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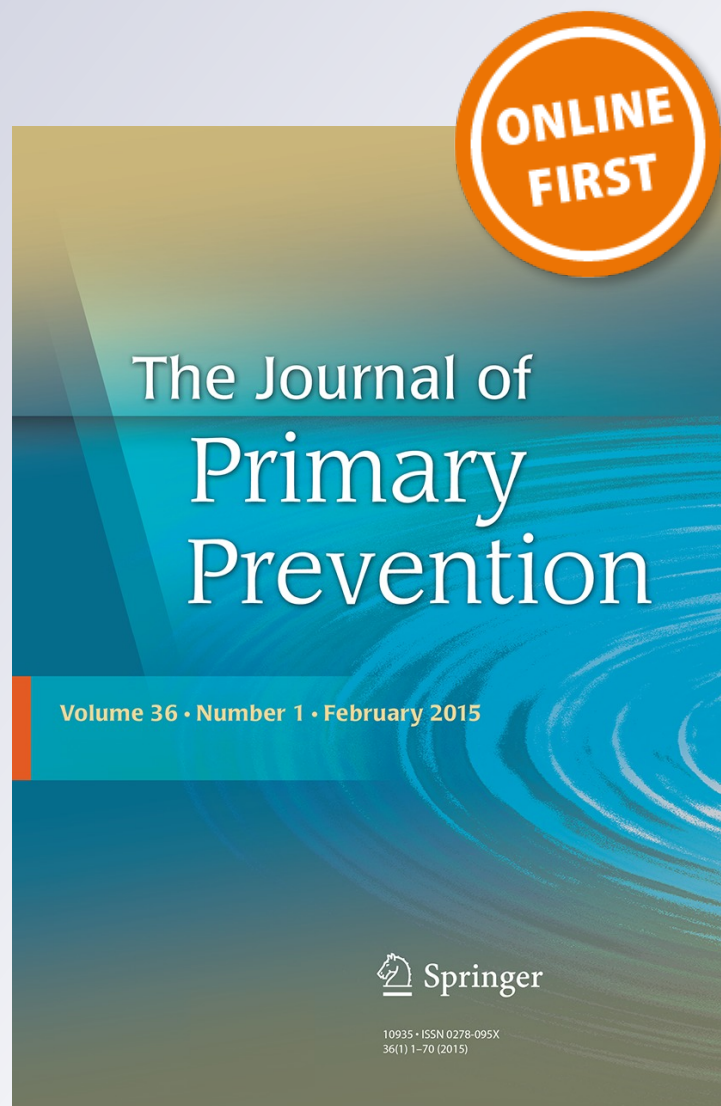
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Coping Resources and Extra-Curricular Activity as Explanatory Factors of Exposure to Violence: Comparing Jewish and Arab Youth in Israel

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Abstract Violent behavior is a well-known social phenomenon among youth around the world including Israel. Adolescence is a crucial developmental period in which youth experience various developmental tasks while being exposed to many risks. Previous studies have shown that community involvement could be an asset for reduced violence among youth. Thus, the aim of this study was to explore the level of participation in extra-curricular activities as well as individual and community coherence and exposure to or victimization by violence among Jewish and Arab youth living in southern Israel. The links between these variable were explored as well. Six-hundred-and-twenty-two adolescents (265-Jews; 357-Arabs) completed self-reported questionnaires which investigated demographics, sense of coherence, sense of community coherence, participation in extra-curricular activities, and exposure to violence. Results show that Jewish adolescents report a significantly stronger sense of coherence and sense of community coherence, they participate more in extra-curricular activities and they are more exposed to and victimized by violence. Moreover, while sense of coherence is reported to be an asset in both groups, participating in extra-curricular activities is an asset only for the Arab

youth. Results will be discussed with regard to the salutogenic theoretical foundation as well as the different cultural backgrounds of the groups.

