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The Effects of Exposure to Violence on Aggressive Behavior: The Case of Arab and Jewish Children in Israel

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The impact of exposure to violence in the context of families, neighborhoods, and peer groups on pre-adolescents and adolescents has been widely studied. However, very little is known on the effect of exposure to political conflict and violence on children and youth. The literature is specially lacking studies assessing these last effects while controlling for exposure to violence in other contexts. This study evaluates the cumulative impact on Israeli children's aggression of exposure to violence in four social ecological settings: family, school, neighborhood and political conflicts. The effects of exposure to violence in these settings were analyzed separately for the two major ethnic communities in Israel: Jewish and Arab. We examine data collected using face-to-face interviews with children and parents, from the two samples, each of 450 dyads with three age cohorts of children - 8 year olds, 11 year olds, and 14 year olds in 2007. We test the effect of exposure to each type of violence on aggressive behavior while controlling for a variety of personal and demographic covariates. Though both Israeli Arab and Jewish children report considerable exposure to various types of political violence, Jewish children were significantly more exposed to political violence (all types). On the other hand, Arab children were exposed to more community and family conflict and violence. In both ethnic groups, exposure to political violence and to violence in the other ecological contexts had a greater effect on children's aggression than did their demographic characteristics. Gender was the only significant demographic variable in both groups, and parents' income affected (negatively) only Jewish children's aggression. The study highlights the detrimental impact of exposure to political conflict and violence on both Arab and Jewish Israeli children's aggression.

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There is ample empirical evidence as to the ill effects of children's exposure to violence in the social environment on their development, including their aggressive behavior. However, despite longstanding developmental theory underscoring the importance of social influences at different ecological levels or systems (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1999; Sameroff, 1991) such as family violence (e.g., Boxer, Gullan, & Mahoney, in press; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003), community violence (e.g., Guerra, Huesmann, & Spindler, 2003; Schwartz & Gorman, 2003; Schwartz & Proctor, 2000), and school-based violence (e.g., Khoury-Kasabri, Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Flannery, Wester & Singer, 2004; Kumpulainen et al., 1998), little research has cut across these domains (a notable exception is the study of Mrug, Loosier, & Windle, 2008, mentioned later). Only the simultaneous analysis of all the systems can facilitate the understanding of the cumulative of exposure to and unique effects of each of the specific forms of violence.

Further, although studies have been conducted around the world to examine youths' adjustment to ethnic-political violence (see, for example, the 1996 special issue of *Child Development*, volume 67, issue 1), this topic has received little empirical attention in comparison to studies of exposure to violence in neighborhoods, homes, and schools. Yet the scope of this problem is quite broad: In 1996, Ladd and Cairns observed that "large numbers of children are living in societies where ethnic-political violence is a common occurrence – a fact of life" (Ladd & Cairns, 1996, p. 15). Over a decade later, little has changed. Ethnic and political conflicts are raging in many regions around the world, often erupting into extreme acts of violence. This has been the case particularly in Israel and Palestine, where since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000 until the end of July 2007, at least 5,848 people have been killed as a consequence of ethnic-political violence (United Nations, August 31, 2007).

Research on the Impact of Exposure to Ethnic-Political Violence

Several studies have demonstrated the damaging psychosocial effects on youth of exposure to war, terrorism, and ethnic-political violence (La Greca, Silverman, Vernberg, & Roberts, 2002; Leavitt & Fox, 1996) among children from a number of different regions of the world including Iraq (Dyregrov, Gjestad, & Raundalen, 2002), Palestine (Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2002), Israel (Punamäki, 1996), Bosnia (Geltman, Augustyn, Barnett, Klass, & Groves, 2000), Lebanon (Macksoud & Aber, 1996), and Rwanda (Dyregrov, Gupta, Gjestad, & Mukanoheli, 2000). Such studies have shown that exposure to the extreme forms of violence exhibited during those events, and the constant threat of losing loved ones or being killed, are associated contemporaneously and longitudinally with a variety of indicators of maladjustment including post-traumatic stress symptoms, anxiety, and depression.

Ongoing ethnic-political violence provides a context in which children may be exposed to any number of specific violent acts as both witnesses and victims.

