An exploration into the impact of exposure to community violence and hope on children's perceptions of well-being: a South African perspective

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Abstract

The study aims to explore the relationship between exposure to community violence, hope, and well-being. More specifically, the study aims to ascertain whether hope is a stronger predictor of well-being than exposure to violence. Stratified random sampling was used to select a sample of 566 adolescents aged 14–17 years, from both high violence and low violence areas in Cape Town, South Africa. A questionnaire consisting of Snyder's *Children's Hope Scale*, the *Recent Exposure to Violence Scale* and the *KIDSCREEN-52* was used. Data analysis techniques included descriptive statistics, correlations, and multiple regression. A positive, significant relationship was found between children's hope and their well-being. Although exposure to community violence was found to be significantly correlated with well-being, the relationship was negligible. While exposure to community violence and hope were found to be significant predictors of well-being, hope emerged as a stronger predictor of child well-being than exposure to community violence.

1 Exposure to Violence and Well-Being

South Africa's socio-political history has created a society characterised by political struggles and various forms of violence. While the advent of democracy in 1994 led to a decrease in politically motivated violence, other forms of violence such as interpersonal, domestic and community violence are still endemic in post Apartheid South Africa. Of great concern is the impact that these forms of violence are having on the children and youth of South Africa who are exposed to violence on a daily basis (Isaacs et al. 2011). Exposure to violence, in any of its various manifestations, has shown to be one of the most damaging experiences a child can endure (Buckner et al. 2004; Isaacs 2010), with substantial evidence indicating a range of negative psychosocial outcomes (Muller et al. 2000; Henrich et al. 2004; Raviv et al. 1999; Schwartz and Proctor 2000). Community violence, in particular, has been identified in local and international research as critically impacting on child and adolescent well-being.

Community violence, defined by McCart et al. (2007 p. 434) as "*deliberate acts intended to cause physical harm against a person in the community*,", also includes gang violence, violence in the home, school and other public spaces. In this research study,

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