lead" to hopelessness risk behaviors will in turn highlight the need for exploring ways to prevent or mediate the effects of hopelessness among individuals living in disadvantaged communities.

While hopelessness has been explored within a domestic context, little research has been done in terms of international levels of hopelessness, and how it compares with

levels of hopelessness in neighborhoods in the United States. The current research first seeks to identify variations in hopelessness among disadvantaged adolescents in addition to variations of risky and protective experiences such as the quality of religion, parenting, peer, and neighborhood relationships; experiences with victimization and concerns about the effects of such victimization. An additional contribution made by the current research is to demonstrate the association between risky and protective factors and hopelessness in impoverished areas. Specifically, the current research offers a comparative analysis of surveys of adolescents in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods in Medellin, Colombia and Mobile, Alabama, in an attempt to discover the similarity of experience among the "truly disadvantaged," (Wilson, 1996) at home and abroad.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Domestic studies of hopelessness and disadvantage

Much research has been undertaken concerning hopelessness in impoverished neighborhoods in urban areas of the United States. Hopelessness and poverty have been linked throughout much of the previous literature (Bolland et al., 2001; Bolland, 2003; Bolland et al., 2005; Bolland et al. 2007; Drummond, Bolland, & Harris, 2010). Across many disciplines there is a suggestion that while hopelessness is not a universal feeling among the disadvantaged, feelings of hopelessness are a greater part of growing up poor (e.g., Banfield, 1974; Lopez, 1994; Donaldson 1993; MacLeod, 1987; Wilson, 1996; Anderson, 1999). In addition prior research illustrates that if youth feel they have limited possibilities for their future, (i.e., feelings of hopelessness), they are more apt to display "violent behavior if failure seems an inevitable part of their future" (Bolland et al. 2005,

p. 293). As stated above, not all those living in poverty succumb to feelings of hopelessness. Thus prior research has focused on trying to identify why some succumb to feelings of hopelessness while others do not within disadvantaged communities.

Past research has focused on a broad examination of hopelessness and significant discoveries have contributed to our knowledge about: the racial variance of hopelessness, the relationship between hopelessness and risky behaviors such as violence, neighborhood and family factors that serve as "protective agents" reducing the likelihood of hopeless feelings. Bolland and colleagues (2007) found race significantly affects hopelessness, such that minority adolescents (whites in their study) had a higher level of hopelessness than their majority counterparts (Bolland, Bryant, Lian, McCallum, Vazsonyi, & Barth, 2007).

Regarding factors that protect youth from developing feelings of hopelessness, Bolland, Lian, and Formichella (2005) examined how "community connectedness," support and warmth shown by a mother figure or other parental caregiver and religious beliefs/activities contributed to a decreased level of hopelessness through data analysis from the Mobile Youth Survey (MYS). Drawing from prior research generally evaluating protective factors in disadvantaged communities, Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) found that lower levels of continued poverty also occur when children have a strong support system in their community with a variety of adults upon whom they can rely. In addition to the surrounding community, parenting can be a strong influence on levels of youth hopelessness (Vazsonyi, Pickering, & Bolland, 2006). In an early test of hopelessness, DuRant found that family conflict and the use of corporal punishment was associated with more hopelessness among a study of disadvantaged black youth in Augusta, GA

(DuRant, Getts, Cadenhead, Emans, & Woods, 1995). Further, Bolland et al. (2005) found that connectedness, warmth toward a maternal caregiver, and religiosity decreased feelings of hopelessness in early tests of the MYS. Finally, we can conclude that protective factors such as, parental involvement, positive community relations, religiosity, and non-corporal punishment seem to indicate lower levels of hopelessness among adolescents in disadvantaged contexts (Bolland, Lian, & Formichella, 2005; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Vazsonyi, Pickering, & Bolland, 2006; DuRant et al. 1995).