Children growing up in those contexts may feel as though their safety is constantly jeopardized; their daily routines might consistently be disrupted; and they might live in constant fear regarding the safety of their families and friends. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of research on the effects of exposure to ethnopolitical violence has focused on outcomes such as psychopathology, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and other clinically significant and diagnosable conditions with the emphasis primarily on criterion measures of psychopathology (e.g., Al-Krenawi, Graham, & Schwail, 2002; Barber, 2001; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Macksoud & Aber, 1996; Punamäki, Qouta, & Sarraj, 2001; Rousseau, Drapeau, & Platt, 1999; Sagi, 2002; Slone, Lobel, & Gilat, 1999).

However, substantial portions (up to 67 %) of children exposed to ethnopolitical violence might not, in fact, show any clinical symptoms (Sack, Clarke, & Seeley, 1996). Cairns and Dawes (1996) thus noted the distinct lack of research on subclinical conditions in children from politically violent environments. In the present investigation, we focus on one outcome measure: aggressive behavior. We treat this outcome as continuous variable rather than through dichotomized indicators of psychiatric diagnosis in order to consider a broader range of association between exposure and aggression.

Research on Other Forms of Violence in the Social Environment

The effects of violence exposure (i.e., *witnessing* and/or being *victimized* by violent acts at home, at school, and in the community) on child and adolescent psychosocial functioning have been intensely investigated (for reviews, see Appel & Holden, 1998; Holden, Geffner, & Jouriles, 1998; Kitzmann et al., 2003; Lynch, 2003; Mazza & Overstreet, 2000; Osofsky, 1997; Trickett & Schellenbach, 1998). As the literature base is extensive, only a selection of studies is presented here. Studies have shown that exposure to physical violence is associated with a variety of negative adjustment outcomes including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms, academic problems, and aggression (e.g., Carlson, 1990; Guerra et al., 2003; Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Mahoney, Donnelly, Boxer, & Lewis, 2003; Martinez & Richters, 1993; Nansel et al., 2001; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993; Schwartz & Gorman, 2003; Schwartz & Proctor, 2000; Singer, Anglin, Song, & Lunghofer, 1995; Slovak & Singer, 2001). Some consensus seems to have emerged that direct victimization by violence probably has a more detrimental effect than does witnessing violence. For example, Mahoney et al. (2003) found that adolescents' symptoms of psychopathology were more reliably linked to their experiences of harsh physical punishment by parents even when accounting also for their experiences as witnesses to interparental physical aggression. Other research suggests that witnessing and victimization might produce similar outcomes, but tied to distinct internal mediating mechanisms: Schwartz and Proctor (2000) demonstrated that both channels of exposure to community violence were linked to children's aggressive behavior,

but witnessing was linked to social-cognitive variations and victimization was instead related to emotion regulation factors.

Whereas some efforts have been undertaken to examine relative impacts on children's adjustment of witnessing and victimization as discrete experiences with violence (Schwartz & Proctor, 2000), there has been exceptionally little effort dedicated to exploring the converging impact of multiple contexts of exposure on adjustment. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1999) developmental model, children should be affected by violence present at multiple levels of their social ecology; relatedly, cumulative risk models imply that increased risk from multiple unique sources should be associated in a linear fashion with psychopathology (e.g., Rutter, 1979; Sameroff, 2000). A recent study (Mrug, Loosier, & Windle, 2008) examined the relationships between violence exposure in three different contexts (home, school, and community) and externalizing and internalizing outcomes in early adolescents. Both contexts-specific and cumulative effects on adjustment were reported.

Theoretical Explanations

Taken together these prior studies all suggest that exposure of children to extreme political violence may have substantial effects in increasing externalizing behaviors. Furthermore, such a conclusion is supported by the cognitive-ecological theorizing that we have proposed to explain the long-term development of aggressive behaviors in children (Dubow, Huesmann, & Boxer, in press; Huesmann, 1997, 1998). The social-cognitive information-processing model for the development of aggression (Bandura, 1986; Berkowitz, 1990; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Huesmann, 1988, 1997, 1998) emphasizes the role of observational learning in teaching the child scripts for how to behave, schemes about the kind of world in which they live, and normative beliefs about what is appropriate and inappropriate. Imitation is now recognized as perhaps the most powerful learning mechanism of all for children acquiring social behaviors. However, what a child learns from what the child observes depends crucially on the child's interpretations of what the child sees. What is important is the cognitive evaluation of events taking place in the child's environment, how the child interprets these events, with whom the child identifies (Huesmann et al., 2003), and how competent the child feels in responding in different ways (Boxer, Goldstein, Musher-Eizenman, Dubow, & Heretick, 2005). The child is most likely to acquire scripts and other cognitions demonstrated by charismatic models (be they in the family, the school, the community, or the mass media) with whom the child identifies and that seem realistic to the child for the world in which the child lives. Once acquired, these cognitions provide a basis for stability of behavior tendencies across a variety of situations.

