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The Protective Factors and Life Outcomes of Youth Exposed to Community Violence

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THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND LIFE OUTCOMES OF YOUTH EXPOSED TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

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THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND LIFE OUTCOMES OF YOUTH EXPOSED TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

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There is an increasing interest in the life outcomes of youth that are exposed to community violence. Previous research has found that community violence has a direct effect on youth development. It has also shown that there are economic costs for communities that have high levels of community violence. Thus far, the literature on youth in these areas has focused on protective factors such as school connectedness, family connectedness, religion and positive life outcomes. There is little research on the affects of mentoring on life outcomes for individuals that were exposed to community violence during adolescence. This study explores mentoring as a mediating variable that promotes positive life outcomes by analyzing data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health studies. A nested multiple regression model was used to evaluate the data. The results show that individuals with mentors are more likely to be civically engaged during young adulthood.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 2001 the Surgeon General of the U.S. emphasized an urgent need to confront the problem of youth violence in the United States (U.S. Department of Health … 2001). The report emphasized the significance of youth violence research not only for the protection of children but also to protect the economy and development of communities nationwide. Many studies focused on the risk factors of youth violence and understanding the offenders and victims of youth violence (Borum 2000; Herrenkohl, Maguin, Hill, Hawkins, Abbott, and Catalano 2000). Over the past decade research on youth violence and programmatic interventions has turned attention from risk factors to the enhancement of protective factors such as family and school (Brookmeyer, Fanti, Henrich 2006; Masten and Coatsworth 1998; Resnick, Ireland, and Borowsky 2004; Ruchkin 2002; Sroufe and Rutter 1984). This turn in topical interest is partly due to the emergence of life-course theory. Many studies are looking at the behavior of individuals throughout several stages of life. Understanding protective factors contributing to positive outcomes and reduced violent behavior is an important part of comprehending the compromised functioning that results from violence (Sroufe and Rutter 1984).

To make sense of protection one must consider not only individual adolescent characteristics but also how the environment affords youth opportunities to succeed (Masten and Coatsworth 1998). The current literature focuses on school connectedness,

family connectedness, and religion. These factors have been shown to have a positive relationship with academic attainment, job attainment, and civic participation. However, what happens to a youth that experiences violence as an adolescent, and who does not have strong relationships at school, home, or at a place of worship? Are there other protective factors that can support positive life outcomes? These questions led to a more in-depth investigation of other social factors that may promote high levels of positive life outcomes. Thus, this study is an attempt to explore mentoring as a mediating variable that deters and/or protects individuals from a life of violent crime and encourage positive life outcomes.

The impact that youth violence has on policy making, the criminal justice system, and other governmental agencies is significant. Youth violence affects communities by increasing the cost of health care, reducing productivity, decreasing property values, and disrupting social services (Mercy and Farrington 2002). The theoretical basis for this study is social bond theory. By using the Add Health Data this study extends previous research and improves our understanding of how youth violence affects young-adult life-outcomes, thus, providing data that is suitable for effective policy-making and program development. The findings will increase our knowledge of how mentoring serves as a mediating variable in leading youth toward positive life outcomes.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focuses on mentoring as a protective factor for youth exposed to violence. This section highlights the findings of previous studies conducted on the issues within this study. The first section provides a brief review of the current literature on protective factors. The second section describes youth violence as it is defined in the United States. The third section introduces social bond theory, the theoretical approach for this study. This section is followed by a brief review of the literature on life outcomes. The chapter concludes with a description of the current study.

Protective Factors

Protective factors are those events, opportunities, and experiences in the lives of young people that diminish or buffer against the likelihood of involvement in behaviors that are risky to youth and/or to others (Resnick, Ireland, and Botowsky 2004). Understanding protective factors contributing to positive youth outcomes that reduce violent behavior can be just as vital as understanding the outcomes that result from violence (Sroufe and Rutter 1984). Protective factors serve as an intriguing dependent variable when evaluating violence and life outcomes. Thus, an awareness of the function of a particular protective factor can serve as a guideline when developing new youth development programs.

It is important to evaluate both individual adolescent characteristics and how the environment affords youth opportunities to succeed. Problem behaviors in adolescents

seem to occur as a result of complex interactions among risk factors, which are "characteristics, events, or processes that increase the likelihood for the onset of a problem" (Kazdin 1995), and protective factors, that are either internal or external to the individual and associated with positive (or less negative) life outcomes (Dekovic 1999). Previous literature has identified four protective factors: family connectedness, school connectedness, religion, and mentoring on promoting positive life outcomes.

Family Connectedness

Parent or family connectedness has been shown to be a protective factor for youth in promoting positive life outcomes (Resnick, Bearman, and Blum 1997). This finding shows that youth that have high levels of connectedness to their parents have higher levels of positive life outcomes. Previous research has revealed that family can serve as a deterrent from criminal behavior (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990, Hagan 1989, Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986, Sampson and Laub 1993). Family structure, family class background, and family functioning show a family's capacity to monitor behavior, restrict behavior, and/or give adolescents experiences that encourage pro-social behavior (Brookemeyer, Fanti, and Henrich 2006). As such, families can be important informal social-control agents that discourage criminal behavior.

