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Title: The Impact of Universal versus Selective Approaches to Prevention on High-Risk, Socially-Influential Middle School Students

Text: Two decades of evidence from violence prevention trials suggest three important lessons. One is that schools are central to implementing prevention efforts. A second is that interventions often have their strongest effects on children with high levels of pre-existing risk. Third, and that combining universal and selective interventions can have stronger effects than implementing single approaches. The CDC Multisite Violence Prevention Project implemented these learnings in an attempt to reduce risk for violence among middle school youth.

This paper reports the findings of a multi-site randomized trial evaluating the separate and combined effects of two school-based approaches to reduce violence among a high-risk sample of early adolescents. Students were designated as high-risk by elevated levels of aggression and accompanying relatively higher levels of social influence. A total of 37 schools at four sites were randomized to four conditions: (a) a universal intervention that involved implementing a student curriculum and teacher training with sixth grade students and teachers; (b) a selective intervention in which a family intervention was implemented with a subset of sixth grade students exhibiting high levels of aggression and social influence; (c) a combined intervention condition; and (d) a no-intervention control condition. Analyses of multiple waves of data from two cohorts of high risk students at each school (N = 1805) within the grade targeted by the interventions revealed few

proximal effects on aggression, victimization, or school perceptions. However, effects were found on family mediators, including monitoring, family cohesion, and deviant beliefs.

In addition, the results revealed a complex pattern of effects moderated by pre-existing levels of a multi-factor indicator of ecological risk. The selective and combined interventions were associated with flatter slopes on self-reported aggression and use of aggressive strategies in conflict among students at higher levels of ecological risk. Similar effects of the selective intervention, moderated by ecological risk, were observed on student-teacher relationships.

The discussion compares these results to effects from a school-wide sample, based on an ecological perspective on development, risk, and intervention effects. These findings have important implications for efforts to develop effective violence prevention programs.

Theme Groups: 6 Efficacy Trials

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