While these social-cognitive models focus on the mediational role of various cognitive structures and processes in linking ecological inputs to behavioral outputs, emotion factors still are meaningful within this general framework. Recent

integrative theoretical work has illuminated links between emotion and cognition at various steps of information processing in response to social conflict (e.g., negative arousal priming hostile cognitions; Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004). Perhaps most salient with respect to ethnic-political violence, however, is the extent to which emotional desensitization (i.e., reduced or flattened affective arousal in response to violence; see Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007; Huesmann & Kirwil, 2007) might act in concert with aggression-supporting cognition to stimulate aggressive behavior. For example, studies have demonstrated that children exposed to very high levels of violence in their communities show elevated aggression in the absence of emotional distress, or "pathologic adaptation" (Ng-Mak, Salzinger, Feldman, & Steuve, 2004). Such reactions might be facilitated by the gradual desensitization to and normalization of violence in the social ecology, particularly in an environment overshadowed by ongoing, extreme ethnic-political conflict and violence. This theorizing applies equally well to the effects of ethno-political violence, community violence, school violence, and family violence.

The Present Study

While the theory outlined above suggests that political, community, school, and family violence should simultaneously affect aggressive behavior, few studies have examined this issue. By doing so, we intend to fill the lacuna in this field of research. Our goal for the present study was threefold: First, we wanted to assess the magnitude of the relation in children between their own encounters with political violence and their own aggressive behavior. Second, we wanted to estimate the unique relation of political violence with aggression within a broader risk matrix incorporating exposure to school, community, and family violence. Thus, in the present study, we included measures of exposure to violence in the family, neighborhood, and peer group to examine the unique effect of political violence exposure as well as the additive impact of exposure in those other salient developmental contexts. Finally, we wanted to compare the strength of the relations we observe in Arab-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli children.

Based on prior research and the theory outlined above, we expected to find relations between exposure to every kind of violence and aggressive behavior that were independent of exposure to the other kinds of violence even though we also expected exposure to different kinds of violence (political, community, school, and family) to be correlated. We also expect that, while exposure to violence may vary across the populations, significant relations between exposure and aggression will be found in both populations of children.

Jews and Arabs in Israel: Socioeconomic, Cultural and Political Differences

As our study was conducted on Jewish and Arab children in Israel, some basic characteristics of these two communities are outlined in the following lines. The two major ethnic groups in Israeli society are the Jewish majority and the Arab

minority. Arabs comprise 19.1 % of the Israeli population. Approximately 82 % of them are Sunni Muslims, about 9 % are Christians of various denominations, and about 9% are Druze (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2003). The geo-political situation of Israel in the Middle East poses a dilemma for the Arab population in the country. The sense of loyalty to their brethren in the occupied territories and in the neighboring countries puts them in conflict with their required civil loyalty to the Jewish state. This internal conflict is exacerbated by the fact that many Israeli Arabs have relatives who fled in the wake of the 1948 war to the neighboring Arab countries or to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, then occupied by Jordan and Egypt, respectively.

The Arab population was for decades a deprived minority in domains like the criminal justice system, occupation, education, etc. (for details, see, among others: Al-Haj & Rosenfeld, 1988; Kretzmer, 1988; Landau, 2006; Rattner & Fishman, 1998; Shavit, 1990). Since the onset of the Al-Aqsa Intifada (in October 2000), the deep division between the Jewish and Arab communities in Israel has widened dangerously and the delicate balance between these two communities has become unsettled. The natural identification of many Israeli Arabs with the Palestinian struggle, and especially the violent events of October 2000, in which 13 Arab citizens were killed by the Israeli police, have served to construct the Jewish-Arab rift within Israel as the potentially most dangerous and violent internal social conflict in Israel (Landau, 2006). A recent reminder of this ongoing conflict were the Acre Jewish-Arab riots in October 2008, the worst bout of inter-communal violence since the start of the second intifada, by Jewish and Arab residents of the northern port city of Acre (Cook, 2008). The extreme intensity of this conflict stems from its multi-faceted nature; being based simultaneously on national, religious, cultural, and economic divisions. Each of these factors, in itself, is enough to fuel a conflict between population groups. The combination of and interplay between these factors thus serves to position this conflict as a particularly acute one.