Maternal and paternal support may be associated with less several behaviors such as drugs and disruptive behavior (Mahoney, Lewis, and Donnelly 2001). Mahoney, Lewis and Donnelly (2001) found that positive parent-child interactions were linked to decreases in problem behaviors such as promiscuity, drug use, and violence. It is evident that the role that parents play in the life of their child will heavily influence his/her behavior. A close bond between father and child (Brooke, Richter, Whiteman, and

Arencibia-Mireles and Masci 2002) or simply the presence of a father (Ellis, Bates, Dodge, Ferguson, Horwood, and Petti 2003) was associated with higher levels of school connectedness and lower levels of delinquent behavior. Resnick, Bearman, and Blum 1997 conducted a study in 1997 that evaluated the main threats that affect the health of adolescents. They found that parental connectedness, as expressed by feelings of warmth, love, and caring from parents) has been shown to be more significant than the physical presence of a parent (Resnick et al. 1997). In their study parental (family) connectedness was measured by the following variables: closeness to mother and/or father, perceived caring by mother and/or father, satisfaction with relationship with mother and/or father and feeling loved by and wanted by family members. Maternal and paternal support may have the greatest benefits for children with externalizing and attention problems (Usher, Mulvihill, and Mielcarek 1999).

Studies that concentrated on the relationship between parenting practices and behavioral problems among youth have focused on dysfunctional practices such as hostility, punitive shaming, and rejection (Brookmeyer, Fanti, and Henrich 2006; Loeber and Stouthammer-Loeber 1986; Ruchkin 2002). In research on children, resilience generally refers to good outcomes in spite of serious threats to development. Research on resilience has found that positive parenting characteristic such as talking and spending time with children are associated with reduced conduct problems, even among high-risk children (Masten 1994). This study explores how protective factors such as family connectedness can serve as a buffer against community violence exposure and supporting the youth to become more resilient much like studies that have been previously

conducted. However, this study differs in that it looks at how mentoring can serve as a protective factor when and/or if family connectedness is low.

School Connectedness

School connectedness is defined as an adolescent's experience of caring at school and sense of closeness to school personnel and the environment (Resnick et al. 1997). In the United States school-aged children and adolescents spend nearly half their waking hours in school, and schools are widely considered a critical setting for developing youth (Smith, Boutte, Zigler, and Finn-Stevenson 2004). School connectedness has been identified as a critical protective factor in adolescent development, and it has been related to higher levels of school retention, improved emotional health and well-being, and reduced problem behavior (e.g., Bond et al. 2007).

School connectedness is often measured using student perceptions of how students get along with one another and are treated by school staff (Hoy, Smith, and Sweetland 2002; Rosenblatt and Furlong 1997). Research has shown that students' increased connectedness to school is related to a greater likelihood of school completion (Bond et al. 2008). This finding is pertinent to the conceptual framework for this study, according to this study there is a correlation between school connectedness and academic attainment. If a student's level of connectedness is low, will mentoring serve as a mediating variable that promotes school completion and higher levels of academic attainment?

Factors relating to the school climate have been identified as important in fostering students' connectedness to school (Blum 2005). School climate is a complex construct used to describe the characteristic qualities of interactions among adults and students at

school, encompassing the atmosphere, culture, values, resources, and social networks of a school (Hoy, Smith, and Sweetland 2002). Student perceptions of supportive school climate have been linked to student adjustment, commitment to learning, and academic achievement (Brand et al. 2003), as well as school safety and teacher victimization (Gottfredson et al. 2005).

Resnick et al. (1997) found that high school students who did not feel connected to their schools have significantly lower rates of emotional distress, suicidal ideation, suicidal behavior, violence, substance abuse, and early sexual initiation. School connectedness has been correlated to student aggression and behavior (Haynes, Comer, and Hamilton-Lee 1989). If the student did not feel supported by the individuals in the school they were more likely to disengage in their studies. In the previously mentioned study school connectedness was found more protective than other factors such as family connectedness and peer relationships. Possible explanations for these findings include when students feel connected to their school, they may be more likely to confide in teachers about the experience of violence exposure, which may lead to better coping skills and decreased violent behavior (Brookemeyer, Fanti, and Henrich 2006). By discerning the effects of school connectedness on adolescent behavior, the understanding of protective processes in affecting life outcomes will strengthen.

Religion

Religions involvement has been found to be an influence on youth's behavior (Pearce, Jones, Schwab-Stone, and Ruchkin 2003). It may regulate youth's behavior through the promotion of normative beliefs and moral values (Cochran, Beeghley and Bock 1988). As previously discussed, protective factors are those events, opportunities,

and experiences in the lives of young people that diminish or buffer against the likelihood of involvement in behaviors risky to youth and/or to others (Resnick 2004). As such, religion can serve as an experience that correlates with the behavior of youth. Many religions have a doctrine and/or set of beliefs that followers choose to base their lives upon. The internalization of these beliefs become a part of self-identity, along with associated feelings of guilt and shame once a religious norm is broken, may function to constrain the behavior of youth (Ellison and Levin 1998). Religion may have a function as an external regulator of youth behavior through the provision of a social network (peers and adults) bonded by an acceptance of and commitment to moral values and social norms (Durkheim 1951; Krause, Ellison, Shaw, Marcum, and Boardman 2001). By interacting with this social network the youth may experience a level of social control. By internalizing the norms and values they may be deterred from deviant behavior as a means to remain a member of the social network.

Several studies have demonstrated that the more social problems affecting a neighborhood and the fewer the non-religious controls, the greater is the importance of the constraining effect of religiousness on delinquent behavior (Johnson, Joon Jang, Li and Larson 2000; Tittle and Welch 1983). Johnson et al. (2000) examined the degree to which an individual's religious involvement significantly mediates and buffers the effects of neighborhood disorder on youth crime. To test this hypothesis, the authors analyzed the 5th wave of data from the National Youth Survey, focusing on 226 Black respondents (aged 15–21 yrs), given the historical as well as contemporary significance of the African-American church for Black Americans.

