

## ABSTRACT

Carr, Jamal Lydell. *Assessing Attitudes Towards Violence Among African American Male Youth: The Influence of Ecological Factors*. (Under the direction of Dr. Craig Brookins.)

Over the last few decades the issue of youth violence has continued to be a major concern in the United States. Due to the prevalence of violence in communities, schools, and homes, more emphasis has been placed on building youth competencies in conflict resolution and anger management. One of the major problems facing violence prevention program developers is determining whether programs should target youth or youth environments. A common attitude held by some individuals is that youth are the problem. As a result many programs target youth and underestimate the influence of the environment on their attitudes towards violence. In order to develop appropriate violence prevention programs, it is essential to understand the ecological context in which violent attitudes are fostered. The present study examined youths' attitudes towards violence within an ecological context in a sample of 151 African American adolescent males in North Carolina afterschool programs. Participants completed a 62-item survey that was comprised of the Neighborhood Characteristics Questionnaire, the Authoritative Parenting Index, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale. It was hypothesized that neighborhood characteristics, parenting styles, and self-esteem would significantly correlate with youths' attitudes towards violence. Significant correlations were found between neighborhood disorder, parental responsiveness and demandingness, and youths' attitudes towards violence. Findings are discussed as they relate to current literature on youth violence along with the limitations and implications for this study.

ASSESSING ATTITUDES TOWARDS VIOLENCE AMONG  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE YOUTH:  
THE INFLUENCE OF ECOLOGICAL FACTORS

by  
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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Jamal Lydell Carr is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald L. Carr and the husband of Malissa Bailey Carr. He was born and raised in Buffalo, NY with a desire to excel in school. After graduating from Canisius High School, Mr. Carr was accepted to Central State University (Ohio). During his matriculation through college he had a desire to major in Psychology and in 1998 graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Psychology. Mr. Carr has continued his education by entering graduate school at North Carolina State University and earning a Master's of Science degree in Psychology. Mr. Carr's future plans include continuing his education towards a Ph.D. and using his knowledge and skills to help those that are in need.

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## **Introduction**

The United States is one of the most economically advantaged countries in the world. Its population has access to an abundance of resources unlike any other country. It continues to be a major leader in the areas of education, health care, and technological advances. However, it is also a world leader in crime and violence. Although interpersonal violence is found in all nations worldwide, it is prevalent in the United States particularly among youth. Although statistics on the incidence of violent crime trends have declined in the U.S. from 1994 to 1998, it remains a crucial issue that warrants attention (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Table 1).

Interpersonal violence continues to be a national phenomenon that impacts many groups across diverse settings. It has been described as a significant problem in poor inner cities and among minority youth (Cooley, Turner & Beidel, 1995; Bell & Jenkins, 1993). A study by Hausman, Spivak, & Prothrow-Stith (1994) found the experience of violence to be high among all adolescents, however, African American youth reported higher levels of witnessing interpersonal violence and being threatened. This suggests that African Americans are more prone to be victims of, and have higher exposure to violence than other ethnic groups. Other researchers have found that youths' exposure to violence increases their propensity of using violence to resolve conflicts (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Neidig, 1995). It is this cycling effect of violence among youth that is of major concern.

Over the years, several violence prevention initiatives have been developed to help youth negotiate conflicts. Some of these initiatives include conflict resolution, peer mediation, rites of passage, and psychotherapeutic interventions. Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are designed to teach youth alternative, nonviolent skills of problem solving and conflict resolution. Rites of passage programs help youth to develop positive identities and values

through mentoring with appropriate adult role models. The underlying theory for this approach is that the transition from childhood to adulthood represents an opportunity for positive change that often is neglected or corrupted. Psychotherapeutic approaches consist of psychotherapy, casework, and professional counseling. Many of these initiatives have achieved some level of success in changing youths' violent behaviors, but were found to be less successful when applied to other groups and contexts.

Given the diversity of populations that experience interpersonal violence it is important to develop initiatives that can be used across various groups and settings. Many violence prevention initiatives could be subsumed under more holistic interventions that focus on second order change rather than just treating the "symptoms" of youth violence. Second order change strategies focus on change within structures to transform them into a completely different entity. Violence prevention programs that use an ecological framework for the examination of youth violence realize that it is a problem influenced by a host of factors, and use structured and disciplined techniques to promote healthy environments and pro-social behaviors. Promotion of this type of change will not only help researchers better understand youth violence, but a host of other risk factors that are related to it. This present study examines attitudes of violence within an ecological context in a sample of African American adolescent males. By examining youth violence within an ecological context, researchers will be able to achieve a greater understanding in the way violent attitudes are cultivated and provide recommendations for interventions that promote pro-social behaviors.

### **Literature Review**

History has shown the propensity of man to perpetrate acts of violence against another (Scher & Stevens, 1987; Staub, 1996). In many instances, these acts of violence were used to

protect one's family and possessions, to vent frustration, to show dominance, or to seek revenge. The use of violence was a common way to handle conflicts. The current problem is that far too many young adolescents continue to use violence to resolve conflicts that they have with others.

The encouragement to use violence, particularly among males, emerges from a complex socialization process that begins at an early age where boys are taught how to be aggressive. Initially, it may start as boys wrestling with each other. As boys mature they are instructed by older males how to fight or box. They are taught how to stare at their opponent to invoke a fear response, get into a fighter's stance, and how to ball up their fists and use them when necessary. Many young males and even young females have been successfully socialized to use their fists or other objects as weapons. What is discouraging is the number of adolescents that are not taught how to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner. The socialization process of young males towards violence continues by the reinforced belief that crying is for girls and that men should hold all emotional reactions inside so as not to portray weakness. The dread of being called a "sissy" or "soft" and the need to avoid such labeling further induces youth to use violence (Scher & Stevens, 1987).

The glamorization of violence is a common occurrence in the United States. Youth are constantly bombarded with pictures of violence in music, sports, video games and movies. The message that is being portrayed is that violence is a normal part of everyday life and that it is an acceptable way to handle problems or conflicts. Furthermore, many youth do not have the necessary pro-social skills to deal with conflicts in an appropriate manner. Developing and mastering conflict resolution skills are supposed to be an important milestone that adolescents achieve during their maturation to adulthood (Durant, Pendergrast & Cadenhead, 1994). Instead, the opposite is true and as a result, many adolescent teenagers get caught up in this vicious cycle

of violence (Widom, 1989).

High rates of violent crime can have serious effects on a community. It produces fear in community members that their lives are in danger. Furthermore, this danger is manifested in muggings, drive-by shootings, drug trafficking, and gang warfare. Even some schools are considered danger zones due to the eruption of school shootings and stabbings. Initially, youth violence was considered a problem within poor inner city neighborhoods, but now it is also a problem in rural and suburban areas (Osgood & Chambers, 2000). This fear of violence is a result of both internal and external influences within our society. Internal influences stem from the actual violence that people see take place day to day in various contexts (Cooley, Turner, & Beidel, 1995). This victimization includes activities such as school violence, domestic violence, or exposure to community violence. External influences include the media's portrayal of violence and society's association of various acts of violence with the "underclass" (Garrett, 1995). By associating violence with the "underclass", many minority youth are viewed as dangerous by mainstream society.

Violence within communities can become so debilitating that those families and businesses with the necessary resources and ability to move away do so. Without businesses to provide jobs and recycle money back into the community many inner city areas become economically deprived and increasingly reliant on government funds and resources. This then may create a social isolation of the poor that increases the poverty rate and further deteriorates a community (Schubiner, Scott & Tzelepis, 1993).

A critical point that needs to be made is that poverty does not directly cause young adolescents to become violent, but it creates an environment in which violence and other delinquent behaviors are fostered and tolerated. In many instances poverty is coupled with

economic inequality and social exclusion of minority groups. According to Kramer (1998) this can inhibit and break positive social supports networks that affect young people within a community.

Positive social support networks are those mechanisms that occur naturally when people live together. Generally, these social networks are established and recognized by the community members as a system of support and guidance. They are often found in larger communities where residents have lived together for a considerable amount of time. Kramer emphasizes that these support networks also provide informal social controls that allow adults to monitor, supervise, impose sanctions, and shame that help to keep young people in line. These controls are readily supported by older community members and help young people develop values that will aid them in adulthood. When social support networks breakdown, informal social controls diminish within the community, and violence and other delinquent behaviors are possible repercussions.

### **Understanding Youth Violence**

According to Bureau of Justice Statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice (Table 1) violent crime trends have declined from 1994-1998. Violent crime in this context includes murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. The statistics also show a decline in violent crime trends by the sex (Table 2) and race (Table 3) of the victim, and indicates declines for both African-Americans and Whites. However, in looking at violent crime trends by the race of victim there should be a cause of concern. In the United States, African-Americans make up between 12 to 15 percent of the population. Yet, the rates of violent crimes are higher for African Americans than whites in each year from 1994-1998. This raises the question, why rates of violent crimes are higher for African Americans than other ethnic groups.

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**Table 1.**  
**Bureau of Justice Statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice**

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Violent Crime Trends per 1000 population age 12 and over.

| Year | Totals | Murder | Rape | Robbery | Aggravated<br>Assault | Simple<br>Assault |
|------|--------|--------|------|---------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1994 | 51.2   | 0.1    | 1.4  | 6.3     | 11.9                  | 31.5              |
| 1995 | 46.1   | 0.1    | 1.2  | 5.4     | 9.5                   | 29.9              |
| 1996 | 41.6   | 0.1    | 0.9  | 5.2     | 8.8                   | 26.6              |
| 1997 | 38.8   | 0.1    | 0.9  | 4.3     | 8.6                   | 24.9              |
| 1998 | 36.0   | 0.1    | 0.9  | 4.0     | 7.5                   | 23.5              |

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**Table 2.**  
**Bureau of Justice Statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice**

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Violent Crime Trends per 1000 population by sex of victim

| Year | Totals | Male | Female |
|------|--------|------|--------|
| 1994 | 51.8   | 61.1 | 43.0   |
| 1995 | 46.6   | 55.7 | 38.1   |
| 1996 | 42.0   | 49.9 | 34.6   |
| 1997 | 39.2   | 45.8 | 33.0   |
| 1998 | 36.6   | 43.1 | 30.4   |

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**Table 3.**  
**Bureau of Justice Statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice**

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Violent Crime Trends per 1000 population by race of victim

| Year | White | Black |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1994 | 17.1  | 33.5  |
| 1995 | 13.5  | 26.4  |
| 1996 | 13.3  | 26.3  |
| 1997 | 12.9  | 20.7  |
| 1998 | 11.6  | 19.2  |

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Frequent violent behaviors among adolescent youth have been found to be associated with previous exposure to violence, personal victimization, depression, and hopelessness (Durant, Treiber, Goodman and Woods, 1996). Pervasive exposure to violence can lead youth to disregard the use of non-violent tactics when confronted with a conflict. Attitudes towards the use of aggression as being necessary to resolve conflicts may actually cause youth to attend to more hostile aspects of their social cues in their environment, and as a result, discouraging youth from learning skills that are necessary for peaceful conflict resolution (Vernberg, Jacobs, & Hershberger, 1999). Youth learn rather quickly what works and what doesn't work in dealing with conflicts. Furthermore, previous victimization makes it much more difficult for youth to use and learn positive conflict resolution skills that may make them appear weak within their social surroundings (Lynch and Cicchetti, 1998). The use of violence makes it easier for them to fit in, particularly, when violence is the norm. The examination of factors at the cultural, community, family, and individual are an important step towards understanding interpersonal violence among

youth, particularly among African American males.