Of special relevance to this study are the cultural differences between these two ethnic groups. Jewish and Arab children are raised in different cultural contexts. Much of the Arab population in Israel is characterized by traditional patriarchal and authoritarian family values, with an emphasis on extended family, interdependence, and mutual cooperation. In comparison, the Jewish population is mostly characterized by Western family values, with an emphasis on the nuclear family, and independence of family members (for more detailed comparisons between the two ethnic groups in Israel see, among others, Benbenishti, Zeira, Astor, and Khoury-Kassabri, 2002; Haj-Yahia and Ben-Arieh, 2000; Landau, 2006). The above cultural differences are also reflected in recent studies, mainly in the context of schools. Some studies report a higher level of aggression among Arab students (Khoury-Kasabri, Astor & Benbenishti (2009); Zeira, Astor, & Benbenishti, 2003). Others found no differences in victimization between Jewish and Arab students (Khoury-Kasabri, Benbenishti, Astor & Zeira,

2004). On the other hand, in the study of Sherer and Karnieli-Miller (2004), Jewish youth were found to be more aggressive than their Arab counterparts. However, Arab teachers and parents in that study were reportedly more aggressive than their Jewish counterparts.

Method

Sampling Procedures

The data are part of the initial wave of an ongoing longitudinal study of the effects of exposure to conflict and violence on mental health on three cohorts (ages 8, 11, and 14) of youths growing up in the Middle East. The data reported here focus on the initial wave of data collected on the Israeli sample, a sample of 901 children. The Arab group consisted of 450 children: 150 8-year olds (66 girls, 84 boys), 149 11-year olds (69 girls, 80 boys) and 151 14-year olds (79 girls, 72 boys) and one of their parents (67.8 % were mothers). The Jewish group consisted of 451 children: 151 8-year olds (79 girls, 72 boys), 150 11-year olds (73 girls, 77 boys) and 150 14-year olds (94 girls, 56 boys) and one of their parents (87.4 % were mothers).

In order to facilitate comparisons between high and low risk areas, the sampling design included a large proportion of children living in high-risk areas. Thus, of the Arab sample, 6.9 % live in Jerusalem, 69.7 % in the north (close to the Lebanese border), and 23.1 % in central Israel (low conflict area). Of the Jewish sample, 15.1 % live in Jerusalem, 24.9 % in the north, 22.6 % in the south (around the Gaza Strip), 23.5 % in the occupied West Bank, and 13.9 % in central Israel.

Families in the designed areas were randomly sampled. They were approached by one of three ways: (1) Recruitment by phone: random phone calls were made to households in the designated area. The respondents were asked to participate in the project if they had children in the right age; (2) Recruitment by cluster sampling: Within the designated area we randomly selected neighborhoods and streets, the interviewers then went door to door locating families with children fitting the sample criteria and asked them to take part in the project; (3) Non-probability sampling: Interviewees were allowed to recommend families who fit the research criteria. Each family's census data were verified, and if it indeed met the requirements, it was included in the sample. Face to face interviews were scheduled for those who agreed to participate (55 % in the Jewish sample and 65 % in the Arab sample).

Interview Procedures

The interviews of the parent/child were conducted in the families' homes separately and privately; the interviewers read the surveys to the respondents, who indicated their answers, which were then recorded by the interviewer. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

Measures

Demographic Information

Parents responded to standard questions to assess demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, religious affiliation). To assess indices of socioeconomic status, parent education was coded as follows: 1 = illiterate to 10 = doctorate or. For income, parents were asked, "The average Israeli family income is \$ 3,015/month. Is your income: 1 = below average to 5 = way above average".