Results from estimating a series of regression models indicated that (1) the effects of neighborhood disorder on crime among Black youth are partly mediated by an individual's religious involvement (measured by the frequency of attending religious services) and (2) involvement of African-American youth in religious institutions significantly buffers or interacts with the effects of neighborhood disorder on crime and, in particular, serious crime. Their study revealed that involvement in religious institutions buffered or interacted with the effects of neighborhood disorder on serious crime (Johnson et. al 2000). While this study focused primarily on African Americans, it still provides a conceptual framework that is applicable to this study.

Mentoring

Mentors are individuals who are non-parental adults that support youth psychological development, relationship development, academic success, and behavioral management (Bryant and Zimmerman 2003). Those who identify an important non-parental adults in their lives, often report better psychological well-being, more rewarding relationships with others, academic success, and fewer problem behaviors than their peers (Bryant and Zimmerman 2003, Klaw, Rhodes, and Fitzgerald 2003, Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro 2002). Research on social networks (Lin 1999) and on mentoring within work organizations (Ragins 1999) highlights the importance of significant others in improving career opportunities for the adult workforce.

Mentoring can be divided into two types. First, formal relationship refers to programs such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, which attempt to match at-risk youth with adult mentors. These types of programs generally facilitate positive outcomes among youth (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper 2002), improving academic

performance attitudes and relationships with friends and relatives as well as reducing problem behaviors (Grossman and Rhodes 2002). Second, informal mentoring relationships occur naturally between the youth and the adults with whom they come in contact. These nonparent adults have received several of labels, such as natural mentors, very important people, role models, and significant others (Bryant and Zimmerman 2003), but all are adults that adolescents perceive to be influential in a positive way.

Mentoring renders benefits that decrease the potential for problem behaviors and improve psychological well being, academic performance, and relationships with others (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro 2002). Each study produced supporting data that suggested that the presence of a mentor in an adolescent's life produces positive life outcomes.

Mentoring is a factor that has not been studied extensively and will be tested as a means to identify another possible protective factor for youth that have engaged in youth violence. While previous studies suggest that mentoring is a protective factor this study aims to close the gap in the current literature on mentoring youth. By evaluating the significance of certain protective factors the understanding of life outcomes will be greater. This study used the protective factors measured in previous studies with the addition of mentoring to assess whether or not mentoring helps youth mediate the negative effects of youth violence, thus promoting positive life outcomes such as academic achievement, job attainment, and civic engagement.

Exposure to Youth Violence

Thirty years ago researchers were confident that children who experienced violence had a greater likelihood of becoming violent adults when compared with

children who did not experience violence (Silver, Dublin, and Lourie 1969). Longitudinal studies (Farrell and Bruce 1997; Gorman-Smith and Tolan 1998) have demonstrated that exposure to violence is positively related to increases in violent behavior. The association between community violence exposure during adolescence and young adult life outcomes has been a subject studied within criminology, public health, and psychology.

Urban youth are at a greater risk of witnessing violence and for being victimized (Bell and Jenkins 1993; Schwab-Stone, Ayers, Kasprow, Voyce, Barone, and Shriver 1995). In a study in New York City 36 percent of high school students reported being threatened with a weapon within a one-year period (Centers for Disease Control 1993). Another study found that 39 percent of urban youth in New Haven, Connecticut reported having seen "someone shot or shot at" (Schwab-Stone et al. 1999). The number of youth being exposed to violence is of great concern due to the negative consequences of exposure to violence. The negative ramifications associated with exposure to violence include internalizing symptoms and externalizing behavior, decreased perceptions of risk associated with high-risk behavior, and increased likelihood of using violence (Durant, Cadenhead, Pendergrast, Slavens and Linder 1994; Schwab-Stone et. al 1995).

Social Bond Theory

In 1969, Travis Hirschi proposed that a tie with others would discourage or encourage individuals from committing a delinquent act. According to the theory society serves as a restraint on deviant behavior. When ties are weakened or loosened an individual is more likely to engage in deviant behavior. As described by Hirschi (p. 16 1969) "elements of social bonding include attachment to families, commitment to social

norms and institutions (school, employment), involvement in activities, and the belief that these things are important." Social bond theory is important in this study because the theory emphasizes the relationship between outcomes and delinquency of youth when there is an absence of social attachments (i.e., protective factors). It is important to evaluate the ties within the network of a particular individual because family, friends, and our social networks affect our lives and the development of self.

While Hirschi's concept of social bond consists of four elements, this study will solely focus on attachment. Attachment refers to the symbiotic linkage between a person and society. It is a reference to the symbiotic linkage between a person and society. By attachment, Hirschi (p. 18 1969) refers to the extent to which a person is attached to others.

The basic assumption of social bond theory is that when a bond is weakened or broken deviant behavior may occur. As stated by Travis Hirschi (p. 17 1969):

> The more weakened the groups to which the individual belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself and recognizes no other rules of conduct than what formed on his private interests.

Attachment is a powerful form of personal control that may be exercised as a direct or indirect form of control, that is, the object of attachment does not have to be present to regulate or mediate individual behavior (Nye 1958). When an individual has strong and stable attachments to society they are less likely to violate social norms. Hirschi hypothesized that they are more likely to contemplate their decision and avoid deviant behavior because of probable consternation from valued attachments. The concept of attachment is at the core of the individual socialization process. The strength or weakness of attachment to others will determine an individual's behavior across the life-

course in numerous ways. Behavior that results is dependent upon whether or not the individual internalized norm-abiding behavior or deviant behavior from those to which they are attached.

One of the most critical times of development is during adolescence (Hagan and Foster 2001). The structure and characteristics of the ties within our network are important when discussing protective factors. During the time of adolescence if an individual has strong positive social ties he or she will exhibit positive habits or behaviors.