Keywords Violence · Youths · Extra-curricular activities · Cultural groups · Coping resources

Introduction

Violent behavior is a well-known social phenomenon among youth in many nations around the world, including Israel (Smith-Khuri et al., 2004). Adolescence is a crucial developmental period during which youth perform various developmental tasks while experiencing many risks. Previous studies have shown that community involvement could assist in reducing violence among youth (Zeldin, 2004). The aim of this study was to explore the level of participation in extra-curricular activities, as well as individual and community coherence and exposure to or victimization by violence, among Jewish and Arab youth living in southern Israel. We also focused on understanding the role of these resources as explanatory factors related to exposure to violence in the two ethnic groups.

Violence Among Youth

Violence has different manifestations which include bullying, physical fights, carrying weapons and others.

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Many countries around the world have identified violence as a crucial social problem (Molcho, Harel, & Dina, 2004) and one of the main factors related to physical and mental health among adolescents (Pickett et al., 2005). Indeed, several studies have reported the relationship between violent behavior and psychosocial health, alcohol use, drug use and risk behaviors (e.g., Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & Ruan, 2004). Violence is one of a variety of risk behaviors (Molcho et al., 2004) in which boys from low socio-economic backgrounds are considered particularly at risk (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008). A cross-sectional study which compared levels of violence among adolescents in several countries around the world found relatively high levels of violence in Israel compared to other countries. One of the reasons given was that Israel is a country where wars are common and 'fighting' constitutes normative behavior and a requirement of survival (Pickett et al., 2005). The violence investigated in various countries suggests that it crosses cultures and geographical borders (e.g., Craig et al., 2009). However, ethnic comparisons of violence within Israel are rare (Molcho et al., 2004), even though such comparisons could contribute to understanding and reducing it (e.g., Craig et al., 2009). One study that compared Jews and Arabs in Israel found that while Jews experienced more verbal and social violence, Arabs encountered more physical violence (Khouri-Kassabari, Benbenishty, Astor & Zeira, 2004). Moreover, a comparison within sub-groups of the Arab youths in Israel revealed that Bedouin-Arabs sustained more severe physical violence than other Arab sub-groups (Khouri-Kassabari & Attar-Schwartz, 2008). A recent Ministry of Education report revealed that, overall, Arab adolescents experience more violence in almost every category than do their Jewish counterparts (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2014). The present study attempts to expand knowledge and explore levels of violence and resources that might aid in reducing violence among Jewish and Bedouin-Arab youth in southern Israel.

The Salutogenic Model and Sense of Coherence

Antonovsky (1987) offered the "salutogenic" model to evaluate individuals' coping abilities in stressful and conflictual situations. According to this model, people have general resistance resources which enable

them to perceive the world as organized, understandable and meaningful. These resources represent the motivations and the internal and external resources of which one can make use when facing a stressful or conflictual situation. Antonovsky termed the ability to make use of these resources a "sense of coherence" (SOC). As SOC differs among people, there are gaps in the abilities of different individuals to cope with various situations. According to this model, people with a high SOC will perceive the world as meaningful and manageable, and therefore they will perceive themselves as having internal and external resources to cope with a variety of challenging situations (Antonovsky, 1987). Thus, they will tend to behave with less antisocial behavior such as violence (Nilsson, Starrin, Simonsson, & Leppert, 2007). During adolescence SOC is developed and serves as an important resource (e.g. Simonsson, Nilsson, Leppert, & Diwan, 2008).

Antonovsky (1987) considered a number of cultural dimensions that contribute to the development of a strong SOC. Among them is a homogeneous society with strong historical roots, which, even if socially isolated, is part of the modern world. Arab society, especially the Bedouin-Arabs in the Negev (Israel) who are the target population of this study, are one such homogeneous society, which could enhance their adolescents' feelings of consistency and meaningfulness, thus strengthening SOC. On the other hand, various studies have found that members of minority groups may face considerable challenges developing SOC (e.g., Israelashvili, Taubman-Ben-Ari, & Hochdorf, 2011). In addition to cultural and minority issues, studies have shown that individuals with high socioeconomic status are at an advantage regarding SOC compared to those at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale (Lundberg, 1997), which would tend to put the Arab group at a greater disadvantage.