Besides hopelessness, similar concepts have been explored as general "protective mechanisms" operating in disadvantaged communities. Among these concepts focus has been placed on neighborhood ties, social control, institutional resources, social support, and routine activity patterns (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Vazsonyi, Pickering, and Bolland (2006) examined the relationship between negative health outcomes and both, maternal warmth and positive discipline using the MYS. Specifically they found those parenting processes decreased the likelihood of participating in health compromising behaviors as well as violent behaviors when measured at various points throughout adolescence. Family connectedness has been shown to lower suicidal ideation, among other risky health behaviors. However, in particularly close families when one member is victimized the other members are more likely to experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Resnick et al., 1997). Social support plays a substantial role amongst life stressors (risky behaviors). However, it seems that the outcome varies based on the support coming from family members or peers. Family support significantly reduces stressors on individuals; whereas, peer support leads to high

risk activities (Dubow, Edwards, & Ippolito, 1997). There is some disagreement over the role of protective factors; some research has shown that while parental attachment and monitoring serve as protective for girls, they also serve as additional risk factors for boys (Formoso, Gonzales, & Aiken, 2000). Protective factors have been shown to have an influence on the risky behavior of adolescents. Therefore, additional examination of parental rules, positive parental discipline, positive sense of community, parental monitoring, and religiosity will be tested by my study for their mediating effects on hopelessness.

Beyond protective processes, prior research has discovered "risk-factor" characteristics of disadvantaged communities that contribute to hopelessness. These risk factors have been potentially identified as, witnessing violence, traumatic stress, worry, change in mother figure, negative peer influence, and daily life in poverty. In research focused in general adolescent development within disadvantaged communities, Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) find that the number of years spent living in extreme poverty relate to future economic circumstances. While living in extreme poverty, children are exposed to a greater influence of negative peers, and neighborhood violence inflicted on the children as well as their friends and family. This violence can cause much stress and worry for children who are concerned not only about themselves, but also about their family and friends.

Brooks-Gunn and Duncan's findings on early childhood poverty are further supported by Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, and Smith (1998). This study finds that a childhood spent in extreme poverty is strongly correlated with achievements outcomes later in life. This study suggests that the longer a child spends in an extremely

impoverished environment, the greater their risk for hopelessness as they grow older. Similarly, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) find that the longer children live in impoverished environments the greater the risk is that they will commit a crime, or become a victim of a crime. In all of Brooks-Gunn's literature she concludes that the length of time a child has spent living in extreme poverty, the greater their encounters with "risk factors" such as crime, intergenerational poverty, and lack of achievements. These are factors that could greatly increase the hopelessness a child experiences.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a risk factor often not identified in disadvantaged youth. Many cases of PTSD are diagnosed as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), as often it is not realized the trauma that can come from living in impoverished areas. Many youth living in disadvantaged areas experience violence as both victims and perpetrators, much like soldiers in war. Strong support systems can help to mitigate PTSD that causes anxiety, low self-esteem and feelings of helplessness, which if left unattended could swell to feelings of hopelessness (Bertram & Dartt, 2008).

Comparative studies of disadvantage

While there has not been much literature specifically examining hopelessness levels among Latin American populations, however, there has been much study of the populations of Medellin, Colombia in relation to how extreme violence and poverty in the area has affected residents. Medellin has long been seized by the violence spewing from the power struggle between militia groups, gangs, paramilitary organizations, drug cartel, and the Colombian government (Melguizo & Cronshaw, 2001; Bronstein, 2007; Romero, 2007; Kurtz-Phelan, 2007; Roldan, 1997; Sanin & Jaramillo, 2004). Since the 1950's

Medellin, Colombia has been in a persistent state of conflict and civil war. It has among the greatest number of internal migrants in the world (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). Much of this migration has occurred because of the militia/paramilitary actions in Medellin. One of the most infamous of these groups is the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Beginning in the 1980's the FARC among other groups began direct attacks on the Colombian Army in the southern portions of Colombia in response to the defeats they had been suffering in northern Colombia (Melguizo & Cronshaw, 2001). These attacks spawned a massive displacement of peasants and marked the first time the violence had reached the highest political offices. High-profile politicians, journalists, and military officers were assassinated during these attacks.

During the 1980's the level of violence and the number of groups committing it increased rapidly. Formal and informal gangs sprang up on every corner, many of whom began working as armies for the drug cartel (Melguizo & Cronshaw, 2001). The FARC, gangs, and lesser known drug cartel leaders have had an impact on Medellin history, but no one has had the impact of Pablo Escobar. Escobar is famous worldwide for his work as a drug cartel. However he is famous in Medellin not only for his drug cartel days, but also for the public services he provided in the barrios (neighborhoods) that raised him. It was in these areas that Escobar was feared as much as he was loved (Bowden, 2001). These barrios are commonly called "the city that Pablo built" because of all the services he provided to the people living there, but also because of his strong hand in running the barrios. The residents of Medellin, specifically those of the most violent neighborhoods of, San Javier and Santa Domingo (Kurtz-Phelan, 2007), are often forgotten by their

government. This allows gangs and militia groups to provide the civil services and protection citizens require (Melguizo & Cronshaw, 2001).