Life Outcomes

The following sections provide a brief discussion about each outcome that will be evaluated; academic attainment, civic participation, job attainment, and violent behavior. The first life outcome that will be evaluated is academic attainment. Teenagers with high aspirations to succeed have high educational and occupational goals and resources to meet these goals. Unfortunately, many students do not make the decisions that are necessary to reach their goals. Schneider and Stevenson (1999) argued that students who are the most likely to succeed have aligned ambitions, meaning that they have high educational aspirations, complementary educational and occupational goals, and resources and detailed life plans for reaching their goals. The theoretical focal point of this study is attachment. As previously discussed if an individual has strong social bonds they will feel more attachment toward the values that are important to the relationship. Protective factors such as religion and school connectedness stress the importance of aspirations to meet personal goals whether that is spiritually or intellectually.

School climate has been an influential factor in academic achievement. If an individual feels a sense of connectedness to his or her school he or she will become actively engaged at school, thus increasing his or her likelihood to complete school. Individuals that reach higher levels of academic attainment understand the sequential nature of life events and the consequences of their actions, leading them to use time wisely and make smart decisions about academic activities (Frisco 2008).

In developing the conceptual framework of this study the idea of civic participation as a life outcome became ideal. As such civic participation was added to the study. Due to the cultural importance of democracy, the need for a variable measuring this ideal was pertinent to the study. The addition of civic participation was added in support of Alexis De Tocqueville (1835) of American ideal of volunteerism. Since the ideals are what would be culturally relevant and assumed to be positive outcomes by American standards the variable was constructed by evaluating the current literature. It is very important to study factors that may influence the development of commitments to civic participation during late adolescence because late adolescence is a critical period for development of sociopolitical orientations (e.g., Erikson, 1968).

As expected, it was found that positive relations among all investments in work, religion, family, and volunteer activities and one or more of the traits in question. A further analysis of the relationship between the protective factors and civic participation will be discussed in the analysis and conclusion sections. Social investments (attachments) in work and family were positively related to conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability. Attachment to religion was positively related to agreeableness and socialization (a theoretical parallel to being both agreeable and

conscientious). Finally, social investment in volunteer activity was positively related to conscientiousness (Lodi-Smith and Roberts 2007).

As Yates and Youniss (1998) explain, adolescence is a time when youth are thinking about and trying to anticipate their lives as adults. They are working to understand who they are and how they will relate to the broader society (also see, Atkins and Hart, 2003). Theorists like John Dewey (1900) and reformers such as Deborah Meier (1995, 2002) link experiencing a sense of belonging to a caring and supportive school community with the development of commitments and capacities for democratic ways of living. Flanagan, Cumsille, Sukhdeep, and Gallay (2007) find a positive relationship between school and community climates and civic commitments. Discussion between parents and youth revolving around civic and political issues relates to a wide range of civic outcomes (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin and Keeter, 2003; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Current literature evaluates the relationship between social institutions and civic participation, but is lacking in literature that focuses strictly on mentorship and civic participation.

There is a lack of research correlating protective factors directly to civic participation, but there is research-correlating education to civic participation (Dee 2004), that has shown that an increase in education will increase civic participation. In support of the second hypothesis, if an individual has high levels of academic attainment, it is expected that he or she will also have high levels of civic participation.

The third life outcome to be evaluated is job attainment. Stressful events such as exposure to violence can lead to economic problems such as quitting or losing a job, serious financial problems, and dependence on public aid (Gorman-Smith and Tolan

1998). Gorman-Smith and Tolan (1998) evaluated the consequences of violence exposure during adolescence. They examined developmental issues associated with community violence. No protective variables were introduced into their model. In contrast, this study evaluates youth exposed to violence as well, but will further Gorman-Smith and Tolan's study by using additional variables. The focus will be to see if protective factors support positive job outcomes despite being exposed to community violence.

Nan Lin (1999) found that education exerted a significant and important effect on job attainment. Much like the first hypothesis, if protective factors have shown to have a positive relationship with academic attainment; it is assumed that the same would be true of job attainment.

Last, violent behavior will be tested as a negative life outcome. Social investment serves as a counterpart to delinquency. Laub, Nagin, and Sampson (1998) found that individuals with strong social bonds had higher levels of positive outcomes. In addition, the participants in the study discontinued their criminal activities if they acquired a stable and viable job (Laub, Nagin, and Sampson, 1998; Longshore, Chang, Hsieh, and Messina, 2004). They also found that delinquent boys relinquished their life of crime on getting married, in part because of strong attachment to partners who held expectations that ran contrary to criminal activities (Sampson and Laub, 1990). While this study did not examine attachment to partners, the conceptual framework of Sampson and Laub's (1990) study was used to cerebrate how attachment to family, school, religion, and mentors affects behavior during young adulthood.

In 2004 Michael Resnick completed a study in which he found that protective factors could serve as a bulwark for risky behavior, including violent behavior. It was expected that the findings of this study would only further support the findings of the study conducted by Resnick.

The Current Study

This study will evaluate the role of protective factors in promoting positive life outcomes in young adults. The literature previously discussed used data to evaluate life outcomes during adulthood. This study shows how social bonds affect outcomes during a different stage in life than what has been studied in the past.

The primary attachments and interactions of the individuals are with the parents, closely followed by the attachments to peers, teachers, religious leaders, and other members of a community. Family connectedness, school connectedness, religion, mentoring, and attachment will be tested in this study. Social bond theory suggests that conventional figures, such as parents, when bonded make a huge impact in the deterrence of criminal acts (Resnick 2004). According to Hirschi (1969) other attachments, such as school, also play a significant role in teaching social norms, values, and beliefs. If the organizational culture of school, family, religion, and mentoring promotes positive life outcomes, then the attachment to those protective factors will influence positive life outcomes for youth exposed to violence. The attachment that Hirschi refers to is the tie that connects a youth to the protective factors being tested in this study.