Sense of Community Coherence

In general, characteristics unique to minority groups tend to strengthen their sense of community (Birman, Trickett, & Buchanan, 2005). Contemporary research emphasizes the importance of understanding culture to fully comprehend the coping and adaptation mechanisms employed by groups to negotiate stressful and conflictual situations (Trickett, 2009). Hence, we have included an additional, more collective coping

resource in this study, namely, *sense of community coherence*. This is a relatively new concept that includes Antonovsky's components of personal SOC—comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. *Comprehensibility* refers to the sense of predictability, safety and security felt by members of the community and the extent to which members are not surprised by what happens in the community. A community's *manageability* is the extent to which the individual perceives the community as offering services such as supplying professional support and assistance during times of crisis and distress. Lastly, community *meaningfulness* is the extent to which one perceives the community as offering means for personal satisfaction and self-actualization (e.g., extra-curricular programs; Braun-Lewensohn, 2013).

In sum, the present study examined SOC on two levels—personal and communal. We hypothesized that community SOC is a meaningful, collectivist resource for adolescents from both cultures, but we expected it to be stronger and to offer more meaningful explanations of exposure to and victimization of violence among the Arab population, whose culture is more collectivist oriented than that of Israeli Jews (Abu-Kaf & Priel, 2008).

Extra-Curricular Activity

Youth around the world spend 80 % of their waking hours outside school (Zaff, Moore, Papillon, & Williams, 2003). After school hours, unstructured activities that lack adult supervision have negative effects including antisocial behaviors and the risk of being involved in crime and violence (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Overall, the literature suggests that involvement in these activities aids in reducing youths' negative behaviors and that girls report participating in such activities more than boys (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). There are several possible reasons for the fact that extra-curricular activities reduce negative behaviors and promote positive development. First, such activities enable adolescents to develop a variety of social and intellectual skills in diverse environments. These activities facilitate adolescents' ability to contribute to their community which, in turn, develops a sense of belonging to the community, enhances pride in the community and provides support for the adolescent as needed (Eccles,

Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003). However, relatively few extra-curricular activities are offered in low income communities with at-risk populations (Mahoney, Eccles, & Larson, 2004). Moreover, it appears that the extra-curricular activities do not serve minority populations to the same extent as they do for the majority and have mixed results (Linville & Huebner, 2005). In Israel, there is a need to elaborate research concerning extra-curricular activities outside of schools and to investigate different ethno-religious groups in regards to the relationship between extra-curricular activities and risk behaviors such as violence (Tanus, 2009).

The Ethnic Groups of This Study

Jewish society is the majority group in Israel and is considered a 'Western,' individualistic society (Sagy, Orr, Bar-On, & Awad, 2001). However, diversity in Israel exists not only among the various ethnicities that constitute the country's overall population, but also within the Jewish majority (Bistrov & Sofer, 2010).

The *Bedouin-Arabs* of the Negev are a minority group in Israel. They are *Muslim Arabs* who, during the past half century, have experienced a rapid and dramatic transition, becoming closer to modern Israeli and Western society (Globman & Katz, 1998). Their move from traditional semi-nomadic life to urban settlements has had social and economic consequences (Abu Saad, 2004). Still, at present, about half of the Bedouin in the south of Israel are living in unrecognized villages with no infrastructure and no planning committee to approve construction permits. Thus, every house that is built is automatically deemed illegal and the government has instituted a massive policy of house demolitions (Abu Saad, 2004). This contributes to the conflicted relations between the Negav Bedouins and the Israeli government (Abu Saad, 2004).

Our research hypotheses are as follows:

1. We hypothesize that individual SOC will be stronger among the majority group, whereas communal SOC will be stronger among the more collectivist culture of Arab Bedouins (Braun-Lewensohn, 2013). Moreover, Jewish youth will participate in more extra-curricular activities (Mahoney et al., 2004) and will be less exposed to violence (Card et al., 2008) because of the

differences in socioeconomic status between the two groups.

- In both groups we expect low socioeconomic status and boys to be linked to more violence (Card et al., 2008), while personal and community SOC are expected to be linked to less exposure to and victimization by violence (Braun-Lewensohn, 2013). We also expect extra-curricular activities to be linked to reduced violence (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) in the Jewish group, but did not hypothesize a relationship in the Arab group because of lack of research in this field (Fig. 1).