The onslaught of the violent paramilitary groups caused concern among Medellin residents. Like the militia groups, paramilitary groups assert their control over the barrios, but unlike the militia groups they seem to have violence and not the interests of citizens at heart (Melguizo & Cronshaw, 2001). The current murder rate for Medellin is difficult to pin down, but as of October 2009 the coroner's office reported upwards of fifteen hundred murders for the year, more than double the number reported in October 2008 (Bronstein, 2009). This increase has been attributed to the recent extradition of one of the prominent modern drug cartel, Don Berna, to the United States has created a power vacuum as those remaining struggle to claim the recently vacated position of power (Bronstein, 2009).

Mobile, Alabama, while not known for drug cartels, is known for the concentrated poverty of African-Americans, ranking 3rd in United States cities in concentrated poverty (Jargowky, 1997). Concentrated poverty comes out of the idea of concentrated disadvantage, which posits that as cities deindustrialize those living in the area lose their jobs, this creates a vacuum in which poverty and disadvantage become pervasive (Wilson, 1996). This process has resulted in Mobile's poor citizens becoming trapped in their neighborhoods, unable to escape poverty. In 1998, the US Census estimates that 27.3 percent of all Mobile County residents under the age of 18 were living in poverty. Ten years later in 2008, this number was relatively the same at 27.6 percent; it seems that while poverty rates are not rising, they are also not falling over a ten-year period.

A study of Colombian adolescents aged 12-18, 77% of whom self-identified primarily as students, interviewed as a part of a national survey of Colombian adolescents and adults argues that positive community ties and close parental relationships with children are the strongest deterrents from depression, anxiousness, and hopelessness (Kliewer, Murrelle, Mejia, Torres, & Angold, 2001). The focus of this study was on the impacts of witnessing violence and subsequent hopeless behaviors. However, Kliewer et al. concluded that while exposure to violence was a predictor of hopelessness, it was not the only predictor and that further study was necessary to identify additional hopelessness predictors. Risky behaviors, exposure to prolonged concentrated disadvantage, and witnessing violence have been shown to increase potential feelings of hopelessness. My examination seeks to explore the potential of harsh parental discipline, worry, victimization, victimization of a friend or family member, negative peers, and PTSD to influence feelings of hopelessness.

The effects of relative poverty

As social beings, humans are constantly comparing themselves to others, trying to determine if we have been short changed at any juncture. If we do conclude we have been wronged, we have to figure out how to obtain whatever it is that we are missing. Often this takes the form of crime. As income inequality rates rise, so do crime rates (Blau & Blau, 1982). Thus, in societies with collective poverty crime rates would be much lower than societies with a stark contrast between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Similarly, happiness literature has long looked at relativism as an explanation for varying levels of happiness. Clearly, a relationship between income and happiness exists, but it is not clear how significant or non-spurious the relationship (Clark, Frijters, & Shields, 2006; 2008).

Similarly, it has been shown that happiness is partially dependent on relativism and comparison, but in order for these comparisons to occur some basic needs must first be met, no matter the circumstances (Veenhoven, 1991). Even more convincing of relativism is that indeed our circumstances affect our happiness. People are not simply happy because they are rich, they are happy because they are richer. When circumstances do not offer much hope for accruement of wealth and self-advancement, hopes are not raised, and thus hopes are not disappointed. However, if success is promised, as in the concept of the American Dream, and that success is unattainable, people become disillusioned and discontent. Indeed, it seems that relative depravation (poverty) is at play in our societies (D'Ambrosio & Frick, 2007).

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the differences between levels of hopelessness in underprivileged youth in similarly disadvantaged populations, one at home, and one abroad. First the study identifies protective and risk factors that could influence feelings of hopelessness. Then, the study looks to compare these potential relationships across the international divide of Mobile and Medellin. Finally the study offers culturally based possible explanations of the similarities and differences between factors significant in Mobile and Medellin, and their implications for the disadvantaged youth living there.

METHODS

Sample and Procedures

Hopelessness was examined through the usage of the Mobile Youth Survey (MYS) and a similar survey of disadvantaged adolescents in Medellin, Colombia.