Previous research has focused on the rates of youth violence and types of youth violence. Newer studies have found that youth that had lower levels of violent behavior had higher levels of protective factors. Using social bond theory five hypotheses were

tested based upon the reviewed literature. Based on the literature, the following hypotheses will be tested: (1) individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have higher levels of academic attainment, (2) individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have higher levels of civic participation, (3) individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have higher levels of job attainment, (4) individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have lower levels of violent behavior. The fifth hypothesis states that: individuals with mentors will have higher levels of academic attainment, job attainment, civic participation and violent behavior. As stated in the literature review, little research evaluates the role of formal and informal mentors. Since mentors are individuals that promote positive life outcomes, then it is expected that an individual who has a mentor will exhibit higher levels of job attainment, academic attainment, and civic participation.

This study will use the hypotheses to show empirical evidence for social bond theory, and evaluate the social factors that influence behavior and life outcomes, thus, expanding the literature of both social bond theory and youth violence. The following chapter describes the methodology applied to this study.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is an attempt to interpret the social forces that affect young adult life outcomes for individuals exposed to youth violence during their adolescent years. A quantitative methodological approach was selected for this study. Previous research has tested the strength of the association between protective factors and life outcomes by using multiple regression models. Preceding research has also tested the relationship between different protective factors. This study adds to the literature by evaluating how changes in the relationships between the protective factors (religion, school connectedness, family connectedness and mentoring) will affect life outcomes for youth exposed to violence. Using a nested regression model is the most useful way to show how life outcomes may change when violence and protective factors are present in an individual's life. In this chapter I will provide a description of the data, followed by a brief discussion of the hypotheses and variables. This chapter ends with an explanation of the analysis employed in this study.

Data

Data for this study came from the Wave II and Wave III of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Add Health was designed with the understanding that families, friends, schools, and communities play important roles in the lives of adolescents. The study is a school-based longitudinal study of nationally

representative samples of adolescents in grades 7-12 in the United States in 1994-95. Wave II data collection includes follow-up in-home interviews with adolescents and follow-up, school-administrator interviews conducted in 1996. Wave III data collection, conducted in 2001 and 2002, includes in-home interviews with the original respondents (now young adults) and in-home interviews with their partners. A representative sample was drawn with a final N=4882.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this thesis was to find empirical support for social bond theory by studying the relationships between protective factors, youth violence, and life outcomes. Based upon the literature and theoretical explanations the following hypotheses were tested using a nested regression model:

$H_{1:}$ Individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have higher levels of academic attainment.

$H_{2:}$ Individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have higher levels of civic participation.

H_3: Individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have higher levels of job attainment.

H_4: Individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have lower levels of violent experiences.

H_5: Individuals with mentors will have lower levels of violent experiences.

Conceptual Framework

The selected variables were chosen based upon previous literature and a theoretical foundation of social bond theory. The dependent variables were academic attainment, civic participation, job attainment, and violent experiences and were measured by victimization, offending, family connectedness, school connectedness,

religion, and mentoring. I created a scale for the variables victimization, offending, and violent experience. A table representing the questions used to construct each of the variables can be found in Appendix A.

Dependent Variables

All of the life outcomes were measured at Wave III. Academic attainment was measured by one question 'what is the highest grade of regular school that you have completed? The possible values range from nine (9^{th} grade) to 17 (5 or more years of college). Each participant was asked whether he or she had participated in volunteer or community service. The measurement for civic participation was measured as a dichotomous variable, where '0' represents (NO) and '1' (YES). Job attainment was measured by one question 'Do you have a job?' The value for the response 'No' is equal to a '0' and 'Yes' equals '1.' Violent experience is an inclusive variable, both self-reported offending and victimization are measured. To measure violent experience, nine questions were used to create a z-score-based scale. The variable was weighted and zero-centered. Violent experience had an α=. 718: "In the past 12 months did you or did you see…"

Q1: someone shoot/stab someone?

Q2: someone pulled a gun on you?

Q3: someone pulled a knife on you?

Q4: someone stabbed you?

Q5: someone shot you?

Q6: you were beaten up?

Q7: you beat someone up?

Q8: you pulled a knife/gun on someone?

Q9: you shot or stabbed someone?

Independent Variables

A z-score scale was created for the variables victimization and offending. The variables were weighted and zero-centered. The alpha reliability coefficients were .660 and .640 respectively. Summing the responses of five items derived the victimization scale (see Appendix A). Two items were used to create the offending scale (Appendix A). The original variables had a range of zero (never) to two (more than once). Each response with a value of '1' (once) or '2' (more than once) was collapsed into a dichotomous variable with a minimum of '0' and a maximum of '1'. The value '0' means that the respondent has not offended or has not been a victim of violent crime. The value '1' means that the respondent is a victim of violent crime or has committed a violent crime.

Protective factors are considered independent variables that can have their own direct effects on behavior (Jessor, Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, and Turbin 1995). The independent variables measuring protective factors were family connectedness, school connectedness, and religion. Mentoring served as an independent variable, but as a mediating variable to test how changes in the relationships between the protective factors could change the life outcomes of the respondents. Mentoring was measured by one question 'Other than your parents has an adult made an important positive difference in your life since you were 14 years old?' The range for the mentoring variable was from zero to one.

