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Can supportive parenting protect against school delay amongst violence-exposed adolescents in South Africa?

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ABSTRACT

Exposure to multiple forms of violence is common amongst adolescents from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in South Africa. Adolescents' exposure to violence at home, in school and in their communities can lead to detrimental outcomes in education. In particular, adolescents who are more frequently exposed to multiple forms of violence are at risk of school delay. This paper investigates the potential for supportive parenting to protect against adolescents' school delay in this context. With this aim, this paper applies structural equation modelling to a sample of 503 adolescents exposed to multiple forms of violence from 40 socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Adolescents' self-report data on child abuse in the family, school and community, and adolescents' perceptions of positive parenting, consistent discipline, good monitoring, parental involvement and social support were analyzed. Results showed that perceptions of more positive parenting and consistent discipline moderated the relationship between more frequent exposure to multiple forms of violence and school delay. Our findings suggest that supportive parenting has the potential to protect against school delay for poly-victimized adolescents in South Africa.

1. Introduction

1.1. Socioeconomic disadvantage and adolescents' school delay in South Africa

School delay (enrolment below the age-appropriate grade) is a major policy concern for education in South Africa. School delay is closely related to the country's high levels of inequality, which affects the quality of education and thus adolescents' school outcomes and their educational opportunities (Department of Basic Education, 2016; Spaull, 2015). Hence, adolescents' academic achievement and progression are profoundly affected by the socioeconomic characteristics of their families, schools and communities (Lam, Ardington, & Leibbrandt, 2011). For instance, more than 30% of the variation in grade 6 reading and mathematics achievement in South Africa can be explained by socio-economic characteristics (Spaull, 2013). This is because adolescents from socioeconomically disadvantaged families and communities mostly attend poorly-resourced schools in rural areas, which are characterized by a lack of safety, inappropriate resources, low quality of teaching and poor learning outcomes (Lam et al., 2011; van der Berg, 2008).

Poorly-resourced schools in disadvantaged areas of South Africa are the least able to overcome the burden of home socioeconomic

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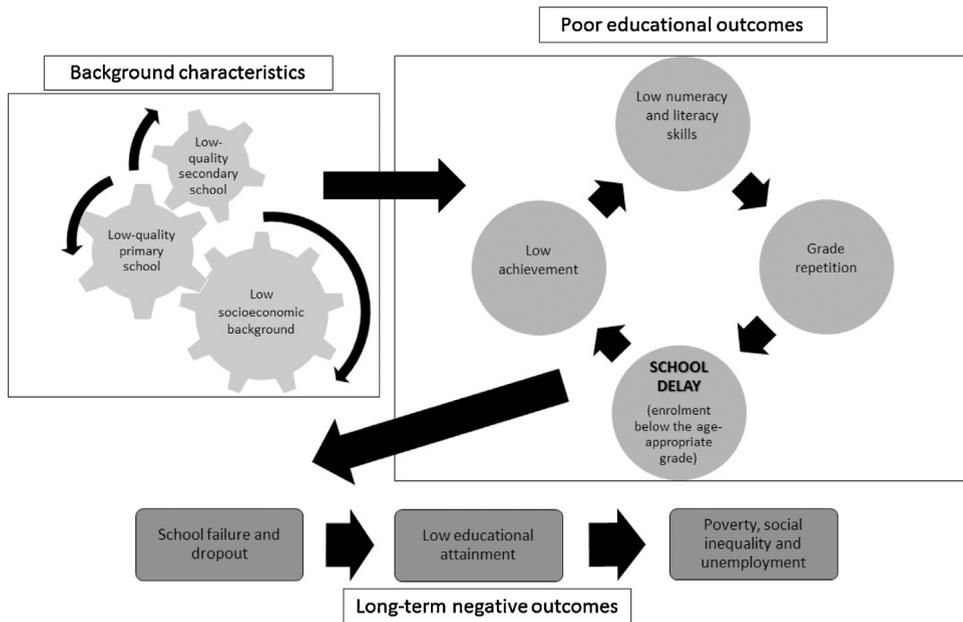


Fig. 1. Background characteristics, poor educational outcomes and long-term negative outcomes: School delay theoretical framework.

Based on Spaul, 2013; Spaul, 2015; Spaul and Kotze, 2015

disadvantage on students' performance (van der Berg, 2008). Thus, by grade 9, adolescents' mathematical knowledge in 60% of the poorest schools in South Africa is already five years behind the knowledge of wealthier adolescents attending more-functional and wealthier schools (Spaul, 2015; Spaul & Kotze, 2015). Therefore, despite high enrolment ratios amongst disadvantaged adolescents, *basic completion* – grade 9 completion- is low (Department of Basic Education, 2016). Accordingly, grade repetition rates are high in South Africa, especially amongst socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Department of Basic Education, 2016). While 30% of the poorest grade 11 students in South Africa have repeated a grade at least once, only 8% of the wealthiest grade 11 students have ever repeated a grade (Branson, Hofmeyr, & Lam, 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2016).

Thus, school delay is an important negative educational outcome affecting many adolescents in South Africa due to the low socioeconomic characteristics of their families and the poorly-resourced low-quality schools which adolescents attend (Spaul, 2013, 2015). Local research indicates that adolescents' school delay is associated with low numeracy and literacy skills and grade repetition, which in turn predicts school dropout and low educational attainment in the long term (Lam et al., 2011; Spaul & Kotze, 2015). Furthermore, studies on the South African education system, labour market and social mobility have identified low educational attainment as a significant determinant of an intergenerational cycle of social inequality characterized by unemployment and poverty (Branson et al., 2014; Spaul, 2015). Fig. 1 summarizes the links between school delay, background characteristics, other poor educational outcomes and long-term negative outcomes in South Africa.

1.2. Adolescents' exposure to violence and school delay in South Africa

Similar to other Sub-Saharan African countries, there is a high prevalence rate of violence against children and adolescents in South Africa (Leoschut & Kafaar, 2017; Meinck, Cluver, Boyes, & Loening-voysey, 2016; Sherr et al., 2016). A 2015, nationally representative survey conducted among adolescents aged 15–18 found that within the home, 34% of adolescents had experienced physical abuse, 21% neglect, 16% emotional abuse, and 23% had witnessed domestic violence in their lifetime (Leoschut & Kafaar, 2017; Ward et al., 2015). Furthermore, 20% of adolescents reported persistent bullying at school, while 50% had witnessed violence take place in the community (Ward et al., 2015).

Repeated victimization and exposure to multiple forms of violence among adolescents are also becoming more common in South Africa (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Leoschut & Kafaar, 2017; Ward et al., 2015). For instance, 64% of all adolescents aged 15–18 in South Africa experienced “*Lifetime Poly-victimization*” – numerous victimizations across different contexts ever in their lives (Leoschut & Kafaar, 2017). Furthermore, exposure to multiple forms of violence is more prevalent amongst adolescents from socioeconomically disadvantaged families and communities in South Africa due to related risk factors such as chronic poverty, unemployment, parental stress, and household overcrowding (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Leoschut & Kafaar, 2017; Meinck, Cluver, & Boyes, 2013, Meinck, Cluver, & Boyes, 2015b; Seedat, Niekerk, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009; Ward et al., 2015). For instance, a recent cross-sectional study in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in the Eastern Cape showed that 94% of adolescents were repeatedly exposed to two or more forms of violence in the past month (Herrero Romero et al., n.d.).

Most of the global and South African evidence on the negative impact of violence against children has focused on its detrimental consequences to children's mental and physical health (Barbarin, Richter, & Wet, 2001; Bruwer et al., 2014; Meinck, Cluver, Orkin

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