Methods

Participants

The study sample comprised 622 Israeli adolescents, aged 14–19 (Jews: $M = 16.01$, $SD = 1.19$; Arabs: $M = 16.56$, $SD = .97$), living in southern Israel. The five participating schools represented different types of communities in southern Israel, namely city, development town,¹ communal village, Bedouin city and Bedouin village. Jews accounted for 42.5 % ($N = 265$) and boys for 42.8 % ($N = 266$) of the sample population (boys within Jewish sample; $N = 118$, 44.5 %; boys within Arab sample; $N = 148$, 41.5 %). The parents of the Jewish adolescents were significantly more educated: whereas 67.1 % of Jewish fathers had above high school education, only 24.9 % of Arab fathers had post-high school education ($\chi^2 = 208.7$, $p \leq .001$). The gap was even greater among mothers: 73.2 % of the Jewish mothers as compared to 16.6 % of Arab mothers had a post-high school education ($\chi^2 = 325.82$, $p \leq .001$). Jewish adolescents also reported higher economic status on parents' job status: 95.8 % of the fathers of the Jewish group were working while only 75.3 % of the Arab fathers had jobs ($\chi^2 = 82.80$, $p \leq .001$). Among the mothers, 84.9 % of Jewish mothers were employed while only 24.4 % of the Arab mothers were employed ($\chi^2 = 255.22$, $p \leq .001$). As for place of birth, a vast majority of Jewish and Arab adolescents were born in Israel as were their parents.

¹ A developmental town is a small town on the periphery of Israel which is usually populated by low income families.

Procedure

After receiving required approvals from the Office of the Chief Scientist in the Ministry of Education and from the school principals, we obtained passive parental consents² and distributed the questionnaires to participating students during regular class. The questionnaires were administered to the students in their native tongues-Hebrew for the Jewish students and Arabic for the Arab students. Completion time for the questionnaire ranged from 30 to 45 min. No identifying personal data were requested in this research.

Measures

We collected *demographic background data* relating to gender, age, parents' level of education and parents' job status.

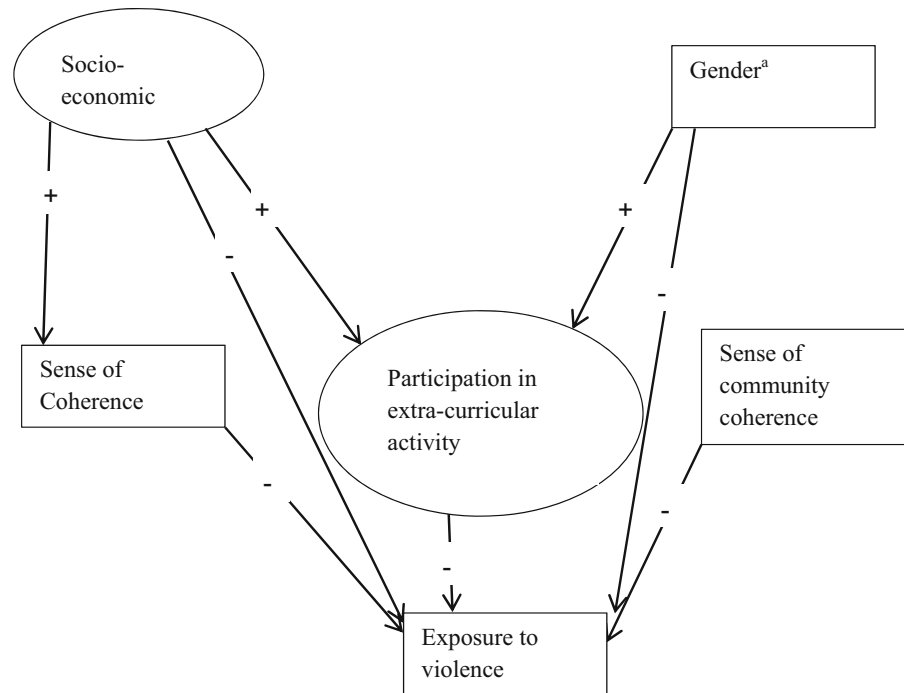
We measured *Sense of Coherence* (SOC; Antonovsky, 1987) using a series of semantic differential items on a seven-point Likert-type scale, with anchoring phrases at each end. High scores indicated a strong SOC. In this study, we measured SOC by the short form scale consisting of 13 items, which is highly correlated to the original long version. The scale includes such items as: "Doing the things you do every-day is..." Answers ranged from 1 "a source of pain and boredom" to 7 "a source of deep pleasure and satisfaction." In the present study, the Cronbach alpha was evaluated separately for the Jewish and Arab groups. For both groups $\alpha = .76$.