Mobile Youth Survey

The Mobile Youth Survey (MYS) was given across the 14 most impoverished neighborhoods in the Mobile, Alabama metropolitan area. These neighborhoods held extremely high concentrations of poverty. "In 1990, Mobile ranked third nationally in the concentration of African American poverty (Vazsonyi, Pickering, & Bolland, 2006, p. 51)." All 14 neighborhoods had poverty levels greater than 40%. One half (7/14) of the neighborhoods in the study had poverty rates more than 73%, and some neighborhoods had poverty rates greater than 92%.

The youth in these neighborhoods were recruited as survey participants during door-to-door visits during which the survey was explained, parental consent was obtained, and an appointment for the survey was scheduled. If being interviewed in a pre-arranged location was not possible, the interview was conducted in the youth's home. During the administration of the MYS questions were read aloud to participants, and participants marked responses in their survey booklets. Trained monitors were on hand to answer any questions and explain material to respondents. After the survey was completed, respondents were paid $10. The current analysis uses data solely from Wave 11 (results from 2008) of the MYS which include 1,129 valid responses to the variables of interest.

Medellin, Colombia Survey

For the Medellin Colombia sample, one specific neighborhood of San Javier (Comuna 13) was examined during the summer of 2009. More than 160,000 residents reside in this neighborhood, one of two disadvantaged communities that are the site for much of the violence of this violent city. After the peak of the violence in Medellin in the 1990's, the government stepped in to regain control of the barrios, which resulted in

decreased violence until recently (Sanin & Jaramillo, 2004, Kurtz-Phelan, 2007, Romero, 2007, Bronstein, 2009).

Six high schools serve this neighborhood and for this study, three were selected (each with different composition, academic and scholarly achievement, and geographic distance throughout the neighborhood). The survey was administered during the school day to all 6th through 11th grade students for whom parental and subject consent was obtained. During an hour and a half, trained administrators read the survey in the students' native language of Spanish. Additional monitors were on hand to answer questions and explain survey materials. In total, 1,219 Medellin adolescents participated by giving valid responses to the variables of interest.

Measures

The questions from which these scales were constructed are contained within the appendix. Each scale includes a stated Cronbach alpha which measures the internal reliability of each scale is considered "good" when the alpha is .6 or greater. When the alpha level is .8 or greater the internal reliability is "excellent."

The dependent variable: *Hopelessness* was a scale constructed using 6 questions with answer responses of "agree" and "disagree." The measure of hopelessness is constructed to convey the views of respondents about their own futures. Questions in this scale referenced topics such as, not being able to get what you want, giving up because of an inability to make life better, having bad luck, not being able to get what you want, and not expecting to live a long life. Both the Medellin and MYS hopelessness scales ranged from 0 to 6 with higher responses representing greater hopelessness (Cronbach alpha .69 Medellin; .63).

Demographic Variables: The variable *age* ranged from9 to 18 in the MYS and from 10 to 20 in the Medellin data. The variable *sex* contrasts male respondents (0) to female respondents (1). The variable *years in neighborhood,* inquired as to the number of years each respondent had lived in the neighborhood. This variable ranged from (0) less than 1 year to (5) 5 years or longer.

Protective Factors: The variable *religiosity* consisted of one question that asked respondents about the importance of religion in their lives; specifically if religion was, "not important (0) somewhat important (1) or very important (2)."

Parental Rules was a multi-question scale constructed from 5 questions from the Medellin study (range 0-5) and three questions from the MYS (range 0-3). This scale was designed to measure the rules of the respondent's families regarding homework, dating, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and fighting. Higher scores on these scales indicate more parental rules (Cronbach alpha .37 Medellin; .60 Mobile).

Parental Monitoring was scale constructed from 4 questions with answer responses of "no" and "yes" for two of the questions, and "they don't know," "they know a little" or "they know a lot" for the other two questions. This scale measured the amount of parental monitoring in reference to how much the parents of the respondents know about their children's behaviors. This measure addressed the specific behaviors of where respondents spent time when not in school or at work, where respondents spent their nights out, and whom the respondents are hanging out with. The scale ranged from 0-8 in both data sets. Higher scores on these scales represent more parental monitoring (Cronbach alpha .55 Medellin; .70 Mobile).

Positive Parental Discipline was a scale constructed from 3 "yes" or "no" questions about parental discipline. These questions refer to discipline measures such as, taking away of privileges, extra chores, or calmly discussing the issue with their child. In either data set, the parental discipline scale ranged from 0 to 3 with higher scores representing greater positive parental discipline (Cronbach alpha .35 Medellin; .61 Mobile).