Traditionally, youth violence has been viewed from an individualistic mental health model that focuses on deviancy. From this view, violent behavior was seen as a disease that needed "treatment". In order to treat the "disease," the symptoms had to be identified and then alleviated. This individualistic view has led to a negative labeling of youth overall. However, many African American male youth have received the brunt of this negative labeling leading to several myths. Some myths surrounding African American males include the belief that they are more prone to violence than other groups and have moral deficiencies. These beliefs have led to an increase in stiff judicial penalties and laws that were developed in hopes of curbing violent crime trends. Violence reduction has now become the focus of criminal justice and law enforcement agencies (Hausman, Spivak, & Prothrow-Stith, 1994). The growing concern now is the increasing incarceration of African American youth.

Since the mid 80's many professionals from different areas and disciplines have expanded this "disease" model to be broader in its scope where the "host," "agent," and "environment" are interdependent elements of the violence problem (Kaljee, Stanton, Ricardo, & Whitehead, 1995). This public health model has offered a broader perspective on interpersonal youth violence by adhering to a social and cultural deviancy model. The trouble is that it is extremely deterministic in that it neither allows for variation between individuals nor for changes within individuals over time, or from situation to situation (Kaljee, Stanton, Ricardo, and Whitehead, 1995). This also creates a picture of violence among African American males as a disease that stems from a broad generalization of the problems in low-income areas. As a result most of the programs aimed at decreasing violence are more reactive than preventive. Some of the reactive measures include crime bills, which increase the severity of penalties for violent

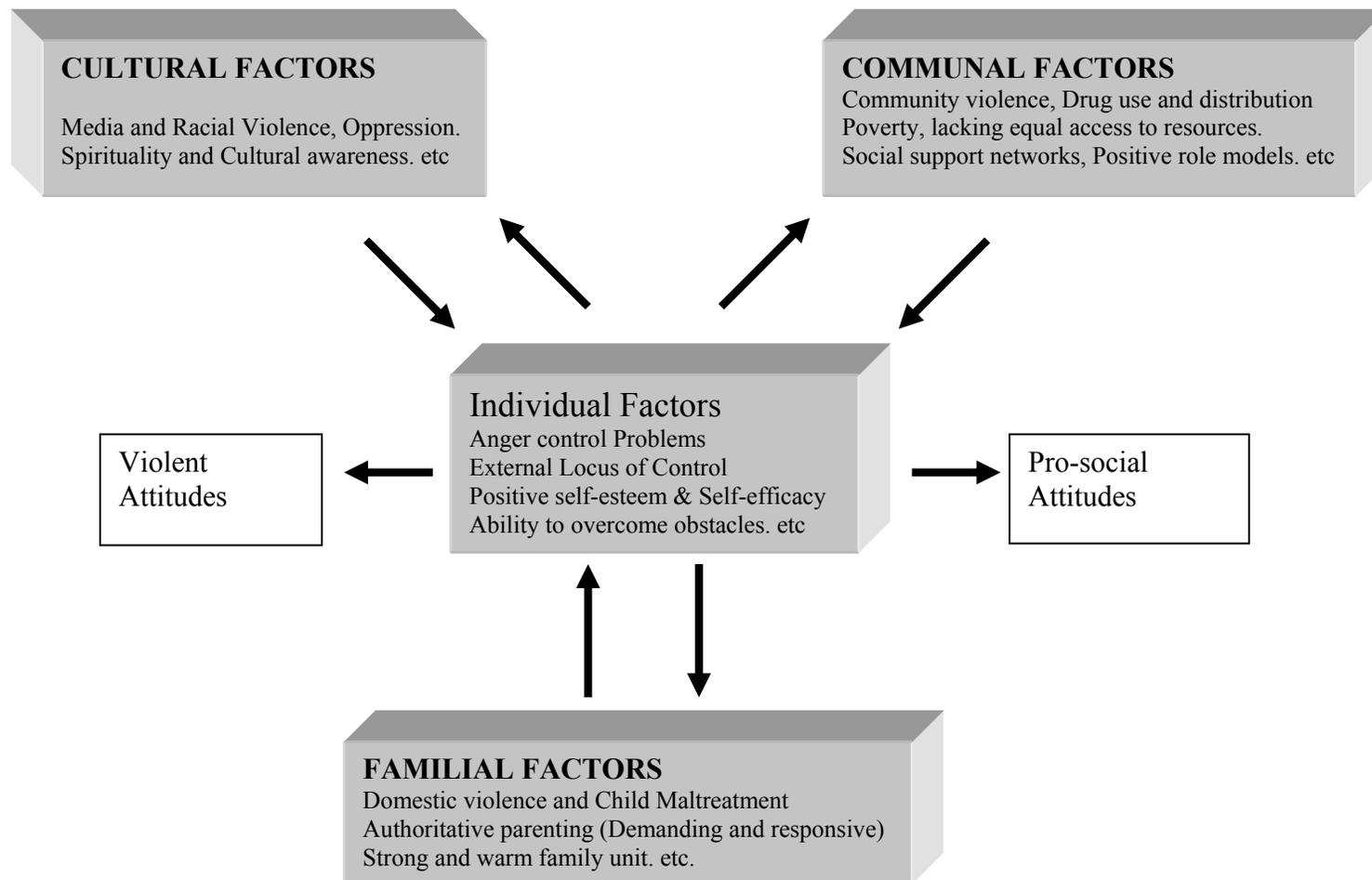
crimes, larger police forces, and the expansion of prisons.

In understanding the problem of youth violence, it is important to specify the various parameters and the dimensions of the problem (Corvo, 1997). Wolfe, Wekerle, and Scott (1997) identified the dimensions of youth violence as a cumulative effect of cultural, communal, familial, and personal risk factors. From this perspective, interpersonal violence is more than just a problem of troubled youth; it's a shared problem of cultures, communities, families, and people. Furthermore, the study of these dimensions allows researchers to identify the presence or absence of factors that contribute to healthy adolescent development.

Each dimension is seen as existing on a continuum. On each continuum there are two extremes or valences. One extreme includes factors that put youth at an increased risk for violent behavior. The other extreme contains those protective factors that promote positive youth development. The idea is that although risk factors may exist on certain levels, developing or enhancing protective factors within that level or on the other levels may buffer the effects of those risk factors. The critical piece is determining what the most prevalent risk factors are and understanding how protective factors may buffer the effects of those risk factors.

### **Ecological Risk Factors**

In Figure 1, there is a modified version of Wolfe, Wekerle, and Scott's (1997) ecological model of development. This model takes into consideration the ecological factors that contribute to youth violent attitudes or healthy pro-social attitudes. It is a transactional model that proposes that various factors within an ecological context coupled with individual characteristics may influence youth attitudes.



**Figure 1.**

**Ecological Model of Development**  
**Modified Model from Wolfe, Wekerle, and Scott, 1997**

### Cultural Level Risk Factors

According to Staub (1996) when there exists a large-scale epidemic of violence in a society, it is imperative to study the societal and cultural conditions. At the cultural level there exists factors that are associated with and contribute to an individuals' attitudes towards violence. Some of these factors include prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion from participation in various societal processes that can lead to a group demanding change, and if those demands do not produce the desired outcomes it can lead to violent uprisings. Additionally, when those in power respond to uprisings with violence it can in turn lead to additional discrimination and exclusion. Continued discrimination and exclusion in turn can weaken community support networks and overall stability. Furthermore, Staub states that cultural and social institutions of the larger society, to the extent they maintain discriminatory practices, are important contributors to the relationship between poverty and youth violence.

It is important to note that youth are not objects that develop in a vacuum. As each individual develops he or she is socialized so as to fit within the larger society. The socialization process includes learning what is acceptable and not acceptable. However, problems can arise when there are conflicting messages. In the case with interpersonal violence among youth there is the implicit knowledge that violence is not appropriate, but major forms of entertainment (movies, video games, music) are heavily saturated with violent images. One message that youth receive is that violence is not appropriate for dealing with conflicts. Another message that youth receive is that violence is entertaining, fun, and comes with respect. Although both messages are presented the latter seems to be more appealing to youth as it is represented in various forms of entertainment including music, movies, and sports. This problem is further enhanced if the message to use violence is reinforced on the different dimensions or levels. Research has started

to address this issue of interpersonal violence among youth by examining the different contexts in which violent attitudes are fostered.

The history of the United States is replete with violence. The history includes the over taking of Native Americans, the enslavement of African peoples, and other inhumane atrocities. This devaluing and oppression of people by a dominant group is in itself violence. Although laws for civil rights have increased and racial disparities are declining there still exist substantial structural inequalities between racial groups (Staub, 1996). African-Americans and other ethnic groups are still dealing with different manifestations of racism. The media and popular culture are two primary areas in which stereotypes of African-American males as being prone to violence still abound.

The media's constant negative depiction of inner city life is one factor that receives scarce attention. The media portrays African American youth as being lazy, intellectually inferior, and violent (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). The confinement of violence to low-income urban areas, through the media, continues to feed prejudices that already exist against African-American males. It also adds to the sense of hopelessness that some African-American males feel. Although baggy pants and the hat tilted to the side is a fashion style for many African-American males, it does come with a stereotype that an individual is involved with a gang or some type of criminal behavior. This negative labeling and stereotyping of youth may lead to further violence (Kaljee, Stanton, Ricardo & Whitehead, 1995). The media's influence on the perceptions of violence in a community and negative depictions of inner city life adds to the frustration that many African Americans feel. Regardless of socio-economic status, many people continue to look at African-American males in a fearful and disapproving manner.

Racism is also evident in the association of the so-called "underclass" with violence.

This term carries the notion of poor minority urban neighborhoods characterized by female-headed households, drugs, and gang violence. This perspective views violence as just another trait of the underclass. The problem with the portrait of an underclass of violent African American males is that its primary source of information is based upon the number of African-American males arrested and imprisoned for violent crime. This in and of itself may be the product of racial discrimination. For example, if police are more likely to arrest African American males for violent crime than white males, and racial bias is a factor in the assignment of counsel, the denial of bail, and who is likely to be convicted and imprisoned, then the picture of violent African American males may reflect official stereotypical attitudes and behaviors rather than racial differences (Stark, 1994).