Sense of Community Coherence (Braun-Lewensohn & Sagy, 2011)

This consists of 15 items on a seven-point Likert-type scale with anchoring phrases at each end. It translates the major themes of Antonovsky's personal SOC—comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness—into a given community's resources. Examples of items are: "To what extent do you feel that you have influence in your community?"; "this community

² As requested by the Ministry of Education, prior to entering the classes, a letter was sent to the parents explaining the research. Parents who did not want their child to participate in the study were asked to sign a form which was attached to the letter stating their refusal.

Fig. 1 Theoretical model.
^aFemale is expected to be related to more participation in extra-curricular activities and less exposure to violence



offers interesting alternatives for youth in extra-curricular activities”; “I intend to live in this community in the future.” Cronbach alpha was assessed separately for the Jewish ($\alpha = .70$) and Arab ($\alpha = .79$) groups.

Exposure to and Victimization by Violence (Benbenishti, Khuri-Kasabari, & Astor, 2006)

This scale comprises 21 items on a three-point Likert scale 1 “never,” 2 “once or twice,” 3 “three times or more.” It characterizes exposure of the individual to violence and victimization. Students were asked to rate the extent to which they encountered different situations in the last month. Examples of these items include: “someone pushed you on purpose” and “some of your personal belongings were stolen.” Cronbach alpha reliability was evaluated separately for the Jewish ($\alpha = .81$) and Arab ($\alpha = .83$) groups.

Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities

We composed an index for this study that comprised the sum of its constituent items. The index asked adolescents to rate their participation in extra-curricular activities after school hours. It included six

items and answers ranged from 0 “did not participate at all” to 3 “participated regularly at least once a month.” The items were: youth leaders, youth movement, sports, volunteering, youth council, music or dance classes.

Results

Preliminary analysis revealed that 87.2 % of the Jewish and 59.1 % of the Arab adolescents participated in one or more extra-curricular activities. The most prevalent activity among the Jewish group was sports (45.3 %) while among the Arabs it was volunteering (27.5 %). As for exposure to violence, 81.1 % of the Jews and 64.4 % of the Arabs reported being exposed to some kind of violence. The Jewish group was most likely to report that someone had stolen their possessions (45.3 %), while the Arab group was most likely to report that someone had pushed them (27.7 %).

We performed a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance to investigate ethnic differences in regards to the study’s variables. There was a statistically significant difference between Jews and Arabs in the combined dependent variables [$F(4,$

615) = 45.97, $p < .001$; Pillais Trace = .23 partial $\eta^2 = .23$]. When we considered the results for the dependent variables separately, all variables reached statistical significance: sense of personal coherence [$F(1, 615) = 69.07$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$], community sense of coherence [$F(1, 615) = 8.11$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$], exposure to violence [$F(1, 615) = 6.65$, $p \leq .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$], and participation in extra-curricular activity [$F(1, 615) = 70.39$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$]. Thus, our hypothesis was partially confirmed. Jewish adolescents reported stronger personal SOC (Jews: $M = 4.53$, $SD = .76$; Arabs: $M = 3.95$, $SD = .93$) and participated more in extra-curricular activities (Jews: $M = 5.64$, $SD = 3.98$; Arabs: $M = 2.68$, $SD = 3.35$). However, the differences on the other two variables were also stronger and higher among Jewish youth, which was contrary to what we hypothesized. Thus, Jewish adolescents also had a stronger community SOC (Jews: $M = 4.30$, $SD = .77$; Arabs: $M = 4.10$, $SD = .92$) and were more exposed to or victimized by violence (Jews: $M = 5.64$, $SD = 3.98$; Arabs: $M = 2.68$, $SD = 3.35$).