Family connectedness was measured by the question 'How much do you feel your parents care about you?' Respondents receive a score from zero (not at all) to five (very much). The item 'Do you feel close to people at your school?' measured the variable school connectedness. The range for the school connectedness variable is from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree). Religion was measured by the question 'How important is religion to you?' The values of the response ranged from one (fairly unimportant) to three (very important)

Four control variables were included in the study. Gender was measured by one question that stated 'What is your gender?' where '0' represents male and '1' represents female. Black, Asian, and Native American were dummy coded to White, where '0' represented White and '1' represented Black, Asian, or Native American.

Data Analysis

Both data sets, Wave II and Wave III, were linked, and the units of analysis were the survey respondents. Four life outcomes will be tested using a nested regression model. A nested regression model was selected to explore whether changes in the set of protective factors will change life outcomes. An ordinary least squares regression model would not be an adequate measurement to test the value of mentoring as a protective factor. The goal of this study was to explore how the outcomes of the youth exposed to violence would change if they had a mentor. The variance between the strength of the protective factors without the inclusion of mentoring versus with mentoring can be compared by nesting the mentoring variable in the equation.

Regression coefficients of the protective factors were evaluated to determine the interaction between protective factors and young adult life outcomes. To define

mentoring as a mediating variable, the following conditions must be met: the independent variables must be significantly related the dependent variable, the independent variables must be significantly related to the dependent variables, and the magnitude of the relationship between the independent variables and violent experience must significantly decrease after controlling for the mentoring.

While there have been many studies conducted involving protective factors and youth violence, this study differs in that it focuses on life outcomes of young adults rather than adults. Most literature focuses on the outcomes of adults (primarily individuals above the age of 25). My primary goal was to evaluate the interaction between protective factors and life outcomes. The empirical evidence for positive life outcomes that exist in current literature evaluates the life outcomes of adults, meaning that the life outcomes reflect the summation of an individual's protective factors during adolescence and young adulthood. I focused solely on young adulthood to see if empirical evidence shows that protective factors produce positive life outcomes at an earlier life stage than what has been studied in the past.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSES

This study seeks to understand the relationship between protective factors and young adult life outcomes of youth exposed to violence. The following sections consist of analyses to determine whether my hypotheses were supported by the data. The data in Table 1 (Appendix C) shows the descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study. This table includes the four dependent variables, six dependent variables, and the control variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables N=4882

	Mean	Std. Dev	Min.	Max.
Dependent Variable				
Academic Attainment	13.21	1.989	6	22
Civic Participation	.29	.454	0	1
Job Attainment	.73	.444	0	1
Violent Behavior	.00	.874	-.212	12.580
Independent Variable				
Family Connectedness	4.83	2.706	1	96
School Connectedness	3.70	.986	1	5
Religion	3.33	.788	1	4
Mentoring	.76	.424	0	1
Victimization	.00	.772	-.261	5.788
Offending	.00	.872	-.460	3.711
Control Variables				
Gender	.54	0.499	0	1
Black	0.25	0.432	0	1
Native American	0.05	0.210	0	1
Asian	0.05	0.211	0	1

Academic Attainment

Table 2 displays the effects of protective factors on academic attainment. The protective factors included in the regression model were family connectedness, school connectedness, religion, and mentoring. Model one shows the affect of the control

variables on the life outcome. In model two, exposure to community violence is added to the model, victimization and offending represent exposure to community violence. In model three mentoring is added to the model. Model four includes all of the control variables, community violence variables and protective factor variables.

First, these findings do not support Hypothesis 1; which states that 'individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have higher levels of academic attainment.' Attachments to other institutions were not significant at all. Second, mentoring had no effect at all. Hypothesis 3 stated that 'individuals with higher levels of protective factors would have higher levels of academic attainment, job attainment and civic participation.' Hypothesis 3 was not supported by any of the data. Third, victimization was a significant factor at the $p<.05$ level in all of the models in which it was entered. For every one-unit increase in victimization in model two, victimization had a coefficient of -.150, the unstandardized coefficients increased to -.151 in model three, and -.163 in model four. The R^2 did not change significantly when mentoring was added to the equation. However, the R^2 doubled from .018 in model 1 to .045 in model 4. Lastly, Native Americans' academic achievement levels are significantly lower than those for whites in models two, three and four, but were not significant in model one.

Table 2. Nested Multiple Regression Equations for Academic Attainment

Independent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Gender	.147	.103	.116	.113
(Male=0)	(.148)	(.148)	(.148)	(.149)
Black	-.034	.064	.050	.100
	(.168)	(.170)	(.170)	(.174)
Native American	-.910	-.858**	-.889**	-.897**
	(.302)	(.301)	(.301)	(.301)
Asian	-.041	-.037	-.031	-.022
	(.373)	(.371)	(.370)	(.371)
Victimization	------	-.150*	-.151*	-.163*
		(.075)	(.075)	(.076)
Offending	------	-.095	-.092	-.079
		(-.113)	(.113)	(.115)
Mentoring	------	------	.276	.267
			(.165)	(.165)
Family Connectedness	------	------	------	-.098
				(.106)
School Connectedness	------	------	------	.061
				(.071)
Religion	------	------	------	-.115
				(.094)
R^2	.018	.034	.040	.045
R^2 adj.	.011	.024	.027	.027

N= 4882

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

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Unstandardized coefficients are reported.

Civic Participation

The results for the nested regression model for civic participation are presented in Table 3. There are two significant findings in the model. Hypothesis 2 stated that

'individuals with higher levels of protective factors will have higher levels of civic participation' and was supported by the findings. For every one-unit increase in mentoring individuals were .127 more likely to be civically engaged in model three and .129 more likely in model four. Both were significant at the p<. 01 level. In model two the R^2 is .017, when mentoring was added to the model the R^2 increased to .032. The R^2 increased to .037 in model four. Thus, the variability of the model tripled from model one to model four. Thus, gender was significant in all four models at the p<. 01 level. The direction of the effects was positive. Women were more likely to volunteer than men.