Positive Sense of the Community was a scale constructed from 10 questions with possible responses of "agree" and "disagree." This scale deals with the sense of community the respondent feels. Questions posed in this scale discuss topics like neighborhood friendships, specifically dealing with trust and ability to depend on others in the neighborhood. This scale ranged from 0 to 10 in both data sets with higher scores indicating more positive feelings about one's community (Cronbach alpha .53 Medellin; .59 Mobile).

Risk Factors: The *victimization* variable was created from 2 questions assessing the frequency and recency of being cut or stabbed. One question had response choices of "no", "yes, just once," and "yes, more than once." The second question had response choices of "agree" and "disagree." Each scale ranged from 0 to 3 with higher scores indicating more victimization (Cronbach alpha .89 Medellin; .69 Mobile).

Victimization of a friend or family member was a scale similar to the variable of victimization for self, but this one asked questions about the frequency and recency of injury to a friend or family member. This scale ranged from 0-3 with higher scores indicating a greater level of family or friend victimization (Cronbach alpha .58 Medellin; .63 Mobile).

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was a scale constructed from 4 questions with response categories of "yes" and "no" for one question and "almost never," "sometimes," and "very often" for the other three questions. This scale asked about levels of internalization of traumatic events. This scale ranged from 0 to 7 in each data set with higher scores indicating more internalization of traumatic events (Cronbach alpha .62 Medellin; .52 Mobile).

Worry was a multivariate scale constructed from three questions with response choices of "not at all," "some," "very much." These three questions dealt with how often/much the respondent worries about getting good grades, if their family has enough money, or if they will get a good job upon adulthood (scale ranged from 0-6; Cronbach alpha .55 Medellin; .54 Mobile).

Negative Peers was a multivariate scale constructed from 6 questions with response categories of "most of them," "some of them," and "almost none of them." These questions in this scale measured the portion of friends who considered the adolescents a "punk" if they did not: engage in behaviors such as drinking alcohol, using drugs, carrying a weapon, fighting, and having sex. This scale ranged from 0 to 12 with higher scores indicating more "negative" peers (Cronbach alpha .82 Medellin; .82 Mobile).

Harsh Discipline was a scale constructed of two questions asking respondents how their parents handle discipline; specifically if they "slap, spank, hit, yell, or scream when you do something wrong. This scale ranged from 0-2 with higher scores indicating a greater deal of harsh discipline being used (Cronbach alpha .41 Medellin; .41 Mobile).

RESULTS

The two data sets (Medellin and Mobile) were merged to create one cross-sectional data set. After merging the data sets I conducted T-Tests to evaluate variation between experiences within the two neighborhoods. Next, I used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to determine the individual variable scales association with hopelessness, as well as the association with hopelessness of combined variable scales.

The first question addressed by the current research is how hopelessness varies across the similarly disadvantaged milieus of Mobile, AL and Medellin, Colombia. Thus, to evaluate the variation in life experience between our two disadvantaged neighborhoods, I performed T-Tests on all variables (see Table 1). First I assessed the variation among our populations regarding positive/protective factors such as religiosity, positive parenting, and a positive sense of the community. Regarding protective factors, I found that Mobile youth report significantly more parental monitoring than do Medellin youth ($T=9.67$; $p<.001$). However, I find that Medellin youth reported significantly more religiosity ($T=3.03$; $p<.05$), parental rules ($T=7.18$; $p<.001$), and positive parental discipline ($T=12.55$; $p<.01$). Medellin youth also reported having a significantly greater positive sense of their community than Mobile youth ($T=2.61$; $p<.001$).

Next I assessed variation among the populations regarding negative factors and experiences such as harsh parental discipline, victimization, PTSD, worry, victimization of a friend or family member, affiliation with negative peers, and finally the dependent variable of interest, hopelessness. The results indicate that Mobile youth report significantly greater experiences of victimization ($T=8.82$; $p<.001$), and report more victimization of their friends and family than youth in Medellin ($T=23$; $p<.001$).