Evaluation of the Path Analysis Model

We used AMOS 5.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999) with maximum likelihood estimation to test the hypotheses that socioeconomic status, gender, coping resources and extra-curricular activities would be associated with exposure to and victimization by violence. We used multi-group analysis to compare the effect of the different variables in each group (Jewish vs. Arab adolescents). For socioeconomic status, we examined four dimensions-fathers' and mothers' education as well as their job status; and for extra-curricular activities, we used the six original items (youth leaders, youth movement, sports, volunteering, youth council, music or dance classes) to create latent variables. For the other scales, we computed the mean separately and used it as a manifest variable. We assessed model fit to the data using the ratio of Chi square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df), incremental fit index (IFI; Bollen, 1989), comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). Acceptable fit is indicated if the χ^2/df ratio is three or less (Carmines & McIver, 1981), IFI and CFI are equal to or greater than .90, and RMSEA is less than .08

(Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The indices were adequate for the final free model: $\chi^2_{(84)} = 157.9$, $p \leq .001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.88$; CFI = .93; IFI = .93; RMSEA = .04 (see Figs. 2, 3).

The overall explanatory power for exposure to violence by the study's variables was higher among the Arab (28 %) than the Jewish (13 %) group. Differences also emerged when comparing the extent to which each of the variables explained exposure to violence. For the Arab adolescents, the variables low socioeconomic status ($-.38$), being male ($-.31$), participating in fewer extra-curricular activities ($-.20$), and low personal SOC ($-.12$) significantly explained increased exposure to violence, whereas for Jewish adolescents, lower personal SOC ($-.26$), being male ($-.12$) and participation in extra-curricular activities (.18) were the significant variables that explained increased exposure to violence. It should be noted that gender also had an indirect effect on exposure to violence (.03) in the Jewish group, and that both socioeconomic status ($-.13$) and gender ($-.03$) had an indirect effect on violence in the Arab group.

In order to test the differences in the strength of the relationships specified above, we compared the effects of the different variables on violence using a nested model. We assigned group-level equality constraints for each effect, thereby allowing comparison of the constrained model fit to that of the free model. Statistical differences were found for the variables as follows: SOC and exposure to violence [$(\chi^2_{(86)} = 187.1)$; $\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 29.2$; $p \leq .001$]; extra-curricular activities and exposure to violence [$(\chi^2_{(86)} = 167.7)$; $\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 9.8$; $p \leq .01$]; gender and exposure to violence [$(\chi^2_{(86)} = 214.5)$; $\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 56.6$; $p \leq .001$]; and socioeconomic status and exposure to violence [$(\chi^2_{(86)} = 198.8)$; $\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 40.9$; $p \leq .001$].

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore differences between Jews and Arabs in Israel regarding exposure to and victimization by violence, as well as personal and community coping resources and participation in extra-curricular activities. We focused on these variables since they have previously been found to explain violence in different countries and cultures (Nilsson et al., 2007; Tanus, 2009).

Fig. 2 The relationships between socio-demographic variables, coping resources, informal education and violence: Results of path analysis for Jewish adolescents. ^a Female was related to more participation in extra-curricular activities and less exposure to violence. * All reported paths are significant at the $p < .05$ level