In summary, the primary risk factors for interpersonal violence at the cultural level included the acceptance of violence in major spheres of entertainment, the media's confinement of interpersonal violence to only low income urban areas, and the ensuing racial stereotypes that are generated from the media's influence. The cultural issues that have been raised are difficult to deal with since they are imbedded deep in the culture of modern society. The major point is to recognize what the issues are at this level and to understand how they are related to violent behaviors. Furthermore, it is imperative to look at the scope of interpersonal youth violence within the context of a racial society in order to understand how racist behaviors and ideologies may lead to misrepresented notions of non-white groups when it comes to violence and other delinquent behaviors. Articles reviewed that describe the cultural factors that influence violent attitudes and behaviors can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4.**  
**Literature Review of Cultural Factors**

| Author                   | Title   | Year | Method              | Results   |
|--------------------------|---|------|---------------------|---|
| Scher, M.,<br>Stevens, M | Men and Violence  | 1987 | Explorative Summary | Social mores, familial experiences, and individual choices are all contributing factors in men's propensity towards violence. |
| Stark, E.                | Black Violence: Racism and the Construction of Reality  | 1994 | Explorative Summary | Examined how racial stereotypes impact African American adolescent male's propensity toward violence.                         |
| Webber, J.               | Comprehending Youth Violence. A Practicable Perspective | 1997 | Explorative Summary | Examined the transactional-ecological model for comprehending youth violence.   |

### Community Level Risk Factors

It has been well documented that the prevalence of violence in the United States is most significant in poor inner city communities, represented by minority populations (Schubiner, Scott & Tzelepis, 1993; Osgood, 1995). It's important to note that the reviewed literature on community risk factors did not use poverty as a causal factor for adolescent behaviors towards violence. Instead, poverty was consistently seen as a condition in the environment in which violence and other delinquent behaviors were fostered and often tolerated. According to Dahlberg (1998) violence has to do more with dimensions of poverty rather than the status of poverty. Some dimensions of poverty include community violence, high rates of drug abuse (Garrett, 1995), low community participation (Dahlberg, 1998), and easy access to firearms (Durant, Getts, Cadenhead & Woods, 1995; Schubiner, Scott, & Tzelepis, 1993).

Research has shown that a significant relationship exists between exposure to community violence and increases in aggressive behavior in adolescent youth (Cooley, Turner, & Beidel,

1995; Bell & Jenkins, 1993). Exposure to community violence occurs through various modalities that include the media, observation, hearsay, and direct contact either as perpetrator or victim (Schubiner, Scott & Tzelepis, 1993). Furthermore, the degree to which adolescents are exposed to violence in their homes, neighborhoods, and schools and the extent to which they have been victims of violence are associated with their own use of violence (Durant, Pendergrast, and Cadenhead, 1994). There is extensive evidence that many adolescents are exposed to high levels of violence and that this exposure is having a significant effect on the increasing violent trends found among this age group. According to Durant, Getts, Cadenhead, & Woods (1995) this problem is also found among the weapon carrying behaviors of young children who use violence to resolve conflicts. In their study, 225 African-American adolescents living in or around nine HUD Public housing communities in Augusta, Georgia completed a survey that examined the social and psychological factors associated with the frequency of weapon carrying behaviors. They found weapon carrying to be significantly associated with previous exposure to violence and victimization, higher depression, more severe corporal punishment, older age, family conflict, and low purpose in life.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning theory offers some insight on aggression. Bandura (1973) contends that people learn when to use aggression, how to use aggression, and against whom to use aggression. His theory states that learning takes two major forms, which are modeling and imitation. For the most part, the primary venue where many children observe and learn aggression are the family, the subculture, and the media which are all important components of any community. People that use violence tend to model what they have been exposed to in their life. As mentioned previously there is a link between exposure to violence and an individual's use of violence.

Another community factor that is related to increased violent behaviors is the prevalence of drug use and abuse in a community. In many low-income urban areas drug use and distribution are prevalent. This problem can be related to violent behaviors in several ways. According to Goldstein's (1985) tripartite model, violence can be a result of (a) psychopharmacological effects, which is the substances physiological impact on behavior, (b) economic effects that pertains to the violence that is committed to obtain the money to buy the drugs, and (c) systemic effects, which are the various relationships that arise out of the distribution of drugs. These interrelationships consist of the boss in control of the drug operation, the actual drug dealers, and the drug addicts.

Although Goldstein's Tripartite Model describes violence within a drug trafficking framework, a person does not need to be directly involved in that system in order to be affected by this problem. The existence of a community drug problem puts the whole community at risk. This model poses a causal relationship between the drug culture and violence. However, it is quite possible, that important non-causal relationships exist between these behaviors (Osgood, 1995). That may prove to be an interesting topic for future studies.

In summary the literature reviewed examined how living in a poor urban area, being exposed to violence within the community, and the prevalence of drug use and abuse are related to violent behaviors in adolescent youth. Youth living in poor urban areas are presented with a host of issues that are not characteristic of other living areas. These factors put them at an increased risk either as a perpetrator or victim of violence. One of the critical issues discussed earlier is the previous exposure to violence as a key predictor of violence in adolescent youth. This can be explained by using Albert Bandura's theory of aggression. The key component of his theory is that behaviors can be imitated. Finally, the prevalence of drugs in a community is also

linked with violent behaviors. By examining these issues one would be able to come to a greater understanding of how communal factors are linked to interpersonal youth violence. A summary of reviewed articles related to communal risk factors is found in Table 5.

**Table 5.**  
**Literature Review of Community Factors**

| Author  | Title   | Year | Method   | Results  |
|---|---|------|--|--|
| Bell, C.C., & Jenkins, E.J.                           | Community Violence and Children on Chicago's South Side   | 1993 | Exploratory Survey Design  | 536 Youth Children that completed the survey 26% reported that they've seen someone shot and 30% saw someone stabbed.  |
| Durant, R.H., Pendergrast, R.A., Cadenhead, C         | Exposure to violence and victimization and fighting behavior by Urban black Adolescents         | 1994 | Cross sectional survey design<br>225 youth between ages 11-19.             | Frequency of fighting was significantly correlated to exposure to violence   |
| Durant, R.H., Treiber, F., Goodman, E., & Woods, E.R. | Intentions to use Violence among young Adolescents  | 1996 | Pre-test measurement<br>225 youth between ages 11-19                       | -African American students scored higher on Hypothetical solutions scale<br>-hypothetical solution scale highly correlated to exposure to violence             |
| Hausman, A.J., Spivak, H., & Prothrow-Stith, D.       | Adolescents' knowledge and attitudes about and experience with violence                         | 1994 | Random digit telephone survey.<br>400 teens in Boston.                     | Attitude scores indicate that adolescents believe that fighting can be avoided, but they lack knowledge of behavioral options.                                 |
| Langhinrichson-Rohling, J., & Neidig, P               | Violent Backgrounds of Economically Disadvantaged Youth: Risk Factors for Perpetrating Violence | 1995 | Survey Study<br>474 job corp participants. Mean age of participants was 18 | This group reported high rates of witnessing, experiencing, and perpetrating any act of physical aggression on parents, siblings, friends, or adult strangers. |
| Schubiner, H., Scott, R., & Tzelepis, A.              | Exposure to Violence Among Inner-City Youth   | 1993 | Survey study<br>246 African American adolescents.                          | 44% reported they could access a gun within one day. 42% have seen someone shot or knifed. 22% saw someone killed.   |
| Warner, B.S., & Weist, M.D.                           | Urban Youth as Witnesses to Violence: Beginning Assessment and treatment efforts                | 1996 | Literature Summary   | In reaction to witnessing violence, youth may present symptoms of PTSD Separation anxiety, and Aggressive behaviors.   |

### Family Level Risk Factors

Family factors associated with interpersonal violence among youth include perceived parental attitudes towards violence, parenting style, domestic violence, and child abuse. The family environment is also important in understanding why some youth seem to be at greater risk for patterns of violent behaviors (Dahlberg, 1998).

Since children model those they are the closest to it would seem reasonable to look at the family as the major medium by which violent behaviors and attitudes are derived. Perceived parental attitudes toward violence may be an important factor in youth developing attitudes towards violence. This is evident by some parents telling their children to hit back if someone hits them. This vengeful attitude has carried over for generations in many African-American families. The fear was that if a child didn't fight back then he or she would continue to be picked on by bullies. This causes several problems in that it teaches youth to use violence when faced with a conflict. Utilizing Bandura's Social Learning theory, if the parents or legal guardian believe that violence is an acceptable way to deal with problems then children tend to be more inclined to use those types of behaviors in resolving conflicts. This issue can be further enhanced by the influence of cultural and community norms. However, if the family promotes and teaches pro-social conflict resolution skills, then the child may be more apt to agree with nonviolent tactics regardless of the prevalent cultural or community beliefs (Orpinas, Murray & Kelder, 1999).

Parenting style is also seen as being influential in the development of the child. However, there hasn't been a great deal of research looking at the role of parents in preventing adolescent involvement in violent interactions. A study by Jackson and Foshee (1998) examined parental demandingness and parental responsiveness on child development. In their study parental

demandingness was defined as parental control of children's behavior. This was characterized as parent's setting and enforcing rules, actively monitoring the child's activities, and maintaining structure and regimen in a child's daily life. Parental responsiveness was defined as parental involvement in attending to the child's emotional and developmental needs. This is characterized as parents being affectionate, supportive, and comforting. Parenting styles that are considered demanding and responsive help to foster competence and positive child development (Jackson, Henrikson & Foshee, 1998). Furthermore, when parental monitoring of adolescent behavior is legitimized, adolescents are more likely to accept parental monitoring and rules that set limits on their behavior and are less susceptible to peer influence (Jackson & Foshee, 1998). The opposite tends to be true for those parents who are not demanding and do not monitor where their children go (Kramer, 2000). If the skills for peaceful conflict resolution are not taught and reinforced in the family then it is likely that a child will display aggressive behaviors towards others when faced with a conflict.

Another serious factor is spousal or domestic violence. There is evidence that suggests that child witnesses of women being battered are at a high risk for a variety of externalizing behaviors that include increased aggression at home, school, and the community (Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Neidig, 1995). Certainly, more children have witnessed marital violence than parents and researchers realize. Battered mothers may believe that the child was unaware of the marital violence that was taking place, but many children have either seen or are aware of the abuse. This problem has a dual effect. For young girls who experience violence between parents, there is a greater chance they will become victims of domestic violence similar to that experienced by their mother. Males, on the other hand, are more likely to use violence as a possible solution when they have similar problems with their significant other (Langhinrichsen-

Rohling & Neidig, 1995).

Child abuse has become a very popular topic in research dealing with violence. Langhinrichsen-Rohling and Neidig (1995) reported a study in which the severity of adolescent aggression towards parents was found to be directly related to the abuse they experienced. Furthermore, a study by Widom (1998) found that even mild to moderate physical punishment from parents toward their children increases the likelihood of the child engaging in all types and forms of aggression as they get older (Widom, 1998).

