

Examining the Relationship between Deadly Gun Violence and School Connectedness

My 300 hours at the Center for Research
on Child Wellbeing, Princeton School of
Public and International Affairs

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Center for Research on Child Wellbeing

- One of the research centers at the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs
 - Produce basic research (publications and research briefs)
 - Educate faculty and students about issues related to children's policies
 - Influence policymakers and practitioners at the federal, state, and local levels
- Notable faculty include Kathryn Edin and Patrick Sharkey
- My research team: A post-doc, Sarah, and a Ph.D student, Amy
- I became interested because I wanted to choose an AFE that looked at OSFs on why students may not do well in school



First 135 Hours: Lit Review

- Our study sought to examine the relationship between school connectedness (feeling a part of and cared for by your school) and deadly gun violence
- The first part of the summer was dedicated the theoretical literature review
- I used Google Scholar and Web of Science to examine around 200 articles (I used about 100 at the end)
- Wrote 17 pages on community violence effects, causes/effects of school connectedness, and neighborhood characteristics
 - Then I wrote about possible pathways between DGV and school connectedness

Community Violence

- Children and adolescents exposed to community violence are more likely to have depression/anxiety/PTSD, increased aggression and delinquent behavior, decreased academic achievement, etc.
 - The violence can cause behavior that leads to increased violence, perpetuating the cycle of violence
- “Hurt et al. (2001) surveyed seven-year-olds who had already witnessed community violence and discovered how many of them were already experiencing symptoms of clinical depression and clinical anxiety. In that study, the authors reported that 61% of their subjects worried that they would die and 19% already wished they were dead”

School Connectedness

- “A sense of belonging or feeling as part of the school. The attachment comes from the student recognizing himself or herself as having meaningful connections to the school that they attend” (Diaz, 2005, p. 300)
- Causes: student mobility, extracurricular involvement, having teachers care
- Effects: dropout potential, delinquent behavior, feelings of isolation
- Mental health is associated with school connectedness, though current studies have been unable to determine whether it is a cause or effect


Neighborhood Effects

- 18% of children in the U.S. live in poverty (Kids Count)
 - 32% Black, 26% Hispanic/Latino, 11% white
- Poor neighborhoods often have schools that are ill-equipped to handle poverty
- Less likely to have collective efficacy (how much individuals in a community are willing to improve their neighborhood and how much control individuals feel that they have over the actions of their neighbors) and social cohesion (how much a community cooperates with each other) which can negatively affect mental health and increase violence (Higgins & Hunt, 2016)
- Lack of collective socialization and ability see education as a social mobility tool



Policy Implications

- The ideal solution would be to end the violence, fix the neighborhood
- Coping with violence: invest in social services and psychotherapy for children and youth
- School connectedness: follow Union City example
- Poverty: create strong safety net, increase affordable housing



Second 165 Hours: Data and Methods

- After completing the lit review, we started to use our dataset (Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study) and to prepare the data for analysis
- While doing this, I wrote a Methods section for our publication

Fragile Families Survey Data (FFCW)

- FFCW is a longitudinal study that collects data on demographics, finances, health and health behavior, cognition and behavior, education and school, employment, relationships, parenting, the legal system, housing and the neighborhood, and family/social ties
 - Oversampled nonmarital births (hence the name) in cities with >200,000 people (stratified)
 - Study started in 1998-2000 and data is still being collected!
 - Baseline, Wave 2 (1 y/o), Wave 3 (3 y/o), Wave 4 (5 y/o), Wave 5 (9 y/o), Wave 6 (15 y/o), Wave 7 (22 y/o)
- Quantitative data (numerical responses)
- This is where our school connectedness and our control/moderating variables originated (Baseline and Wave 6)

Fragile Families Deadly Gun Violence Data

- Fragile Families also gives us Deadly Gun Violence (DGV) data, which they collected from the Gun Violence Archive (GVA)
- GVA uses local media, law enforcement, and government sources to track gun violence (both deadly and non-deadly) across the United States every day
 - Data is collected on the number of perpetrators and victims, descriptions of the perpetrators and/or victims, the type of violence (murder, robbery, domestic violence, etc.) and the source of the information for each incident
- Fragile Families used GVA data to code how many DGV incidents occurred at a specific number of days before the child took their survey (7d, 14d, 30d, 60d, 90d, etc.) and at a certain distance from the child's home and school (100m, 200m, 500m, 1000m, etc.)

Data Transformation

- Using Stata, I cleaned, transformed, and created variables—all to prep the data for analysis
- I cleaned and transformed: 4 school connectedness variables to create a scale; 14 control variables (race, income, etc.) and created new variables based on those; 65 moderating variables (mental health, collective efficacy, etc.) and created new variables and scales; and 36 DGV variables and created new variables
- Performed descriptive statistics on all variables

Next Steps

- We discontinued the project, but our next steps would have been to run models with our variables (IV, DV, control variables, and moderating variables), to write about our results and conclusions, and to submit to the journal for publishing

After the 300 Hours

- I had the opportunity to truly familiarize myself with the literature on community violence and neighborhood characteristics, which is something I can take with me into my education policy career
- Even though we were not able to get tangible results, I learned so much about working with data
- This AFE repeatedly showed me the importance of evidence-based policymaking and how research should guide policy