However, Medellin youth report significantly more PTSD experiences (T=.42; p<.10) and harsh discipline (T=10.25; p<.001). Medellin youth reported significantly greater levels of feelings of worry than the youth in Mobile reported (T=32.5; p<.001). The tests performed did not discern a significant difference in affiliation with negative peers between Mobile youth and Medellin youth (T=.36; p=NS). Finally the results indicate that Mobile adolescents report significantly greater feelings of hopelessness than do Medellin respondents (T=6.63; p<. 001).

In summation, the T-tests showed that while Mobile youth experience more harsh discipline and victimization, Medellin youth report more PTSD and worry. In contrast Medellin youth have a more positive sense of their community, parental rules, positive discipline, and place a higher importance on religion, while Mobile youth experience more parental monitoring.

Finally, to evaluate how the prediction of hopelessness varies between the two disadvantaged populations, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed (See Tables 2a & 2b). SEM first required that the two data sets be merged to compare interaction effects, allowing multiple regression equations to be considered simultaneously for each equation. SEM also allows for the calculation of residual error, which represents the variation in the dependent variable unaccounted for in predictor variables. In order to test whether the associations with hopelessness varied significantly by context, I perform a model comparison process (Bollen, 1985). This procedure seeks to reject the null hypothesis that all the paths in a model are the same for Medellin and Mobile. The first step in this process is to constrain all paths equal for both country context. Then one path is freed to differ between the two groups. The paths freed

include both the structural regression paths as well as the factor variance/covariance paths. Consecutive tests are performed until all of the factor variance/covariance and structural regression paths are tested for invariance. A change in chi-square is used to measure the efficacy of allowing the single path to differ. Since only one path changes during this procedure, the degrees of freedom is 1 and the significance of the change in chi-square is determined by looking at a chi-square table. The model comparison process is often referred to model "stacking" (Bollen, 1989). The baseline chi-square was 1129.

I find that indicators of hopelessness vary across the contexts of Mobile and Medellin, largely as expected, but also with several significant surprises. The demographic variables have varying effects on hopelessness, in both populations the older an individual is, the lower level hopelessness they indicate, males indicated slightly more hopelessness than females for both populations, and years spent living in the neighborhood was not a significant influence in either population when other factors are taken into account.

The protective factors generally seemed to lower hopelessness, showing up far more prevalently, and significantly in the Medellin youth where hopelessness was lower. Positive sense of community and parental monitoring were significant in lowering hopelessness rates in both populations, however positive sense of community was associated with less hopelessness in Mobile, the first path to significantly vary by country context (Δx^2=12.9; df=1; p <.01). Religiosity, which had greater presence in Medellin, was only significant in lowering hopelessness feelings in the Mobile population, the second path to vary significantly by country context (Δx^2=5.0; df=1; p <.05). Parental

rules and positive parental discipline were not significant influences on hopelessness in either population.

Risky behaviors also generally behaved as was expected. Victimization of a friend or family member and negative peers both influenced an increase in hopelessness, however negative peers was associated with more hopelessness in Mobile (the third path to vary significantly by country context Δx^2=9.0; df=1; p <.01). The fourth path to vary significantly by country context was victimization. It was associated with an increase in hopelessness but only in Mobile (Δx^2=4.0; df=1; p <.05). PTSD showed an affiliation with hopelessness in the direction expected, but was only marginally significant for both populations. Harsh discipline was significant in both populations, but as a mitigating factor of hopelessness rather than something that would increase hopelessness as was expected. The effect for worry was the last which varied significantly by country context (Δx^2=20.2.0; df=1; p <.01). Worry mitigated hopelessness in Medellin, but in Mobile it was marginally significant for increasing hopelessness. Overall, the protective and risk factors acted as was predicted by the literature, with the only exceptions being, harsh discipline, worry, and religiosity.

DISCUSSION

Growing up in a disadvantaged milieu differs at home and abroad, as has been examined through these limited observations performed in 14 Mobile, Alabama neighborhoods and one larger Medellin, Colombia neighborhood. Mobile youth had responses of higher levels of hopelessness than the youth in Medellin did. The results seem to support most of the existing literature, finding that PTSD, which seemed to have

potential connections to hopelessness, does have these connections. It was however only marginally significant in both populations, showing that there is some connection, but perhaps it is just as Bertram and Dartt (2008) indicated, PTSD suggests feelings of anxiety and helplessness, but maybe not full-fledged hopelessness. Parental monitoring was a mitigating protective factor for Mobile and Medellin, just as the literature indicated (Formoso, Gonzales, & Aiken, 2000). Their study also alluded to parental rules as a protective factor, but in both populations parental rules did not affect feelings of hopelessness. The influence of negative peers was a risky predictor for feelings of hopelessness in both Mobile and Medellin and having a positive sense of community was found to alleviate hopelessness (Dubow, Edwards, & Ippolito, 1997). While the connection of a community and family do play important roles in preventing or lessening hopelessness, the closeness of a family can cause a greater deal of hopelessness if one or more of the members has been victimized (Resnick et al. 1997).