Family stability plays a critical role in the development of youth, particularly when forces at the cultural and community level are influencing youth and their behaviors. The family may serve as a buffer for youth who face different types of pressure from their social environments. Family level factors can be considered the most critical since the influence of the culture and community is either defused or reinforced at this level (Wolfe, Wekerle and Scott, 1997).

Based upon the readings the major familial factors associated with youth attitudes towards violence included perceived parental attitudes towards violence, parenting style, domestic violence and child abuse. The factors at this level are expected to have a more significant impact since this is the level where cultural and communal factors are either reinforced or defused. Perceived parental attitudes toward violence is important in that attitudes and behaviors displayed by parents will more than likely be displayed by their children as well. Research on parenting styles also shows that lack of parental demandingness and responsiveness is associated with the youth's lack of skills in resolving conflicts in a positive manner. Both domestic violence and child abuse expose children to violence either as a bystander or a victim. Table 6 consists of literature that pertains to the influence of the family risk factors on violent attitudes and behaviors.

**Table 6.**  
**Literature Review of Family Factors**

| Author  | Title  | Year | Method   | Results  |
|---|--|------|--|--|
| Jackson, C., & Foshee, V.A.                               | Violence related behaviors of adolescents: Relations with responsive and demanding parenting                       | 1998 | Test –retest survey design.<br><br>2,434 9 <sup>th</sup> and 10 <sup>th</sup> grade adolescents. | The higher the perceived responsiveness and demandingness of parents, the lower the likelihood that adolescents hit peers, beat up peers, threatened peers, or carried a weapon to school. |
| Kaljee, L.M., Stanton, B., Ricardo, I., & Whitehead, T.L. | Urban African American Adolescents and their parents: Perceptions of Violence within and against their communities | 1995 | Ethnographic and survey research.  | -Parents did not feel an attachment to their violent neighborhoods.<br>-African American adolescents view fighting back as a means to decrease their vulnerability to acts of violence.    |
| Orpinas, P., Murray, N., & Kelder, S.                     | Parental Influences on Students' Aggressive Behaviors and Weapon Carrying  | 1999 | Cross Sectional Survey<br><br>8,865 6-8 <sup>th</sup> graders in an urban area.                  | A significant inverse relationship between relationship with parents, and parental monitoring on Mean aggression score.  |
| Widom, C  | The Cycle of Violence  | 1989 | Observational Cohort Design.   | Abused and neglected children have a higher likelihood of arrests for delinquency, adult criminality, and violent crime  |

### Individual Risk Factors

The bulk of research in the area of interpersonal violence among youth has examined risk factors at the individual level. These risk factors include social-problem solving deficiencies, depression, low-self esteem, hopelessness, and frustration. The lack of skills to resolve conflicts in an appropriate manner is considered to be a major precursor to violent behavior (Dahlberg, 1998). A study by Durant, Getts, Cadenhead & Woods (1995) found adolescent weapon carrying to be associated with depression and low self-esteem. Garrett (1995) described frustration and

loss of hope as being a major reason why some African-American males resort to violence. Furthermore, Garrett considered violent behaviors among African American males to be an expression of frustration over prejudice and the bleak view of the future. The effects of these factors can be devastating. In many instances when individuals are faced with various life stressors and do not have the means to resolve the conflict it may often lead to an act of violence against oneself or others. For youth this is a particularly important issue.

Although there are a host of other individual level risk factors these were the common factors found in the reviewed literature. It is likely that many of these factors have a strong correlation with each other. However, the influence of each factor separately should not be underestimated. A summary of the literature examined on individual risk factors can be found in Table 7.

**Table 7.**  
**Literature Review of Individual Factors**

| Author   | Title   | Year | Method   | Results  |
|--|---|------|--|--|
| Dahlberg, L.L.   | Youth Violence in the United States: Major Trends, Risk Factors, and Prevention Approaches                            | 1998 | Literature summary   | Causes of youth violence were linked to history of early aggression, beliefs supportive of violence, attributional biases, and social cognitive deficits.    |
| Durant, R.H, Getts, A.G., Cadenhead, C., & Woods, E.R. | The Association between weapon carrying and the use of violence among adolescents living in or around public housing. | 1995 | Cross sectional survey design<br>225 males.<br>Ages 11-19. | Weapon carrying behavior was associated with previous exposure to violence, depression, purpose in life and self appraised probability of being alive at 25. |
| Garrett, D.  | Violent behaviors among African American adolescents  | 1995 | Literature summary   | Violent behaviors were linked to an outgrowth of frustration. Association between joining a gang and a sense of identity.                                    |

## **Protective Factors**

According to Barbarin (1993) what is remarkable about all these findings is that many children living under these conditions are doing fairly well even by traditional standards of functioning. For a long time research in the social sciences has failed to look at the resiliency of many African American youth that come from such environments. It has really been within the last decade in which researchers began to do resiliency studies. An article by Jessor (as cited in Durant, Getts, Cadenhead, & Woods, 1995) exclaimed that resiliency is associated with a sense of hope and purpose despite facing negative odds. This construct of hope included having a strong religious faith, involvement in school and athletics, or having a family that is caring and supportive.

Even amongst the detrimental effects of violence found among African American males there is a sign of hope. As mentioned above the rates of violence in this country are declining, but more importantly, there are many African American children that are living or experiencing some of the previously stated risks and show no adverse psychological or developmental effects. This phenomenon that some researchers consider to be resiliency has received considerable attention in contemporary research arenas. It asks the question, what do these children have that other children, in similar situations, don't have?

Resiliency is defined as the ability to recover from or adjust to life stressors (Werner, 1984). It is important to note that resiliency does not equate with invulnerability. Rather, it suggests that even in the face of adversity there exist certain protective factors that aid the person in effectively coping with risk factors. The problem with the construct of resiliency lies in a lack of agreement among researchers concerning its conceptualization. Furthermore, there doesn't seem to be much information in the literature that shows how resiliency specifically relates to

protective factors. However, most of the literature agrees that there are three major protective factors that help to promote pro-social behaviors in children (Werner, 1992). They are: A) temperamental characteristics of the individual, B) having a strong, cohesive family unit, and C) access to external support systems within the community. Figure 1. illustrates how protective factors help to promote healthy pro-social attitudes. Given individual differences it is not necessary that all of the protective factors exist for any child, but the presence of one or more may have a significant impact in the development of the youth.

The first protective factor is the psychological strength of youth to effectively negotiate through conflicts. This psychological strength is often characterized by high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Turner, Norman, and Zunz (1995) defined self-esteem as a belief that one's ideal self-image and actual self-image does not conflict, and self-efficacy as the perception that one has the ability to perform specific tasks. Furthermore, they considered high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy to be the most important traits that resilient children possess. Children with a high level of self-esteem are characterized by a positive view of who they are and thus are less likely to do things that may damage that image. Likewise, children with high self-efficacy are more likely to take on different tasks and to succeed. Having both qualities may help children to have a positive outlook on themselves and their social environment. It also gives them the ability to deal with the various challenges of life as well (Werner, 1987). A study by Floyd (1996) discovered perseverance and optimism to be two key personality characteristics found among a group of African American high school seniors. All the students agreed that hard work pays off and had expressed optimism for their future endeavors. Finally, Werner (1984) found that there were four central characteristics that resilient children have that include:

- ◀ An active, evocative approach toward solving life's problems, enabling them to successfully negotiate an abundance of emotionally hazardous experiences.
- ◀ A tendency to perceive their experiences constructively, even if they caused pain or suffering.
- ◀ The ability, from infancy on, to gain other people's positive attention.
- ◀ Possessing a faith and having an optimistic view of life.

Other essential characteristics of resilient children include having the cognitive skills or intellectual capacity to communicate effectively those things that they are encountering in life. One characteristic is having a sense of humor and not becoming easily frustrated when things don't go as expected. Finally, having the ability to separate oneself from environments or people (at least psychologically if not physically) that are not positive influences (Turner, Norman & Zunz, 1995). Another characteristic that isn't frequently mentioned in the literature is children having hobbies that help them to cope despite being in a chaotic environment. These hobbies may include reading, writing, singing and sports that allow the child to develop gifts that ease the difficulties of life's challenges.

An additional protective factor found among resilient children includes having a family characterized by caring and support. The family unit has received increasing attention as a mechanism that may help aid in the protection of children from adverse circumstances. Despite the enhanced risks that many African American youth face, it has been found that many inner city families maintain high levels of functional competency and raise healthy children (Myers and Taylor, 1995). There are two specific ways (Direct and Indirect) in which the family can effect the development of the child. The direct influence includes the household composition and family structure. In an article by Hauser, Vieyra, Jacobson and Wertlieb (1985) they found that less crowded homes were associated with better outcomes for the children. In addition, higher

achieving lower class African American children were found to be living in homes that were not cluttered or crowded.

Parental attitudes are also found to directly effect the psychosocial development of the child. Parents of health social developing children are characterized as being loving, kind, having shared values, enforced rules and discipline (Hauser, Vieyra, Jacobson & Wertlieb, 1985). It was also found that delegating responsibility accompanied with strong family values to the child from the parents provided knowledge and work ethic necessary for academic achievement (Garmezy, 1991). Not only is this good for academic achievement, but may help to promote other pro-social behaviors as well.

Besides the direct influences of the family unit, there also exist indirect influences. These indirect influences are based upon the attributes of the family unit and how they can carry over to the child. For example, high self-esteem in children is linked with high emotional stability in mothers or other family members (Hauser, Vieyra, Jacobsen and Wertlieb, 1985). Furthermore, parents are also able to influence the child's social support network.

A growing number of studies are identifying some other key parental attributes that are characteristic of low-income African American families. They include family resourcefulness where the family is able to survive and maintain its cohesion in spite of current financial situations (Myers, & Taylor, 1995). Another powerful characteristic is family adaptability, which has been a focal point for African American families for years. Adaptability is seen as a major means of overcoming various obstacles that a family encounters.

Children find a great deal of emotional and social support outside the family as well. These external social supports comprise the third protective factor found among healthy social

developing children. They may include a significant adult such as a schoolteacher, coach, minister, and even extended family members. These are people they can look up to and who they consider to be positive role models (Werner, 1984). This social network provides the child with a sense of safety and stability and allows them to learn from a person who has life experience (Bowen & Chapman, 1996). Other social supports include organizations that the child can get involved in to help ameliorate the problems of a chaotic environment. These include little league sports teams, boys and girl clubs, after school programs, and the church youth group.

The literature on protective factors has identified three major protective factors that are characteristic of resilient children and families. As stated above these factors include the psychological disposition of youth to adequately deal with various life stressors and environmental risks, stable family unit characterized by warmth and supportiveness, and external support networks. Psychological characteristics of resilient children include high levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, perseverance, optimism, and a strong faith in oneself to succeed. Some of the literature used the term temperament to describe these types of characteristics. However, it poses several problems in that it has a biological connotation. Other sources used the concept of psychological strength to describe the same characteristics and it allows for a more socialistic perspective in that these characteristics can be developed through mentoring and training. The literature also discussed the important role of families in the lives of resilient children. Key family characteristics include stability in family relationships, supportiveness, warmth, and the ability of the family as a unit to deal with adverse conditions. Finally, external support systems have also been linked with resiliency in children. Children that have caring adults outside the family are more likely to succeed. These adults may include teachers, coaches, mentors, and even religious leaders. Each of these mechanisms offer youth an opportunity to develop and

display mature attitudes and behaviors in spite of the existence of risk factors. A summary of the reviewed literature on protective factors can be found in Table 8.