Table 3. Nested Multiple Regression Equations for Civic Participation

Independent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Gender	-.112**	-.113**	-.107**	-.107**
(Male=0)	(.039)	(.039)	(.039)	(.039)
Black	-.005	-.001	-.008	-.022
	(.044)	(.045)	(.045)	(-.046)
Native American	.020	.022	.008	.010
	(.079)	(.080)	(.079)	(.079)
Asian	.045	.045	.047	.044
	(.098)	(.098)	(.097)	(.098)
Victimization	------	-.005	-.005	-.002
		(.020)	(-.020)	(.020)
Offending	------	-.005	-.004	-.006
		(-.030)	(-.030)	(.030)
Mentoring	------	------	.127**	.129**
			(.043)	(.043)
Family Connectedness	------	------	------	.020
				(.028)
School Connectedness	------	------	------	-.013
				(.019)
Religion	------	------	------	.030
				(.025)
R^2	.016	.017	.032	.037
R^2 adj.	.009	.006	.019	.019

N= 4882

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

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Unstandardized coefficients are reported.

Job Attainment

Table 4 displays the results from the nested regression model for job attainment. First, individuals with high levels of protective factors and/or mentoring were not more

likely to obtain a job. Second, individuals with higher levels of offending had lower levels of job attainment. For every one-unit increase in offending individuals were -.076 less likely to have a job in model two, -.076 in model three, and -.074 in model four. Third, when compared to Whites, Blacks had lower levels of job attainment. The results show that even before entering protective factors into the mode there was a significant difference between White job attainment and Black job attainment. This is evident by the results in model one, which shows a coefficient of -.154 at the p<. 01 level. Even when protective factors were added to the model, Blacks were still less likely to obtain a job than Whites during young adulthood. The R^2 increased from .045 in model three to .046 in model four. Thus, the variability of the model did not change significantly when all of the protective factors were included in the equation.

Table 4. Nested Multiple Regression Equations for Job Attainment

Independent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Gender	-.044	-.051	-.047	-.045
(Male=0)	(-.154)	(.040)	(.040)	(.040)
Black	-.154**	-.149**	-.155**	-.150**
	(.046)	(.046)	(.046)	(.047)
Native American	-.070	-.073	-.080	-.080
	(.079)	(.079)	(.079)	(.079)
Asian	-.059	-.064	-.067	-.066
	(.104)	(.103)	(.103)	(.104)
Victimization	------	.022	.022	.021
		(.020)	(.020)	(.021)
Offending	------	-.076*	-.076*	-.074*
		(.031)	(.031)	(.032)
Mentoring	------	------	.070	.068
			(.045)	(.045)
Family Connectedness	------	------	------	-.002
				(.030)
School Connectedness	------	------	------	.010
				(.019)
Religion	------	------	------	-.012
				(.025)
R^2	.029	.040	.045	.046
R^2 adj.	.021	.029	.032	.027

N= 4882

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

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Unstandardized coefficients are reported.

Violent Experience

Hypothesis 5 was not confirmed by the findings. It stated that 'individuals with mentors will have lower levels of violent experiences.' The results for the nested

regression model on violent experience are presented in Table 5. None of the protective factors were significant. However, the findings did support previous research on offending and life outcomes. Individuals who were offenders during adolescence were more likely to engage in violent behavior during young adulthood in models two (.313), three (.314) and four (.304). Also, Blacks were significantly more likely to engage in violent behavior than whites in all four models. Men were also more likely to engage in violent behavior than women in all four models. The variability slightly increased from model two to model four. In model two the R^2 is .094, when mentoring was added to the model the R^2 increased to .096. The R^2 increased again in model four to .103. The R^2 was too low to determine whether the protective factors can predict violent behavior during young adulthood.

Table 5. Nested Multiple Regression Equations for Violent Behavior

Independent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Gender	-.471***	-.414***	-.408***	-.430***
(Male=0)	(.112)	(.110)	(.110)	(.110)
Black	.461***	.351**	.343**	.348**
	(.126)	(.126)	(.126)	(.130)
Native American	.331	.298	.282	.261
	(.227)	(.223)	(.223)	(.223)
Asian	.059	.068	.060	.089
	(.290)	(.284)	(.284)	(.284)
Victimization	------	.050	.049	.041
		(.056)	(.056)	(.056)
Offending	------	.313***	.314***	.304***
		(.083)	(.083)	(.084)
Mentoring	------	------	.147	.145
			(.122)	(.123)
Family Connectedness	------	------	------	-.095
				(.080)
School Connectedness	------	------	------	-.077
				(.053)
Religion	------	------	------	.002
				(.069)
R^2	.049	.094	.096	.103
R^2 adj.	.042	.083	.084	.086

N= 4882

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

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Unstandardized coefficients are reported.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Youth violence has continued to be a topic of interest within the field of sociology. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will further our understanding of protective factors and the impact that violence has on positive life outcomes. Programs designed to help youth who have been exposed to violence are increasing in number. There is consensus that youth violence is a serious problem in America, but recently a broader view has emerged that the consequences of child and adolescent exposure to violence should be studied along with the cause of youthful perpetration of violence (Malik, Sorenson and Aneshensel 1997). Thorough investigations of the phenomenon, citizens, policy makers, and development agencies can better their techniques in promoting youth development, decreasing delinquent behavior, thus increasing positive life outcomes.