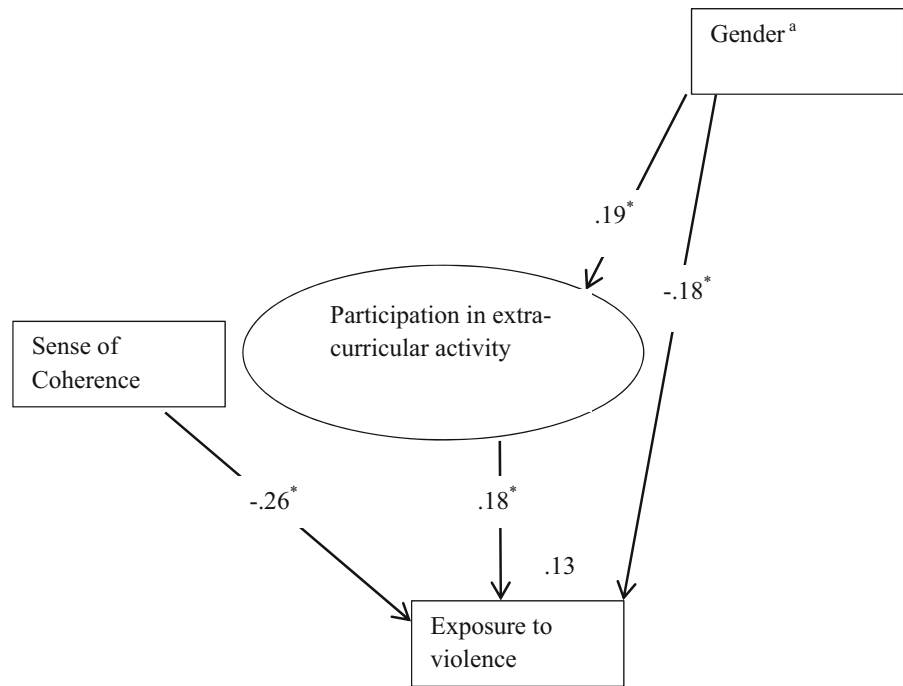
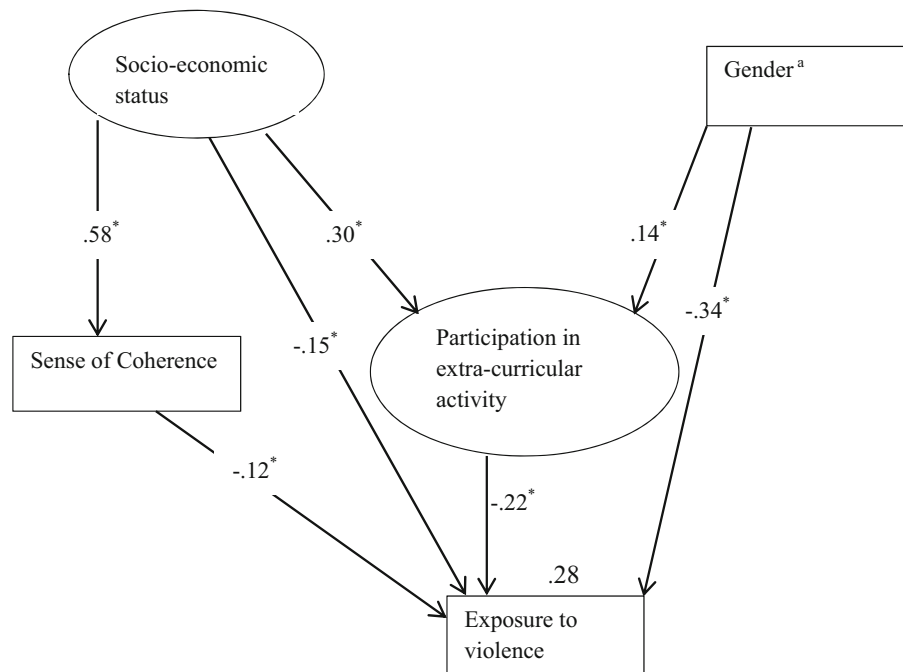


Fig. 3 The relationships between socio-demographic variables, coping resources, informal education and violence: Results of path analysis for Arab adolescents. ^a Female was related to more participation in extra-curricular activities and less exposure to violence. * All reported paths are significant at the $p < .05$ level



Our first hypothesis was partially confirmed, insofar as Jewish adolescents had a stronger personal SOC and participated more in extra-curricular activities. These results confirm previous studies which have

shown that adolescents with low socioeconomic status and those who are a member of minority groups are at a disadvantage relative to adolescents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and members of majority

groups (Mahoney et al., 2004). These results may be due to the fact that parents of low socioeconomic status lack the means to pay the fees required for their children to participate in extra-curricular activities. Moreover, we note that the Arab-Bedouin villages (as opposed to cities) in the Negev, from which approximately a third of the Arab sample came, do not offer many extra-curricular activities to their youth. As for the difference in personal SOC, it seems that the rapid changes in Arab-Bedouin society have created confusion among their youth. This, in addition to being a minority group in conflict with Israel's government, including bitterness over house demolitions sponsored by the government, as well as Bedouin's low socioeconomic status, could all contribute to chaotic life conditions which might lead to the significant differences that we found between these groups.