**Table 8.**  
**Literature Review of Protective Factors**

| Author                  | Title   | Year | Method  | Results  |
|-------------------------|---|------|---|--|
| Floyd, C                | Achieving Despite the Odds: A Study of resilience among a group of African American High School Seniors | 1997 | Cross sectional survey<br>20 High school students.  | Three protective mechanisms were identified.<br>1) Supportive, nurturing family.<br>2) Interactions with supportive adults.<br>3) Personality traits of perseverance & optimism                |
| Garnezy, N.             | Resiliency and Vulnerability to Adverse Developmental Outcomes Associated with Poverty                  | 1991 | Explorative Summary   | Identified modification of stressors by psychological disposition, family cohesion and warmth, and external support networks to be consistent protective factors in stressful life situations. |
| Myers, H.F & Taylor, S. | Family Contributions to Risk and Resilience in African American Children                                | 1995 | Cross sectional survey design<br>441 African American Families                                | Acquiring social support was found to be a significant moderator for parental and family risks.  |
| Werner, E.E.            | The Children of Kauai: Resiliency and Recovery in Adolescence and Adulthood.                            | 1992 | Longitudinal Study<br>103 children born in Kauai in 1955. Were followed at ages 1,2,10,18,32. | Participants were interviewed in their early 30's competence, determination, support of mate, and faith were shared characteristics of these individuals.                                      |
| Werner, E.E.            | Resilient Children  | 1984 | Explorative Summary   | Identified several factors in resiliency research including: Youth with High self-esteem fair better and support networks outside the family are just as important as those within the family. |

### **Literature Review Summary**

The literature reviewed suggests that an ecological analysis needs to be applied when examining youth violence. Conceptually, using an ecological framework helps to define the parameters around the issue of youth violence and helps to identify the major factors that are associated with it (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998). Factors associated with youth violence can be found at the cultural, communal, familial, and individual levels. At each level there exist specific risk factors that act to engage youth towards violence, or protective factors that promote pro-social skills and optimal development.

### **Research Questions**

It is clear from the literature that exposure to violence or being a victim of violence within a community or family is positively related with adolescent aggressive behaviors (Warner & Weist, 1996; Durant, Pendergrast & Cadenhead, 1994; Widom, 1989). Furthermore, attitudes of violence have been found to be related to self-reported aggression toward peers (Vernberg, Jacobs & Hershberger, 1999). Although we can learn much from a better understanding of both attitudes and behaviors of violence this study will focus only on attitudes towards violence as the dependent variable.

Using the ecological model, the key factors that will be addressed in this study will be at the community, family, and individual levels. The key independent variables of interest for this study include disorder and social networks (community), authoritative parenting (family), and self-esteem (individual). Cultural factors are also included in the developmental model of interpersonal violence (Figure. 1) but are beyond the scope of this study.

The first objective of this study is to examine the types of relationships that exist between these independent variables within the ecological context and attitudes towards violence.

Beginning with community factors one area that has not been thoroughly covered in the literature is the effect of neighborhood characteristics, particularly community disorder and social networks, on adolescent attitudes towards violence. Besides exposure to community violence there are other factors that may influence delinquent behavior. According to Sampson and Groves (1989) the social disorganization theory by Shaw and McKay suggests that low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility leads to community social disorganization which accounts for variations in delinquent behavior. The authors measured social organization in terms of local social networks, control of street corner teenage peer groups, and prevalence of organizational participation among a sample of older teenage youth in Great Britain. This study will address the issue of community disorder and social networks by asking the question, what is the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and attitudes towards violence?

The next independent variable that will be used for this study is the child's perception of parenting behavior. In the literature review there was not a significant amount of research on the role of parents in preventing violence among adolescents. However, Jackson and Foshee (1998) conducted a study on two dimensions of parenting behavior (Parental responsiveness and demandingness) and violence related behaviors in a sample of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade adolescents. The results indicated that the higher the perceived responsiveness and demandingness of the parents, the lower the likelihood that adolescents had displayed violent behaviors. The difference for the present study is the sampling of 10 –14 year olds, which are characteristic of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Thus, the second major question to be examined is what is the relationship between authoritative parenting (responsiveness and demandingness) on adolescent attitudes towards violence?

To better test the ecological model the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale has been added as an independent variable. Since this scale measures an individual's level of self-esteem, it will be used as an individual level variable. The question for this variable is does a relationship exist between a person's self-esteem and attitudes towards violence?

The second objective of this study is to determine the extent to which perceived neighborhood disorder, local social networks, authoritative parenting, and self-esteem predict violent attitudes.

**Question I.** What is the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and attitudes towards violence?

**Question II.** What is the relationship between authoritative parenting and attitudes towards violence?

**Question III.** Does a relationship exist between a person's self-esteem and attitudes towards violence?

**Question IV.** To what extent does perceived neighborhood disorder, local social networks, authoritative parenting and self-esteem predict attitudes towards violence.

## **Method**

### Population and Sample

The population of interest was African American adolescent males between the ages of 10-14 in afterschool programs in North Carolina. These afterschool programs offer homework assistance and organized enrichment activities in a structured setting. The county names for where the afterschool programs were located included Catawba, Guilford, Northampton, Wake,

and Wayne. County information on violent crime rates from the North Carolina Department of Justice can be found in Table 9. Additional demographic information is provided in the results section.

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**Table 9.**  
**Crime In North Carolina**

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Violent Crime Rates Per 100,000 by County

| County      | Population Size | Violent Crime Rate |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Catawba     | 141,685         | 307.0              |
| Guilford    | 421,000         | 681.0              |
| Northampton | 22,086          | 303.2              |
| Wake        | 627,846         | 451.9              |
| Wayne       | 113,329         | 443.4              |

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Procedure

In August of 2001 after-school program providers from various counties in North Carolina were contacted by phone and asked to participate in a research study examining African American male youth attitudes towards violence. Those providers that agreed to participate were sent a packet of information. Each packet included a consent form for the provider to sign, a consent form for each parent and child to sign, surveys, instructions to carry out the survey process, and a voluntary participation letter. The program providers talked with the parents about the study and gave them consent forms to sign. Each consent form provided a short summary for the purpose of the study and explicitly made known that any information that was obtained from each child would be kept confidential and anonymous. Upon agreement both parent and child had to provide a signature on the consent form in order to participate in the study (Appendix A).

On dates designated by each program provider the survey study was implemented. Each provider read the voluntary participation letter that specifically stated that any child could discontinue filling out the survey at any time without loss of benefits to which they were entitled. Each child was given a survey and the provider read each question aloud so that the youth could complete the survey. After completion all surveys and consent forms were placed in a sealed envelope and returned.

Upon return of the consent forms and surveys the data were entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Since there were only 62 items on the surveys, it was decided that any survey missing more than 20% of the data (equivalent to 13 items or more) would not be entered into the analysis. Those surveys that were missing 20% or less (equivalent to 12 items or less) were analyzed, but adjustments were made for the missing data. SPSS allows the user to address the missing data issue by using missing values which the program is able to read and analyze as necessary.

### Instruments

Background Questionnaire. Participants were given a background questionnaire asking questions dealing with age, sex, last grade completed, GPA, and race (Appendix B).

The Attitudes Towards Violence Scale. This 15-item scale developed by Funk, Elliott, Urman, Flores, Mock (1999) measures adolescent attitudes towards violence. The scale measures attitudes towards reactive violence and culture of violence. Items reflecting reactive violence are related to an individual's response to an immediate threat such as "If a person hits you, you should hit them back". The culture of violence reflects attitudes that would be expected to be resistant to change such as "It's okay to do whatever it takes to protect myself". Based upon their study the scale demonstrates good internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .86. The

response format follows a three point Likert scale. The response format was coded as: agree, disagree, and not sure. Negative responses were given a score of 0. Likewise, positive responses were given a score of 2. Neutral responses were given a score of 1. This scale is found in Appendix B.

Local Social Networks Subscale and Neighborhood Disorder Subscale. The local social networks subscale and the community disorder subscale were derived from The Neighborhood Characteristics Questionnaire (NCQ), which was modified by McGuire (1997). The NCQ measures social networks among community members and disorder within the neighborhood. Based upon McGuire's analysis each of the sub-scales had an acceptable internal consistency 0.82 and 0.77 respectively. The response format was coded as: Yes, No, and not sure. A copy of this survey is also found in Appendix B.

The Authoritative Parenting Index. This measure was taken from a series of studies by Jackson, Henriksen, and Foshee, (1998) which examined the reliability and validity of a survey that measures children's perceptions of parenting behavior. The 16-item measure consists of two subscales, which are parental responsiveness and demandingness. The results from the reviewed studies show that the alpha coefficients for the reliability of the responsive subscale range from .71 to .90. Likewise, the coefficients for the reliability of the demandingness subscale range from .65 to .83. The response format for this measure include responses Exactly like, A lot like, Sort of Like and Not Like your parent(s). The scoring of each item was from 1 to 4 with favorable answers receiving the higher numbers. A copy of this measure is found in Appendix B.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. This 10-item scale measures self-esteem as an outcome of social forces. Generally, the scale has alpha coefficients for various samples, including African Americans, in the range of .82 to .88 (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1993). It also

has high test-retest reliability in the range of .82 to .88. The response format followed a four point scale with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scoring of each item was from 1 to 4 with favorable answers receiving the higher numbers. A copy of this measure is found in Appendix B.

After the data were collected for this study additional reliability analyses were run for each scale to see if similar reliabilities would be found. Reliability estimates for the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale, Local Social Networks Subscale and Neighborhood Disorder Subscale were consistent with what was reported in the literature. These reliability estimates can be found in Table 16 located in the Appendix B of this document.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses.**

**Question I.** What is the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and attitudes towards violence?

Hypothesis 1. Perceived existence of social networks in the Local Social Network Subscale will be negatively related to violent attitudes in the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale.

Hypothesis 2. Perceived existence of social disorder in the Neighborhood Disorder Subscale will be positively related to violent attitudes in the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale.

**Question II.** What is the relationship between authoritative parenting and attitudes towards violence.

Hypothesis 3. Perceived parental responsiveness in the Responsiveness Subscale will be negatively related to violent attitudes in the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale.

Hypothesis 4. Perceived parental demandingness in the Demandingness Subscale will be negatively related to violent attitudes in the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale.

**Question III.** What is the relationship between self-esteem and attitudes towards violence.

Hypothesis 5. Self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale will be negatively related to violent attitudes on the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale.