Some results were not in line with the existing literature. Medellin has a high religious cultural context, but when it comes to moderating hopelessness religiosity only has significant effects on Mobile youth. Perhaps because of the overarching religious context of Medellin's society its' adolescents do not gain the same skills from participating in religion as Mobile youth. Worry, as a marginally significant variable in Mobile's hopelessness, was found to lower Medellin's hopelessness levels, despite its classification as a risk factor. There was nothing in the literature that would indicate worry's protective powers, but perhaps the simple act of being concerned about your family and their future causes you not to check out completely and give into the feelings of hopelessness. Harsh discipline was classified as a risk factor, but turned out to be a

protective factor for both populations. Maybe harsh discipline is the more commonly used form in disadvantaged communities, or maybe there is cultural context among disadvantaged populations for harsh discipline that does not occur to outsiders.

There is strong evidence in support of relative poverty as a potential explanation of the increased levels of hopelessness among the adolescents in Mobile. The adolescents see the wealthier members of American society achieving the always illusive American Dream, and they want a piece of the pie for themselves. However, they do not have the right set of credentials or life circumstances to achieve this goal through the proper legal channels. Therefore, they often turn to crime and other illicit activities in an attempt to claim what they have been taught is rightfully theirs. The greater the level of inequality and the inequality of dreams and actuality, the greater the level of crime trying to eliminate the gap (Blau & Blau, 1982); this is most certainly the case for hopelessness in Mobile and Medellin. Medellin youth do not expect to achieve at the same level Mobile youth do, therefore when Medellin youth find themselves stuck in the barrios surrounded by crime and drug cartel they are not disappointed, as their American counterparts would be.

The current study is not without its limitations. This data is cross-sectional and therefore examines two different contexts within the same data set; but only at one time within the neighborhood lives. Having a second time of study with similar results would strengthen the associations indicated within this model. In Mobile the surveys were community surveys and therefore youth who had already dropped out of the education system could still be caught by the survey. In Medellin this was not so. Since the surveys

were administered in school, youth who had already left the educational system were missed, and these are quite possibly the adolescents with the greatest hopelessness.

Another limitation of the surveys is that though every effort was made to accommodate the fact that the Medellin students were taking a survey originally written not in their first language, which was a reality. The administrators did provide the surveys in Spanish, and trained officials to assist with any further questions the children had, the survey and the ideas contained within were at their core American. This data was secondary and thus question scales had to be built from what existed, rather than the ideal questions, though since the originators of the survey also examined hopelessness this alleviated some limitations in this area.

Future examinations of hopelessness should focus on adolescent hopelessness and further exploration of the protective and risk factors contained here. Future studies should also investigate relative poverty with hopelessness levels when using comparative studies of similarly disadvantaged populations.

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APPENDIX

Predictors for Hopelessness-- Medellin Survey and Mobile Youth Survey
Religious Importance
How important is religion to you?
Years Living In Neighborhood
How long have you lived in your neighborhood?

Parental Rules
Some families have rules about what children are allowed to do, and about what they are not allowed to do.
Does your family have rules about when you do homework?
Does your family have rules about dating?
Does your family have rules about you drinking alcohol?
Does your family have rules about you using drugs?
Does your family have rules about fighting and hitting other people?

Parental Monitoring
Does your mother or father know who you hang out with?
Does your mother or father know exactly where you are when you are not in school or at work?
How much does your mother or father really know about what you do when you are not in school or at work?
How much does your mother or father really know about where you go at night?

Positive Community Sense
Please agree or disagree with the following statements about your neighborhood.
If I moved away from my neighborhood, I would be sorry to leave.
Very few of my neighbors know me.
I have friends in my neighborhood who know they can depend on me.
I do not like living in my neighborhood.
There are people in my neighborhood, other than my family, who really care about me.
I have friends in my neighborhood I can depend on.
If you don't look out for yourself in my neighborhood, no one else will.
No one in my neighborhood takes any interest in what their neighbors are doing.
It is hard to make good friends in my neighborhood.
If I am upset about a personal problem, there are people in my neighborhood I can turn to.