Exposure to Political Conflict and Violence

Parents of 8-year olds reported on their children's exposure to political conflict and violence, whereas 11- and 14-year old children provided self-reports of their exposure to political conflict and violence. The exposure to political conflict and violence scale includes 18 items adapted from Slone et al. (1999). Respondents indicated the extent to which the child experienced the event in the past year along a 4-point scale (0 = never to 3 = many times). The 18 items comprise the following domains of political conflict and violence events: loss of, or injury to, a friend or family member (e.g., "Has a friend or acquaintance of yours been injured as a result of political or military violence?"); non-violent events (e.g., "How often have you spent a prolonged period of time in a security shelter or under curfew?"); self or significant others participated in political demonstrations (e.g., "How often have you known someone who was involved in a violent political demonstration?"); and witnessed actual violence (e.g., "How often have you seen right in front of you an Israeli being held hostage, tortured, or abused by Palestinians?"). Because of the significant correlations among the four domains of exposure to political conflict/violence (in the Arab sample r s ranged from .17 - .48, median $r = .33$; in the Jewish sample r s ranged from .23 - .44, median $r = .36$), we used a total score in the major analyses that reflects the average of the responses to all 18 items.

The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's α) of all measures are presented in Table 1.

Exposure to Community Violence

The exposure to community violence scale includes 4 items taken from Attar, Guerra, and Tolan (1994) and Barber (1999). Children responded to each item indicating the extent to which they experienced each event in the past year along a 4-point scale (0 = never to 3 = many times). Sample items included: "How often has someone in your family been robbed or attacked by another Israeli?" "How often have you seen or heard a violent argument between your neighbors?"

Table 1
Reliability Coefficients for All Measures (Cronbach's α)

Measure	Number of items	Jewish	Arab
Political violence			
Total	17		
8 years old (parent's report)		.80	.79
11, 14 years old		.70	.73
Loss of, or injury to, a friend or family member	5		
8 years old (parent's report)		.59	.71
11, 14 years old		.48	.81
Non-violent events	6		
8 years old (parent's report)		.58	.58
11, 14 years old		.50	.48
Political demonstrations	3		
8 years old (parent's report)		.56	.49
11, 14 years old		.47	.52
Witnessed actual violence	4		
8 years old (parent's report)		.56	.77
11, 14 years old		.56	.49
Community violence			
Intra-ethnic community conflict	4	.32	.64
School conflict and violence	3	.72	.88
Family conflict and violence			
The Conflict Tactics Scale	6	.78	.91
Children's perception of interparental conflict	6	.36	.56
Aggression			
Peer Nomination of Aggression Inventory	10	.79	.80
Severe Physical Aggression Scale	5	.64	.60
Child Behavior Checklist	20	.89	.89

Exposure to School Conflict and Violence

The exposure to school conflict and violence scale includes 3 items taken from Attar et al. (1994). Children responded to each item indicating the extent to which they experienced each event in the past year along a 4-point scale (0 = never to 3 = many times). Sample items included: "How often have you seen violent physical fights between other kids at school or before or after school?" "How often have you seen a kid attacking another kid to take something from them at school or before or after school?"

Exposure to Family Conflict and Violence

Three measures were used to assess exposure to family conflict and violence. 1) A single item was adapted from Attar et al. (1994) to which children responded along a 4-point scale (0 = never to 3 = many times): "How often have you seen or heard a violent argument between your adult relatives?" 2) *The Conflict Tactics Scale* (CTS; Straus, Giles, & Steinmetz, 1979; Straus & Hamby, 1997) was used to assess parents' reports of inter-parental conflict and violence. The CTS is a measure of the ways in which adults in a marital or similar relationship behaved towards one another in the past year during conflict. The measure includes items describing aggressive acts along a continuum of severity from mild (e.g., yelling) to severe (e.g., threatening with a knife, beating up), with response options ranging from 0 = 0 times to 9 = 9 or more times. We used 6 items from the CTS (e.g., thrown something at your spouse; pushed, grabbed, or shoved your spouse; kicked, bit, or hit your spouse with a fist). 3) We adapted items from the *Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale* (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) by modifying them into a parent report of conflict that the child is exposed to in the home. Parents responded to 6 items taken from the original measure's frequency and intensity subscales, to describe how much each statement is not true (0), somewhat true (1), or true (2) in relation to "how your child sees adults in your home acting during disagreements." Sample items included: "My child never sees the adults in our home arguing" (reverse-scored); "My child sees the adults in our home break or throw things during an argument."; and "My child sees the adults in our home push or shove each other during an argument."