**Question IV.** Do perceptions on neighborhood characteristics, authoritative parenting, and self-esteem predict attitudes towards violence.

Hypothesis 6. The combination of scores on the Local Social Networks Subscale, the Neighborhood Disorder Subscale, the Authoritative Parenting Index, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale will be a better predictor of violent attitudes on the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale than any of the scales separately after controlling for demographic characteristics.

### **Independent Variables**

1. Perceived local social networks
2. Perceived neighborhood disorder
3. Perceived parenting style (parental demandingness and responsiveness).
4. Self-esteem
5. Demographic characteristics:  
(age, grade level, academic achievement, family structure and geographic area).

### **Dependent Variable**

1. Attitudes towards violence.

## **Results**

The sample size of the survey study consisted of 151 African American male youth in eight after school programs in North Carolina. Originally, there were 183 surveys returned, but 32 were not entered into the analysis. Nineteen of the surveys were not analyzed since they did not fit the sample profile. An additional 13 surveys were not entered in the analysis either due to

more than 20% of the questionnaire missing data or survey responses were intentionally misrepresented. Participants ranged in age from 9 to 14 years, with the mean age being 11.20. Participant grade level ranged from fourth grade to eighth grade with over 40 percent of youth being in the fifth grade. Most participants stated that they received grades of B's and C's in school. Lastly, most students reported staying with both parents. Geographic area was determined for each represented county using census data from 2000. Geographic areas were considered urban if the core census blocks had an overall population density of at least 1000 people per square mile or surrounding census blocks had an overall population density of at least 500 people per square mile. Areas that did not fit these criteria were considered rural areas. Further data on demographic characteristics including frequencies and percentages can be found in Table 10. Data was also analyzed by comparing the means and standard deviations of each variable across the afterschool programs. This information is found in Table 11.

**Table 10.**  
**Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Characteristics.**

| Demographic Variable         | Frequencies | Percentages |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| <u>Age:</u>                  |             |             |
| 9                            | 4           | 2.6 %       |
| 10                           | 33          | 21.9 %      |
| 11                           | 57          | 37.7 %      |
| 12                           | 46          | 30.5 %      |
| 13                           | 8           | 5.3 %       |
| 14                           | 3           | 2.0 %       |
| <u>Grade Level:</u>          |             |             |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> grade        | 33          | 21.9 %      |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> grade        | 62          | 41.1 %      |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> grade        | 42          | 27.8 %      |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> grade        | 11          | 7.3 %       |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> grade        | 2           | 1.3 %       |
| Missing                      | 1           | 0.6 %       |
| <u>Academic Achievement:</u> |             |             |
| A's & B's                    | 56          | 37.1 %      |
| B's & C's                    | 84          | 55.6 %      |
| C's & D's                    | 10          | 6.6 %       |
| Missing                      | 1           | 0.7 %       |
| <u>Family Structure:</u>     |             |             |
| Both Parents                 | 81          | 53.6 %      |
| Mother Only                  | 43          | 28.5 %      |
| Father Only                  | 1           | .7 %        |
| Mother/Step Father           | 17          | 11.3 %      |
| Father/Step Mother           | 2           | 1.3 %       |
| Grand Parent(s)              | 0           | 0 %         |
| Other Relative               | 7           | 4.6 %       |
| Guardian                     | 0           | 0 %         |
| <u>Geographic Area:</u>      |             |             |
| Urban                        | 95          | 62.9 %      |
| Rural                        | 56          | 37.1 %      |

**Table 11.**  
**Program Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent and Independent Variables.**

| Program Information | Frequency | Attitudes Towards Violence |     | Social Networking |     | Neighborhood Disorder |     | Parental Respons |     | Parental Demand |     | Self Esteem |     |
|---------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----|-------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|-------------|-----|
|                     |           | Mean                       | SD  | Mean              | SD  | Mean                  | SD  | Mean             | SD  | Mean            | SD  | Mean        | SD  |
| Catawba County:     |           |                            |     |                   |     |                       |     |                  |     |                 |     |             |     |
| Program 1           | 11        | 1.33                       | .35 | 2.03              | .58 | 1.18                  | .36 | 2.64             | .42 | 2.56            | .39 | 3.03        | .39 |
| Program 2           | 14        | 1.17                       | .28 | 1.89              | .54 | 1.29                  | .34 | 2.67             | .20 | 2.67            | .31 | 3.04        | .12 |
| Guilford County:    |           |                            |     |                   |     |                       |     |                  |     |                 |     |             |     |
| Program 3           | 32        | 1.13                       | .14 | 2.07              | .56 | 1.22                  | .34 | 2.65             | .20 | 2.92            | .22 | 3.10        | .09 |
| Program 4           | 54        | 1.28                       | .32 | 2.20              | .36 | 1.32                  | .36 | 2.60             | .28 | 2.88            | .32 | 3.13        | .17 |
| Northampton County: |           |                            |     |                   |     |                       |     |                  |     |                 |     |             |     |
| Program 5           | 13        | 1.13                       | .27 | 2.25              | .46 | 1.26                  | .42 | 2.75             | .22 | 3.07            | .24 | 3.06        | .10 |
| Program 6           | 3         | 1.00                       | .00 | 1.71              | .74 | 1.08                  | .14 | 2.78             | .00 | 3.00            | .14 | 3.00        | .10 |
| Wake County:        |           |                            |     |                   |     |                       |     |                  |     |                 |     |             |     |
| Program 7           | 9         | 1.27                       | .30 | 2.70              | .23 | 1.31                  | .30 | 2.62             | .15 | 2.56            | .24 | 3.03        | .05 |
| Wayne County:       |           |                            |     |                   |     |                       |     |                  |     |                 |     |             |     |
| Program 8           | 15        | 1.06                       | .13 | 2.13              | .60 | 1.18                  | .18 | 2.67             | .15 | 2.96            | .22 | 3.04        | .16 |

The first research question addressed in this study was the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and attitudes towards violence. To address this question two hypotheses were advanced. The first hypothesis stated that perceived existence of social networks on the Local Social Network Subscale would be negatively related to violent attitudes on the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale. The second hypothesis stated that perceived existence of social disorder on the Neighborhood Disorder Subscale would be positively related to violent attitudes on the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale. To test these hypotheses correlational analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) see Table 10. For the first hypothesis perceived social networks was found to be negatively, but insignificantly correlated with attitudes towards violence ( $r = -.124$ ,  $p. <.05$ ). For the second hypothesis there was a positive and statistically significant correlation between perceived levels of social disorder and attitudes towards violence ( $r = .251$ ,  $p. <.05$ ). In order to determine the strength of this relationship a regression analysis was run on these two variables. The regression analysis showed an  $R^2 = .063$ ,  $p. <.05$  which suggests that although the relationship between the two variables is significant, social disorder explains only 6.3% of the variance in youth's attitudes towards violence.

The second research question focused on the relationship between authoritative parenting and attitudes towards violence. According to Jackson and Foshee (1998) authoritative parenting was considered to be associated with responsive and demanding parenting styles. Parental responsiveness refers to a parent's involvement in the emotional and developmental needs of the child. Parental demandingness generally refers to a parent's control over the behavior of a child. Based upon this information two additional hypotheses were generated. The third hypothesis stated that perceived parental responsiveness on the responsiveness subscale would be negatively

related to attitude scores on the attitudes towards violence scale. The fourth hypothesis stated that perceived parental demandingness on the demandingness subscale would be negatively related to attitude scores on the attitudes towards violence scale. The correlational analysis showed that there was a negative and statistically significant relationship between parental responsiveness and attitudes towards violence. The perception of parents as being responsive was negatively correlated with attitudes towards violence ( $r = -.372, p < .05$ ). Similarly, there was a negative and statistically significant relationship found between parental demandingness and attitudes towards violence. The perception of parents as being demanding was negatively correlated with attitudes towards violence ( $r = -.243, p < .05$ ). Regression analyses were conducted to measure the strength of these relationships. For the relationship between parental responsiveness and attitudes towards violence the analysis showed an  $R^2 = .138, p < .05$  suggesting that parental responsiveness only accounts for about 13.8% of the variance in youth's attitudes towards violence. For the relationship between parental demandingness and attitudes towards violence the analysis showed an  $R^2 = .059, p < .05$  suggesting that parental responsiveness accounts for 5.9% of the variance in youth's attitudes towards violence. The interpretation of these findings suggest that parental responsiveness and demandingness are not strong predictors of youth's attitudes towards violence.

The third research question explored the relationship between self-esteem and youths' attitudes towards violence. The fifth hypothesis stated that self-esteem would be negatively related to attitude scores on the attitudes towards violence scale. The correlational analysis showed a negative relationship between self-esteem and attitudes towards violence, however, this relationship was not found to be statistically significant ( $r = -.133, p < .05$ ).

**Table 12.**  
**Correlation Matrix of All Study Variables (Excluding Family Structure)**

| Variables                  | Attitudes Towards Violence | Perceived Social Networks | Perceived Social Disorder | Perceived Parental Resp. | Perceived Parental Dem. | Self-Esteem | Age    | Grade Level | Acad. Ach. |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------|-------------|------------|
| Attitudes Towards Violence | 1.0                        | -.124                     | .251**                    | -.372**                  | -.243**                 | -.133       | -.002  | -.016       | -.104      |
| Social Networks            | -.124                      | 1.0                       | -.091                     | .248**                   | -.035                   | -.068       | -.077  | -.085       | .137       |
| Social Disorder            | .251**                     | -.091                     | 1.0                       | -.149                    | -.167                   | -.039       | .122   | .102        | -.043      |
| Parental Resp.             | -.372**                    | .248**                    | -.149                     | 1.0                      | .335**                  | .004        | -.101  | -.127       | .057       |
| Parental Dem.              | -.243**                    | -.035                     | -.167                     | .335**                   | 1.0                     | .138        | -.083  | -.089       | .000       |
| Self-Esteem                | -.133                      | -.068                     | -.039                     | .004                     | .138                    | 1.0         | -.070  | -.043       | .047       |
| Age                        | -.002                      | -.077                     | .122                      | -.101                    | -.083                   | -.070       | 1.0    | .937**      | -.104      |
| Grade Level                | -.016                      | -.085                     | .102                      | -.127                    | -.089                   | -.043       | .937** | 1.0         | -.094      |
| Acad Ach.                  | -.104                      | .137                      | -.043                     | .057                     | -.000                   | .047        | -.104  | -.094       | 1.0        |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed test)

**Table 13.**  
**Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (Including Family Structure)**

| Variables            | Attitudes Towards Violence | Perceived Social Networks | Perceived Social Disorder | Perceived Parental Resp. | Perceived Parental Dem. | Self-Esteem | Age   | Grade Level | Acad. Ach. |
|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------|-------------|------------|
| Both Parents         | -.209**                    | -.012                     | -.007                     | .067                     | .232**                  | -.027       | .052  | .029        | -.010      |
| Mother Only          | -.017                      | .048                      | -.075                     | -.084                    | -.229**                 | .071        | -.067 | -.054       | -.039      |
| Mother / Step Father | .079                       | -.034                     | .101                      | .084                     | -.013                   | .003        | -.093 | -.073       | .103       |
| Other Relatives      | .289**                     | -.021                     | .021                      | -.090                    | -.034                   | -.080       | .135  | .131        | -.040      |
| Geographic Area      | -.129                      | -.139                     | -.091                     | .127                     | -.042                   | -.247**     | .164  | .167        | -.160      |

The fourth research question examined the predictability of violent attitudes by determining if perceptions of neighborhood characteristics, authoritative parenting, and self-esteem account for a significant portion of the variance in support of attitudes towards violence. The sixth hypothesis stated that the combination of scores on the Local Social Networks Subscale, the Neighborhood Disorder Subscale, the Authoritative Parenting Index, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale would be a better predictor of violent attitudes on the Attitudes Towards Violence Scale than any of the scales separately after controlling for demographic characteristics.