As mentioned above, our first hypothesis was only partially confirmed. Relative to the Bedouin youth we studied, Jewish adolescents were more likely to report their sense of community coherence and exposure to and victimization by violence. Regarding sense of community coherence, it seems that membership in a minority group that is undergoing rapid change reduces adolescents' ability to manage and understand their community. The most surprising difference we found is the fact that the Jewish majority more often experience violence and are victimized by it, since the Jewish majority has a higher socioeconomic status and should thus be less at risk of such exposure (Card et al., 2008).

Our main objective, however, was to examine the role of demographics, coping resources and extra-curricular activities in explaining exposure to violence in the two groups. For both groups, gender was a significant factor, with boys being more exposed and victimized by violence, which confirmed the results of previous studies (e.g., Card et al., 2008). In addition, both communal and personal coping resources played similar roles for both groups. It seems that in terms of violence, as in other stressful and conflictual events, when individuals have meaning in their lives and the activities in which they take part, and when their environment is understandable and they are able to manage it, they know how to confront these types of situations and to cope well.

The major differences in the two cultures were prominent in the way socioeconomic and extra-

curricular activities explained violence. Socioeconomic status was a significant predictor only for the Arab-Bedouin group, and played both a direct and indirect role via extra-curricular activity and personal SOC. As shown in this study, in Bedouin villages and communities there are few low cost extra-curricular activities and most of the society suffers from poverty and lack of resources. Socioeconomic status has a direct effect on the ability of parents to send their children to these activities. If a family barely has the means to feed their children, extra-curricular activity may not even be considered. When a family can afford these activities, they may ensure that the activities will benefit their children. The picture is completely different in the Jewish group. Our study's most alarming finding was that participation in extra-curricular activities had a *negative* effect in the Jewish group. Perhaps there is some exposure to violence in the different activities in which Jewish youth participate, and youth counselors in charge of these activities may not ensure adequate control. This could stem from several factors: first, the youths may consider that authority figures belong either to the school (teachers) or to the home (parents) (Yariv, 2009), but not counselors affiliated with extra-curricular activities. Second, as found in other studies (Tuinstra, Groothoff, van den Heuvel, & Post, 1998), higher SES may relate to more risky and unhealthy behaviors. Finally, this association could also result from the fact that in areas at risk there are few 'low cost' extra-curricular activities, which may also expose youth participants to more violence.

Limitations

We note two study limitations. First, study data were based only on teenagers' self-reports, and as such were subjective and retrospective. Second, we should also consider the cross-sectional nature of this study as another limitation, since we could only test associations as opposed to prediction.

Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to understand the way personal and communal coping resources as well as extra-curricular activities relate to exposure to and victimization by violence in two ethnic groups living

in neighboring communities. As far as we know, this is a first attempt to examine and compare these populations in terms of potential protective factors relating to exposure to and victimization by violence. Our results appear to support the importance of developing a model of differentiation between various ethnic groups with regard to these relationships. In Arab-Bedouin society, it seems very important to develop and offer facilities and opportunities for extra-curricular activities as a means to reduce exposure to and victimization by violence. In addition, it is important to facilitate participation in such activities for adolescents whose families lack the means to support their attendance. On the other hand, the Jewish adolescents in our sample seemed to benefit more from personal coping resources of SOC; thus, programs should be directed towards enhancing this resource by promoting feelings of security and building safe and respectful environments that encourage social relationships as well as increasing adolescents' feelings that they have the real ability to influence decisions in their surroundings (Krause, 2011). Further research should focus on other dimensions of violence that this study did not address such as cyber violence, which might also be important when examining extra-curricular activities and resources that could reduce exposure to violence.

Conflict of interest There is no conflict of interest.

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