A composite score was computed based on the mean of the standardized scores of these three exposures to family conflict and violence measures.

Children's Aggression

Three measures were used to assess children's aggression:

1) A modified version of the *Peer Nomination of Aggression Inventory* (Eron, Walder, & Lefkowitz, 1971) was administered as a self-report measure for children. The 10 items are based on the original peer-rated index of general aggressive behavior. Children provided ratings on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 = "Never" to 3 = "Almost always" on items measuring *verbal* aggression (e.g., "How often do you say mean things?"), *physical* aggression (e.g., "How often do you push or shove other people/kids?"), *indirect* aggression (e.g., "How often do you make up stories and lies to get others into trouble?"), and *acquisitive* aggression (e.g., "How often do you take others' things without asking?").

2) Children were administered the *Severe Physical Aggression scale* (Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1984; Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder, & Huesmann, 1977). Respondents indicated how often in the last year they had engaged in each behavior in the past year along a 4-point scale (0 = never to 3 = 5 or more

times). Sample items were: "How often have you punched or beaten someone?" and "How often have you choked someone?"

3) Parents reported on their children's aggression using the 20-item aggression scale from the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). Parents rated the extent to which their child displayed each problem within the past 6 months (e.g., "argues a lot," "threatens people," "gets in many fights") on a 3-point scale (i.e., 0 = "Not true (as far as you know)," 1 = "Somewhat or sometimes true," and 2 = "Very true or often true").

A composite score was computed based on the mean of the standardized scores of these three child aggression measures.

Statistical Analysis

Results are divided to three parts: first we present the descriptive statistics of the variables in the research and compare between the two samples using T test. We then go on to show the relation between those variables, and last, we use hierarchical regression to examine our hypothesis and evaluate the cumulative and unique effect of each ecological system.

Since both Pearson correlations and linear regression demands that the variables entered distribute normally, Kolgomorov-Smirnov test was conducted (Massey, 1951). Results showed that both dependent and independent measures did not meet this requirement, and square root transformation was in need.

Results

Descriptive Statistics: Demographics

Arab sample: About half (50.2 %) reported their religion as Muslim, 44.2 % as Christian and 5.6 % as others (Druze, Chercasian, etc.). Almost all parents (95.2 %) were married; As to reported parents' education, 55.4 % did not complete high school; 16.1 % have a high school degree, and 28.6 % reported having higher academic education. As to reported income, 42.5 % had income below the Israeli average, 37.1 % had average income, and 20.5 % were above average. Parents reported that on average, there were 3.17 ($SD = 1.39$) children in the home.

Jewish sample: Almost all (92.3 %) were married. A small proportion (18.7 %) reported not having high school degree, 30.9 % have a high school degree, and 50.5% reported having higher academic education. As to income, 41.7 % reported their incomes as below the Israeli average, 28 % reported it as average, and 30.3 % reported it as above average. The average number of children per household was 3.59 ($SD = 1.83$).

Descriptive Statistics for Variables in the Study

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of the variables included in the study, by ethnic origin. As can be seen, in both samples there is a rather high proportion of

exposure to political violence. However, in all items, Jews demonstrated higher levels of exposure to this type of violence. Turning to non-political contexts, it is revealed that almost all children in both groups have been exposed to school violence with no significant difference between them. Arab children were more exposed to community violence as well as to family violence. With regard to aggressive behavior, Arab children reported higher levels of moderate aggression. However, no significant difference was found on a composite measure including these three scales.

Table 2
Exposure to Violence across Contexts in the Jewish and Arab Samples

Context	Measure	Jewish	Arab	t
Political conflict and violence				
	Loss of, or injury to, a friend or family member	26.40 %	10.40 %	2.78 **
	Non-violent events	87.30 %	58.20 %	11.49 **
	Political demonstrations	52.70 %	44.90 %	2.21 *
	Witnessed actual violence	31.10 %	20.70 %	8.55 **
Community violence				
	Intra-ethnic community conflict	49.40 %	75.80 %	-11.54 **
School conflict and violence				
		93.60 %	86.20 %	-0.84
Family conflict and violence				
	Saw or heard a violent argument between their adult relatives	16.90 %	53.60 %	-12.27 **
	Exposed to at least some inter-parental conflict	95.30 %	97.30 %	-9.82 **
	Exposed to spousal physical conflict (CTS)	13.60 %	25.40 %	-12.54 **
Aggressive behavior				
	CBC ^a	4.70 %	6.40 %	-3.63 **
	PNA ^b	8.20 %	11.80 %	0.59
	Severe physical aggression ^c	15.30 %	11.80 %	0.93