This hypothesis was tested using a regression analysis with attitudes towards violence as the dependent variable. The following independent variables were entered into the regression analysis: social networks, social disorder, responsive parenting, demanding parenting, and self-esteem. Other variables entered into the regression analysis included all demographic variables. In order to run the regression analyses the variable for family structure was collapsed from 8 response categories to 4 in order to account for low numbers in several of the response categories. The resulting response categories included both parents, mother only, mother & stepfather, and other care arrangements (consisting of father only, father & stepmother, grand parents, other relatives, and legal guardian). Afterwards, in order to accurately analyze categorical data, dummy variables were created for each of the 4 collapsed response categories. Each category was coded using an arbitrary number for fitting the criteria of that particular response. For example, the dummy variable for living with both parents was given a score of 1 for fitting this criteria or 0 if it did not fit the criteria. A similar procedure was followed for analyzing the geographic area variable.

As a result of the correlation matrix it was expected that neighborhood disorder, parental responsiveness and parental demandingness would have significant betas in the regression analyses. However, after the analyses were run parental demandingness was not a significant predictor of youths' attitudes towards violence. This finding is significant in that dummy variables for both parents and mother only had significant betas. Looking back at the correlation matrix these two dummy variables were significantly correlated to parental demandingness. One possible reason why parental demandingness dropped off in the regression analyses could be due to multicollinearity where the two dummy variables and parental demandingness were explaining the same amount of the variance for youths' attitudes towards violence. Implications for this finding are presented in the discussion section. The first model had an  $R^2 = .30$ ,  $p < .05$  which suggests that it can account for approximately 30% of the variance in the prediction of youths' attitudes towards violence and was found to be statistically significant with an  $F = 4.94$ ,  $p < .05$ . This regression analysis is displayed in Table 14. Another regression analysis was run that excluded all demographic variables. The second model had an  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $p < .05$  which suggests that it can account for approximately 20% of the variance in the prediction of youth's attitudes towards violence and was found to be statistically significant with an  $F = 7.345$ ,  $p < .05$ . The second regression analysis is displayed in Table 15. These findings show that the first model with demographics accounts for more of the variance in youths' attitudes towards violence than the second model without demographics. Furthermore, the independent variables examined in this study only contribute a small portion in the prediction of youths' violent attitudes.

**Table 14.**  
**Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Support of Violent Attitudes.**  
**(Includes Demographic Variables)**

| Variable                             | <u>B</u> | SE B | $\beta$ |
|--------------------------------------|----------|------|---------|
| Geographic area (Urban & Rural)      | -.054    | .047 | -.095   |
| Age                                  | .012     | .058 | .041    |
| School Grade                         | -.041    | .062 | -.138   |
| Academic Achievement                 | -.043    | .034 | -.095   |
| Both Parents (Family structure)      | -.298    | .082 | -.538*  |
| Mother Only (Family structure)       | -.248    | .089 | -.404*  |
| Mother & Step Father (Family struct) | -.194    | .099 | -.223   |
| Social Networks                      | -.025    | .041 | -.047   |
| Neighborhood Disorder                | .136     | .061 | .168*   |
| Parental Responsiveness              | -.317    | .093 | -.281*  |
| Parental Demandingness               | -.076    | .071 | -.087   |
| Self-Esteem                          | -.247    | .151 | -.125   |

Note.  $R^2 = .30$

\* $p < .05$ .

**Table 15.**  
**Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Support of Violent Attitudes.**  
**(Excludes Demographic Variables)**

| Variable                | <u>B</u> | SE B | $\beta$ |
|-------------------------|----------|------|---------|
| Social Networks         | -.023    | .041 | -.044   |
| Neighborhood Disorder   | .148     | .062 | .182*   |
| Parental Responsiveness | -.339    | .093 | -.301*  |
| Parental Demandingness  | -.086    | .071 | -.098   |
| Self-Esteem             | -.224    | .148 | -.114   |

Note.  $R^2 = .20$

\* $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine youths' attitudes towards violence within an ecological context including community, family, and individual level factors. The first question assessed the relationship between youths' attitudes towards violence and perceived neighborhood characteristics. The specific neighborhood characteristics examined included social networks and neighborhood disorder. Based upon the reviewed literature for community level risk factors, it was reported that youths' attitudes towards violence was associated with communities characterized as lacking strong social networks and having high rates of drug use, violent crime, and social disorder.

The first hypothesis stated that there would be a negative relationship between attitudes towards violence and the perceived existence of social networks. The results from the correlational analysis showed that there was a negative correlation found between attitudes towards violence and social networks, but the strength of the relationship was not statistically significant. Although a stronger association was expected between these two variables, the overall result is consistent with what was reported in the literature. It is reasonable to expect that youth perceptions of adult interactions and networking within the community would be associated with the cues that they receive in the development of attitudes towards violence.

The second hypothesis focused on the association between youths' attitudes towards violence and neighborhood disorder. Specifically, it stated that there would be a positive correlation between the two variables. The results showed that there was a positive correlation between youths' attitudes towards violence and neighborhood disorder. This finding supports the current literature that youths' violent attitudes are associated with living in neighborhoods characterized by people hanging out on street corners, abandoned homes and buildings, graffiti,

and trash. The reviewed literature suggests that these kinds of environments may actually influence youths' attitudes towards violence as they try to navigate through their social relationships with other neighborhood youth.

The second research question examined the relationship between youths' attitudes towards violence and authoritative parenting. From the reviewed literature on family level factors, authoritative parenting was comprised of both responsive and demanding parenting styles. Parental responsiveness generally refers to parental involvement in the emotional and developmental needs of the child. A study by Jackson and Foshee (1998) found the higher the perceived responsiveness and demandingness of parents, the lower the likelihood that adolescents had hit peers, beat up peers, carried a weapon to school, or threatened a peer. Given this information, the third hypothesis advanced stated that there would be a negative correlation between youths' attitudes towards violence and parental responsiveness. The results showed a negative correlation between these two variables and this relationship was statistically significant. Similarly, the fourth hypothesis advanced stated that there would be a negative correlation between youths' attitudes towards violence and parental demandingness. The results showed a negative correlation for these two variables and it was significant. These findings were consistent with what was reported in the literature concerning authoritative parenting styles. Authoritative parenting styles are seen as important influences in the overall development of the child. The child genuinely feels that his or her needs, concerns, and desires are valued by their parents. At the same time the child also recognizes and understands the rules established by the parents, which may positively influence behavior even against pressures from the larger community. This research supports the notion that youth who perceive their parents as responsive and demanding tend to hold less attitudes towards violence than youth who do not

perceive their parents as responsive and demanding.

The third research question examined the relationship between self-esteem and violent attitudes in youth. Literature on self-esteem has consistently linked violent behaviors with a sense of despair, frustration, low self-esteem, and sense of hopelessness (Durant, Getts, Cadenhead & Woods, 1995; Garrett, 1995). The fifth hypothesis stated that there would be a negative correlation between youths' attitude towards violence and their self-esteem. The results showed that there was a negative correlation between these two variables, but the strength of the association was not statistically significant. This finding can be interpreted as self-esteem not being significantly related to youths' attitudes towards violence and vice a versa. One point that needs to be made is that the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is only a global measure of self-esteem, where other instruments may measure additional domains including, but not limited to, areas pertaining self-esteem in relation to community life, family life, school achievement, and interaction with peers. Some additional reasons for this lack of association could include youth being heavily influenced by the kind of environment, both within the context of the community and family, they reside. Another possibility is that some youth may be taught that some forms of violence are acceptable, particularly in situations where they must protect themselves or not come across as being a sissy or a doormat. Depending on the type of environment youth live in this becomes a mechanism by which they negotiate their social relationships among their peers. This particular behavior is seen in youth who decide to join in gangs (Simcha-Fagan & Schwartz, 1986). Violence then just becomes a way of life in an attempt to gain respect and street credibility.

The final research question was concerned with the predictability of violent attitudes given the independent variables including neighborhood characteristics, authoritative parenting

styles, self-esteem, and demographic variables. The sixth hypothesis stated that perceived social networks, neighborhood disorder, parental responsiveness and demandingness, and self-esteem would be a better predictor of youths' violent attitudes than any individual variable after controlling for demographic characteristics. Regression analyses were conducted on all independent variables and demographic variables. The final model consisting of all independent variables and demographic variables was found to be a better predictor of youths' violent attitudes than any other model. However, even this model could only account for approximately 30% of the variance found in youths' attitudes towards violence. This suggests that there are additional variables that should be considered in studying youth and their attitudes towards violence.

As mentioned above the dropping of parental demandingness as a significant predictor of youths' attitudes towards violence was a significant finding in this study. This finding may have serious implications as it relates to interventions for youth and their parents about violence prevention. Living with both parents or even the mother only has significant implications for youths' attitudes towards violence and possibly other delinquent activities. Parenting style including both demandingness and responsiveness could be critical components of that intervention. As was mentioned in the literature review the family structure as well as parenting style could help buffer the influences that youth receive from the culture and community.

One interesting note is the possibility that the geographical area variable (urban/rural) could be a moderating variable impacting the strength of relationships between the other independent variables and attitudes towards violence. Although, there were no significant differences between the two groups on any of the variables, it still may warrant attention in future studies. There could be differences in how one comes to view violence based upon where

they live. Violence for an individual living in an urban area may be a means of surviving streets, while violence for a person living in a rural area may be the result of social cues specific to rural areas (i.e. young males are expected to be aggressive which may translate into violence).

A major benefit of this study is that it takes into account the reality that violent attitudes among youth are attributed to a host of factors within an ecological context. There are issues that exist within communities, families, and individuals that need to be addressed in order to effectively deal with youth violence. One point to consider is that results from this study may not only be relevant for African American males, but other groups as well. It is likely that any youth placed within a similar context will more than likely behave and think in a similar pattern. This alone points out that violence among youth is not just an issue facing African American youth.