Positive Parental Discipline
When I do something I am not allowed to my parents take my privileges or ground me.
When I do something I am not allowed to my parents give me extra chore or work to do around the house.
When I do something I am not allowed to my parents calmly discuss what happened with me.

Harsh Parental Discipline
When I do something I am not allowed to my parents yell at me or scold me.
When I do something I am not allowed to my parents slap me or spank me or hit me.
Victimization
In the past year (12 months), did someone cut, stab, or shoot you bad enough that you had to see a doctor?
It is not possible to avoid fights in my neighborhood (please agree or disagree).

Victimization of a friend of family member
In the past year was a friend or anyone in your family shot or stabbed?
Do you or anyone you live with keep a gun in your apartment for protection?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

I have gotten very upset when I found out that a friend or a family member had something very bad happen to them.
I have bad dreams about the bad things that have happened to a family member or friend.
I have trouble sleeping at night when bad things happen to a family member or friend.
When bad things happen to a family member or friend, it feels like they are happening to me.

Worry
How much do you worry about getting good grades?
How much do you worry that your family has enough money to get by?
How much do you worry that you might not get a good job when you get older?

Negative Peers
How many of your friends think you are a punk if you don't drink alcohol?
How many of your friends think you are a punk if you don't use drugs?
How many of your friends think you are a punk if you don't carry a weapon?
How many of your friends think you are a punk if you don't want to fight when you are insulted or dissed or called out?
How many of your friends think you are a punk if you do well in school?
How many of your friends think you are a punk if you don't have sex?

Dependent Variable--Medellin Survey and Mobile Youth Survey
Hopelessness
Please agree or disagree with the following statements
All I see ahead of me are bad things, not good things.
There's no use in really trying to get something I want because I probably won't get it.
I might as well give up because I can't make things better for myself.
I don't have good luck now and there's no reason to think I will when I get older.
I never get what I want, so it's dumb to want anything.
I don't expect to live a very long life.

Table I. T-Tests of 13 variables of interest

Variable	Mean for MYS	Mean for Medellin	T-Score
Time in the Neighborhood	3.69	4.26	8.57***
Religiosity	1.53	1.60	3.03*
Parental Rules	1.65	1.96	7.18***
Parental Monitoring	4.72	3.99	9.67***
Positive Parental Discipline	1.48	1.99	12.55**
Harsh Parental Discipline	1.44	1.15	10.25***
Positive Sense of Community	5.88	6.1	2.61***
Hopelessness	1.63	1.15	6.63***
Victimization	.24	.06	8.82***
Victimization of Family or Friend	2.07	1.12	23***
Worry	2.88	4.74	32.5***
PTSD	2.91	3.66	.42**
Negative Peers	2.22	2.17	.36

p<.05*; p<.01**; p<.001***

Table 2a MYS results predicting hopelessness Model Fit Statistics: Chi Square=152.7; RMSEA=.02; GFI=.99; AGFI=.97

Variable	Standardized Effects	Std. Error	*p*
Age	-.08	.02	<.001
Sex	-.13	.07	<.10
Years in Neighborhood	----	----	----
Religiosity	-.27	.10	<.001
Parental Rules	----	----	----
Parental Monitoring	-.08	.02	<.001
Positive Parental Discipline	----	----	----
Harsh Parental Discipline	-.11	.05	<.05
Positive Community	-.20	.03	<.001
Victimization	.40	.09	<.001
Victimization of Family or Friend	.11	.03	<.001
Worry	.06	.03	<.10
PTSD	.04	.02	<.10
Negative Peers	.15	.02	<.001

Table 2b results from Medellin predicting hopelessness

Variable	Standardized Effects	Std. Error	*p*
Age	-.08	.02	<.001
Sex	-.13	.07	<.10
Years in Neighborhood	----	----	----
Religiosity	.02	.08	----
Parental Rules	----	----	----
Parental Monitoring	-.08	.02	<.001
Positive Parental Discipline	----	----	----
Harsh Parental Discipline	-.11	.05	<.05
Positive Community	-.09	.02	<.001
Victimization	.18	.13	----
Victimization of Family or Friend	.11	.03	<.001
Worry	-.13	.03	<.001
PTSD	.04	.02	<.10
Negative Peers	.10	.02	<.001