^aOn average the items were "somewhat true" or "very true",

^bOn average they engaged in the behaviors at least "sometimes",

^cOn average they engaged in the behaviors at least once in the past year.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Gender Differences

Tables 3 and 4 show the means and standard deviations of the key variables for each gender. As these tables show, in both samples, boys are higher in aggression. Among the Jewish sample boys were also significantly more exposed to school violence.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Sex Differences in the Major Study Variables in the Arab Group

Variable			Girls		Boys		T-test
	Min.	Max.	M	SD	M	SD	
Exposure to political conflict/ violence	0	3	.38	.30	0.40	.38	0.45
Community violence	0	3	.67	.59	.64	.61	0.39
School violence	0	3	1.90	1.01	1.81	1.05	1.1
Family violence ^a	-2.61	15.40	.79	2.29	.85	2.46	.25
Aggression ^b	-3.12	9.75	-.57	2.07	.65	2.58	5.36 **

^aFamily violence is the sum of the standardized scores for three variables (a single item assessing family violence; the Conflict Tactics Scale; and the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale).

^bAggression is the sum of the standardized scores for three variables (the modified self report version of the Peer Nomination of Aggression Inventory; Severe Physical Aggression; and the aggression subscale of the Child Behavior Checklist).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics and Sex Differences in the Major Variables in the Jewish Group

Variable			Girls		Boys		T-test
	Min.	Max.	M	SD	M	SD	
Exposure to political conflict/ violence	0	3	.58	.33	0.62	.39	1.20
Community violence	0	3	.24	.34	.31	.37	1.84
School violence	0	3	1.58	.81	2.07	.78	5.44 **
Family violence ^a	-2.61	8.68	-0.91	1.24	-.71	1.51	1.50
Aggression ^b	-3.12	9.54	-.60	1.88	.56	2.43	5.66 **

^{a, b} See Table 3

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Correlations between Exposure to Conflict and Violence and Children's Adjustment

Tables 5 and 6 show the correlations between exposure to conflict and violence and children's aggression. These tables reveal a consistent pattern of significant but generally modest correlations between exposure to conflict/violence and children's aggression. In all sub-samples, all correlations are significant. In the Arab group: Boys: r s ranged from .26 - .45, median $r = .38$; Girls: r s ranged from .30 - .35, median $r = .32$. In the Jewish group: Boys: r s ranged from .20 - .33, median $r = .28$; Girls: r s ranged from .20 - .33, median $r = .27$.

Table 5

Correlations among Exposure to Conflict/Violence across Contexts and Aggression for Boys (Below the Diagonal) and for Girls (Above the Diagonal) in the Arab Group

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Exposure to political conflict/violence		.38 **	.34 **	.22 **	.32 **
2. Community violence	.42 **		.55 **	.47 **	.31 **
3. School violence	.33 **	.47 **		.40 **	.30 **
4. Family violence	.29 **	.45 **	.30 **		.35 **
5. Aggression	.26 **	.41 **	.45 **	.35 **	

+ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 6

Correlations among Exposure to Conflict/Violence across Contexts and Aggression for Boys (Below the Diagonal) and for Girls (Above the Diagonal) in the Jewish Group

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Exposure to political conflict/violence		.27 **	.11 +	.05	.26 **
2. Community violence	.23 **		.19 *	.20 *	.33 **
3. School violence	.20 **	.32 **		.21 **	.20 **
4. Family violence	.09	.22 **	.20 **		.28 **
5. Aggression	.20 **	.32 **	.33 **	.23 **	

+ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Examining the Joint Contributions of Exposure to Conflict/Violence across Contexts to Predicting Children's Aggression

Hierarchical regression was computed to examine the joint contributions of exposure to conflict/violence across contexts to predicting aggression (Table 7). In this regression, we entered demographic variables (child's gender, age, parents' income, and average level of parents' education) in Step 1. Next, in Step 2, we entered exposure to political conflict/violence. Finally, in Step 3, we entered exposure to conflict/violence in the other contexts (i.e., community, school, and family).