### Limitations

The study has several limitations that may have influenced the outcomes of this study. One of the first limitations in this study is the use of a self-selected sample. Obviously, it is difficult securing participants in this age group, but given the availability of the participants it was the best available option. The drawback in using a self-selected sample is that it limits the extent to which one can generalize across individuals, time, and place. Additionally, there are questions about how well the sample is representative of the African American male youth population. Future studies may consider using a probability sample in order to address some of these issues. Another issue was securing a large enough sample size of African American adolescent male youth. The goal was to get a sample size of approximately 210 youth. Due to several complications only 151 African American participants were surveyed. One of the complications is that the study focused on youth ages 10-14 which is generally a difficult group to assess. The second complication is that several programs dropped out of the study after

initially agreeing to participate. The small sample size in turn impacted the overall power of the study and overall outcome of the analyses. However, the results still provide some useful information about youth's attitudes towards violence and factors that may influence those attitudes.

This study was limited in that most of the data was derived from participants' self report and are liable to self-reporting biases. The issue of violence tends to be a complicated area to analyze since it may have serious implications. Youth recognize this and may have given answers that were not reflective of how they actually felt, but what they perceived as the appropriate answer. Similarly, some of the questions from the neighborhood characteristics subscales and the authoritative parenting subscales could also be considered sensitive, which may have influenced the survey responses and results. However, using surveys and self-report data was the most feasible method for collecting information among this group.

Another limitation of this study centers on the notion of whether attitudes actually predict behavior. It could be argued that although individuals may have certain attitudes towards a particular behavior, they may be less likely to actually carry the behavior out, particularly if the consequences of such actions are harsh. One way to resolve this issue in future studies is to actually observe youth behaviors in realistic environments such as school grounds and to match it with what was reported about their specific attitudes towards violence.

A final limitation of this study acknowledges that the data for social networks, neighborhood disorder, and parenting behavior were all based on youths' perceptions rather than actual reality. Obviously, the responses could be heavily influenced by how the youth felt about these particular variables at the time they were completing this survey. One way to deal with this issue is to census data to get an accurate depiction of city blocks and their characteristics. It

would also be useful to survey parents on their parenting style which would provide more accurate information.

Future studies may also consider examining causal factors associated with the development and maintenance of violent attitudes. There are several additional variables illustrated in Wolfe, Wekerle, and Scott's Ecological Model of Development. These include cultural level factors consisting of the media, racism, and oppression. At the community level additional variables not included in this study are community interpersonal violence, drug use, and access to valued resources. At the individual level some variables that may be worth considering include self-efficacy, resiliency, and external locus of control. These additional variables may actually account for some of the variance in the predictability of youths' attitudes towards violence.

#### Future Implications

The study of youth violence continues to be a major research area. Although, there has been a considerable amount of work done in this area questions still remain. By examining youth violence within an ecological framework some of these questions can begin to be answered. One major question centers on youth violence prevention and best practices. In the past, many violence prevention programs only focused on the individual. Recent literature suggests that some programs are beginning to become more holistic by dealing with family and community level factors (Corvo, 1997; Webber, 1997). It is believed that by focusing on the environments in which violent attitudes and behaviors are fostered programs can better understand how to resolve these issues.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A**  
**Informed Consent Form**

North Carolina State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Assessing Attitudes Towards Violence: The Influence of Ecological Factors

Principle Investigator – Jamal L. Carr  
Faculty Sponsor – Dr. Craig Brookins

You're child is invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors within the family and community that foster violent attitudes and behaviors among African American Adolescents. On dates designated by the after-school program providers, the principle investigator will come in to administer a survey to the youth. Upon receipt of an informed consent form, each youth will receive a survey asking questions related to family and neighborhood characteristics. They will be given detailed directions to complete the survey. Completion of this survey will take approximately 45 minutes.

**RISKS**

There are no risks associated with your child's participation in this study. Furthermore, there will not be a request for information that might be considered personal, sensitive, threatening, degrading or anxiety provoking. The survey is straightforward with questions pertaining to the child's perception of family and neighborhood characteristics, and attitudes and behaviors of violence.

**BENEFITS**

The goal of this research is to obtain a clearer understanding of the ecological factors that foster youth violence. The findings from this research will help in developing effective programs to teach pro-social skills and promote healthy development.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely under lock and key, and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link your child's participation to the study.

**COMPENSATION**

For your child's participation in this study, he / she will receive a pizza party at the after-school program on a date designated by the program provider.

**CONTACT**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Jamal Carr at (919) 832-7682 or Dr. Craig Brookins at (919) 515-7518. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your child's right as a participant in research. Have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919) 515-7856 or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919) 513-2148.

**PARTICIPATION**

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; your child may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide that your child can participate, he / she may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which they were otherwise entitled. If your child withdraws from the study before data collection is completed, the survey will be destroyed.

**CONSENT**

I have read and understood the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please Print

Investigator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**  
**Table of Survey Instruments**  
**And Survey Items**

**Table 16.**  
**Survey Instrument Reliabilities**

| Scale Name                                     | Items | Alpha | What Scale Measures  |
|--|-------|-------|--|
| Background Information                         | 6     |       | It measures demographic information.   |
| The Attitudes Towards Violence Scale.          | 15    | .78   | Measures two constructs of violent attitudes: reactive violence and culture of violence.   |
| The Neighborhood Characteristics Questionnaire |       |       | Measures resident's perception of street crime and quality of life, social networking among community members, attachment to the neighborhood, and disorder in the neighborhood.   |
| - Social networks                              | 7     | .80   |  |
| - Neighborhood Disorder                        | 8     | .65   |  |
| The Authoritative parenting Index.             |       |       | This scale is designed to assess children's perception of responsive and demanding parenting behaviors. Items measuring parental warmth, involvement, and intrusiveness comprise the responsive dimension. Items measuring parental supervision, monitoring, and permissiveness comprised the demanding dimension. |
| - Parental Responsiveness                      | 9     | .57   |  |
| - Parental Demandingness                       | 7     | .54   |  |
| Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale                    | 10    | .40   | This scale measures student's self-concept.  |

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**Please complete the following survey. This information will not be used to identify you in any way. Your identity and answers will be completely anonymous. Therefore, do not put your name on this questionnaire.**

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### **Attitudes Towards Violence Scale.**

Instructions: The following items are designed to measure attitudes towards violence. Please be honest in responding. The answers that you give will not be used against you. Please circle only one response that best corresponds with your attitudes.

- |   |       |          |           |
|---|-------|----------|-----------|
| 1. I could see myself committing a violent crime in 5 years.                | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 2. I could see myself joining a gang.                                       | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 3. it's okay to use violence to get what you want.                          | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 4. I try to stay away from places where violence is likely.*                | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 5. People who use violence get respect.                                     | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 6. Lots of people are out to get you.                                       | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 7. Carrying a gun or a knife would help me feel safer.                      | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 8. If a person hits you, you should hit them back.                          | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 8. It's okay to beat up a person for badmouthing me or my family.           | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 9. It's okay to carry a gun or a knife if you live in a rough neighborhood. | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 11. It's okay to do whatever it takes to protect myself.                    | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 12. It's good to have a gun.  | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 13. Parents should tell their children to use violence if necessary.        | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 14. If someone tries to start a fight with you, you should walk away.       | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure  |
| 15. I'm afraid of getting hurt by violence.                                 | Agree | Disagree | Not Sure. |

**Neighborhood Characteristics Questionnaire.**

Please circle the response that best corresponds with what you believe about the community within which you reside.

## Local Social Networks Subscale

- |   |     |    |               |
|---|-----|----|---------------|
| 16. Do neighbors do favors for each other?              | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 17. Do neighbors share information with each other?     | Yes | No | I don't know. |
| 18. Do neighbors watch each other's property?           | Yes | No | I don't know. |
| 19. Do neighbors ask for personal advice?               | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 20. Do neighbors have parties together?                 | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 21. Do neighbors visit each other's homes?              | Yes | No | I don't Know  |
| 22. Have residents solved a community problem together? | Yes | No | I don't know  |

## Neighborhood Disorder Subscale

- |  |     |    |               |
|--|-----|----|---------------|
| 23. Is litter/trash a problem in your neighborhood?                    | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 24. Is graffiti a problem in your neighborhood?                        | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 25. Are drug addicts a problem in your neighborhood?                   | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 26. Are alcoholics and public drinking a problem in your neighborhood? | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 27. Are there vacant/ abandoned store fronts in your neighborhood?     | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 28. Are there vacant/ abandoned homes common in your neighborhood?     | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 29. Are there burned down buildings in your neighborhood?              | Yes | No | I don't know  |
| 30. Are unemployed people hanging out in your neighborhood?            | Yes | No | I don't know. |

**The Authoritative Parenting Index**

**Instructions:** This questionnaire measures your perception of parental authoritativeness. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer each question by circling the response that best describes the behavior of your parent(s) or guardian(s).

## Parental Responsiveness Subscale.

31. My parent(s) is always telling me what to do.\*

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

32. My parent(s) makes rules without asking what I think.\*

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

33. My parent(s) makes me feel better when I am upset.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

34. My parent(s) is too busy to talk to me.\*

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

35. My parent(s) listens to what I have to say.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

36. My parent(s) likes me just the way that I am.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

37. My parent(s) tell me when I do a good job on things.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

38. My parent(s) wants to hear about my problems.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

39. My parent(s) is pleased with how I behave.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

## Parental Demandingness Subscale

40. My parent(s) has rules that I must follow.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

41. My parent(s) tells me times when I must come home.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

42. My parent(s) makes sure I tell her where I am going.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

43. My parent(s) make sure I go to bed on time.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

44. My parent(s) does not care what I do with my friends. \*

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

45. My parent(s) know where I am after school.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

46. My parent(s) checks to see if I do my homework.

|              |            |              |          |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| Exactly like | A lot like | Sort of Like | Not Like |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------|

**Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale**

**Instructions:** The following list of statements deal with your feelings about yourself. Please circle only one response that best describes how you feel about yourself.

47. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

48. At times I think that I am no good at all.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

49. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

50. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

51. I feel that I do not have much to be proud of.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

52. I certainly feel useless at times.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

53. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

54. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

55. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I'm a failure.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

56. I take a positive attitude towards myself.

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|

Background Questionnaire

57. What is your current **age**? \_\_\_\_\_

58. What is your **sex**? Please circle only one.

|      |        |
|------|--------|
| Male | Female |
|------|--------|

59. What is your **grade in school**? \_\_\_\_\_

60. What is your **race**? Please circle only one.

|       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|
| Black | White | Other |
|-------|-------|-------|

61. What kind of **grades do you get in school**? Please circle only one.

|             |             |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| A's and B's | B's and C's | C's and D's | D's and F's |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|

62. Who do you currently **live with**? Please circle only one.

|                 |        |        |                           |                           |                    |                   |          |
|-----------------|--------|--------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Both<br>Parents | Mother | Father | Mother and<br>Step Father | Father and<br>Step Mother | Grand<br>Parent(s) | Other<br>Relative | Guardian |
|-----------------|--------|--------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------|