

Adolescent Weapon Brandishment and Perception of Danger

Alexis M. Inabinet, MA ¹, John Bolland, PhD ², Mark Beasley, PhD ¹

¹ University of Alabama at Birmingham, ² University of Alabama



Introduction

One of the most consistently reported variables associated with adolescent violence is exposure to violence. Explaining the relationship between feeling unsafe and weapon carrying behaviors may help guide prevention efforts to reduce high rates of violence.

Study Aim: To determine the relationship between perception of danger and weapon brandishment

Method

The Mobile Youth Survey (MYS) is a community research project designed to determine decision making and subsequent health risk among impoverished adolescents. In 1990, 42% of African Americans in the Mobile area lived in high-poverty census tracts, placing Mobile third in the nation in this measure of concentrated poverty.

The responses of 2,335 adolescents that participated in the 2006 wave of the MYS were analyzed in order to identify if there is an association between feeling unsafe and recent weapon brandishment.

Statistical Analysis

Logistic regression was utilized to determine if there is an association between perception of danger and a recent weapon brandishment. Age and gender were used as covariates.

This research was supported, in part, by Grant No. R49-CE000191 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control to the UAB Injury Control Research Center

Statistical Analysis

Perception of Danger was measured by asking participants the following questions:

1. How much of the time do you feel unsafe in your neighborhood?
2. How much of the time do you feel unsafe at school?
3. If you don't carry a knife or gun in my neighborhood, something bad might happen to you.
4. It is not possible to avoid fights in my neighborhood.
5. How much do you worry about gangs in your neighborhood?

Answers were coded as "ever" or "never".

Weapon brandishment was measured by asking participants the following questions:

1. In the past 3 months (90 days), did you carry a knife or razor?
2. In the past 3 months (90 days), did you carry a gun?

Answers were coded as "yes" or "no".

Results

One-fifth of adolescents (N=488, 20.9%) reported carrying a knife or razor, and 388 (16.6%) reported carrying a gun in the past three months.

Adolescents who believe that something bad might happen if a person does not carry a blade in their neighborhood were more than twice as likely to report carrying a blade or gun. Adolescents who reported feeling unsafe in their neighborhood were 1.41 times more likely to carry a blade. Age and gender adjusted results of the relationship between perception of danger and weapon brandishment are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. The relationship between Perception of Danger and carrying a knife or razor in the past three months

Independent Variables	B	S.E.	OR (95% CI)
How much of the time do you feel unsafe in your neighborhood?	.34	.10	1.41 (1.15,1.72)*
How much of the time do you feel unsafe at school?	.22	.11	1.24 (1.01,1.53)*
If you don't carry a knife or gun in my neighborhood, something bad might happen to you.	.73	.11	2.07 (1.67,2.55)*
It is not possible to avoid fights in my neighborhood.	.28	.10	1.32 (1.08,1.62)*
How much do you worry about gangs in your neighborhood?	.28	.11	1.32 (1.06,1.65)*

*p < .05

Table 2. The relationship between Perception of Danger and carrying a gun in the past three months

Independent Variables	B	S.E.	OR (95%CI)
How much of the time do you feel unsafe in your neighborhood?	-.29	.11	.75 (.60,.93)*
How much of the time do you feel unsafe at school?	.03	.12	1.03 (.81,1.30)
If you don't carry a knife or gun in my neighborhood, something bad might happen to you.	.92	.12	2.52 (2.01,3.16)*
It is not possible to avoid fights in my neighborhood.	.24	.11	1.27 (1.02,1.59)*
How much do you worry about gangs in your neighborhood?	.12	.13	1.13 (.88,1.45)

*p < .05

Conclusion

Adolescents living in impoverished communities who felt unsafe were more likely to report recent weapon brandishment. Intervention programs designed to improve overall safety may be most effective if they simultaneously alter threat perception.