Bonding was tested using the Add Health data. While the results were not conclusive they provide substantial information to further research on social bond theory and youth violence. By doing this research I wanted to explore how academic attainment, job attainment, civic participation and violent behavior are affected by: (a.) school connectedness; (b.) family connectedness; (c.) religion; (d.) mentors; (e.) offending and (f.) victimization.

The present study was intended to supplement the current literature on protective factors by exploring the role of mentorship on life outcomes. Previous research suggested that school connectedness, family connectedness, religion, and mentorship produce positive life outcomes. Mentoring did not serve as a mediating variable for the other life outcomes. Hypothesis two was supported in Table 3; mentorship was shown to have a positive relationship with civic participation. This study shows researchers that civic participation can increase if individuals have a mentor. The results are not surprising since the subject would have experienced the benefits of having a mentor, they could possibly be encouraged to volunteer as well. If the mentor is a formal mentor (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper 2002) it is also possible that the mentor is a representative of a volunteer organization, thus promoting a level of civic engagement. Since these programs are generally designed to facilitate positive outcomes among youth. Also, the operationalization of civic participation simply asked whether an individual volunteered in some capacity. Mentorship is a voluntary action of one individual. The subjects that had voluntary mentors could have also exhibited higher levels of volunteerism when compared with their peers that did not have mentors simply because of the origin of their relationship with their mentor.

The data are limited because the classification of informal or formal mentor was not taken into account and the interactions between the mentor and mentee were not assessed. It is my assumption that the mentor could promote negative life outcomes. Thus, a better understanding of the relationship is needed to evaluate the relationship between mentorship and experiences with violence during young adulthood. The presence of an adult figure significantly increased the likelihood of mentorship. Future

research should explore how different types of mentors (formal and informal) influence positive and negative life outcomes. Also, data were not available at the time of the study that evaluated adult life outcomes. This data were limited due to opportunities that may have been provided to the respondents during their early twenties. The Wave IV data may be more representative of the life outcomes of the youth during young adulthood since the subjects would have had time to reflect on their experiences. The data may reflect a better understanding of social bond theory if these factors were not present. As previously stated 'attachment is a powerful form of personal control that may be exercised as a direct or indirect form of control (Nye 1958).' To fill in the gaps of our understanding of the relationship between a mentor and the youth's outcomes (more specifically experiences with violence during young adulthood), we need an understanding of what social norms they have chosen to be attached to and how those attachments developed through their interactions with their mentor.

Youth violence refers to the harmful behaviors that start in early childhood. The young person can be a victim, offender, or a witness to the behavior. It is the second leading cause of death for people between the ages of 10 and 24. An average of 16 youth were murdered each day in 2007. An estimated 20 percent of youth were bullied on school property in 2009. Nearly six percent of high school students in 2009 reported taking a gun, knife, or club to school. These are the results of a study conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2010. Besides causing injury and death, youth violence affects communities by increasing the cost of health care, reducing productivity, decreasing property values, and disrupting social services (Mercy et al. 2002). Should youth violence remain a topic of discussion? Should there be a

continuation of research on protective factors that influence positive life outcomes? These statistics show that research concerning youth violence is not only relevant but that an evaluation of protective factors is important as well. According to the present study, protective factors are not significant factors in predicting life outcomes. However, previous research shows statistical support that shows that protective factors can be a significant factor on life outcomes.

If youth are experiencing high levels of violence then how will academic achievement and the job market in the United States be affected when they become adults? This is just one of many questions that the academic community can evaluate. Future research should focus on the meaning that young people give to specific factors and how they feel that those protective factors shape their realities during adolescence. By conducting such an evaluation, we can better understand the decision-making process that youth make as they enter young adulthood. As previously discussed the operationalization of the variable mentor may have skewed the results. Future research should also use a methodology that allows the subject to define the values and beliefs of their mentors. The results in this study did not fully support previous research. However, youth violence should be a continued discussion.

APPENDIX A

Dependent Variable Construction Questions

Variable	Descriptors of Variables
Academic Attainment	What is the highest grade of regular school that you have completed? 9=9th grade 10=10th grade 11=11th grade 12=12th grade 13=1 year of college 14=2 years of college 15=3 years of college 16=4 years of college 17=5 or more years of college
Civic Participation	In the past 12 months, have you participated in a volunteer or community service? (0=NO, 1=YES):
Job Attainment	Do you have a job? (0=N0, 1=YES)
Violent Experiences	In the past 12 months, (0=NO, 1=YES): You saw someone shoot or stab another person. Someone pulled a knife on you? Someone pulled a gun on you? Someone stabbed you? Someone shot you? You were beaten up? You beat someone up? You pulled a knife/gun on someone? You shot or stabbed someone?

APPENDIX B

Independent Variable Construction Questions

Variable	Descriptors of Variables
Victimization α=. 660	In the past 12 months, (0=NO, 1=YES): You saw someone shoot or stab another person. Someone pulled a knife or gun on you. Someone shot you. Someone cut or stabbed you. You were jumped.
Offending α=. 640	In the past 12 months, (0=NO, 1=YES): You pulled a knife or gun on someone. You shot or stabbed someone.
Mentoring	Other than your parents has an adult made an important positive difference in your life since you were 14 years old? (0=N0, 1=YES)
Family Connectedness	How much do you feel your parents care about you? 1=NOT AT ALL 2=VERY LITTLE 3=SOMEWHAT 4=QUITE A BIT 5=VERY MUCH
School Connectedness	Do you feel close to people at your school? 1=STRONGLY AGREE 2=AGREE 3=NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE 4=DISAGREE
Religion	How important is religion to you? 1=VERY IMPORTANT 2=FAIRLY IMPORTANT 3=FAIRLY UNIMPORTANT

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