Table 7 shows that the demographic variables entered in Step 1 accounted for a significant portion of the variance in aggression for both Jewish (8%) and Arab (8%) respondents. In both groups, higher levels of aggression were significantly related to boys. In the Jewish group it was also related to older children and to lower parents' income. Among Arab children, aggression was related to lower parents' education.

In Step 2, exposure to political conflict/violence accounted for a noticeable increase in variance for Arab children (10%) and a much lower increase among the Jewish group (2%); Higher levels of exposure to political conflict/violence were related to higher levels of aggression. Finally, in Step 3, exposure to conflict/violence in other contexts contributed an additional significant amount of incremental variance in predicting aggression for both Jewish (13%), and Arab

(9%) children. Higher levels of exposure to conflict/violence in the family, school and community predicted high levels of aggression in both group. It is noteworthy that among Jewish children age didn't remain a significant predictor of aggression after the measurements of exposure to conflict/violence were introduced to the model. In the Arab sample, the same applied to parent's education.

Table 7

Hierarchical Regressions in the Arab and Jewish Groups: Predicting Aggression from Demographic Variables, Exposure to Political Conflict/Violence and Exposure to Conflict and Violence in Other Contexts

Variables/step	Jewish			Arab		
	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β
Step 1						
Gender	.242 **	.226 **	.174 **	.235 **	.223 **	.238 **
Child's age	.112 *	.052	.052	-.002	-.060	-.040
Parental education ^a	.011	-.004	.041	-.087	-.084	-.017
Parental income ^b	-.147 **	-.134 **	-.125 **	-.049	-.047	-.054
Step 2						
Exposure to political conflict		.214 **	.126 **		.301 **	.138 **
Step 3						
Community			.203 **			.115 *
Family			.154 **			.160 **
School			.161 **			.226 **
R ² change for step	.09 **	.04 **	.12 **	.07 **	.09 **	.13 **

^aParental education was the average of the two parents' levels of education: 1 = illiterate to 10 = doctorate or law degree.

^bParental income was coded as follows: 1 = below average to 5 = way above average.
+ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

In this study, we collected data on the exposure of 901 8 to 14-year-old Jewish and Arab Israeli children to political conflict/violence as well as violence in other contexts. We also collected data on their aggressive behavior. Our aims were to evaluate the relation of exposure to political violence to aggressive behavior in these ethnic groups, and to examine the unique effects of exposure to political violence within a broader risk matrix that also included exposure to community, family, and school violence.

Significant differences were found between the two groups in their exposure to political and other types of violence, as well as in the severity of their aggressive behavior. In general, though both groups report considerable exposure to various types of political violence, Jewish children were significantly more exposed to all types of political violence. On the other hand, Arab children were more exposed to community and family conflict and violence. These differences may reflect cultural as well as socioeconomic differences between the two groups. However, they did not affect the basic relationship found in both groups between exposure to violence in the four ecological settings and their level of aggression.

As to the children's aggressive behavior, Arab parents rated their children as more aggressive than their Jewish counterparts. However, no differences were found between the two groups regarding self reported aggression. This finding is in line with the study of Khoury-Kassabri et al. (2004) who found no differences in victimization to aggression in schools between Jewish and Arab children.

It is worth mentioning that, in spite of the aforementioned differences, in both ethnic groups, exposure to political violence and to violence in the other ecological contexts had a greater effect on the children's aggression than the demographic variables. Gender was the only significant demographic variable in both groups, and parents' income affected (negatively) only Jewish children's aggression.

In general, this study highlights the potentially detrimental impact of exposure to political conflict and violence on both Arab and Jewish Israeli children's aggression. As noted earlier, political conflict and violence are persistent ecological stressors for children not only in Israel but in many other parts of the world as well. Whereas published studies on the negative impact of violence in the family, neighborhood, and peer group are common, the current study adds to our knowledge by illuminating the psychological and behavioral results of persistent exposure to political conflict and violence.

A more comprehensive understanding of the effects of exposure to violence (political and other) on children's aggression also requires clarifying the role of mediating variables, such as their normative belief with regard to aggression in general and aggression towards outgroups in particular. This should be addressed in future research.

We were limited in this investigation by the cross-sectional nature of our data, and estimating the relation of adjustment to violence exposure has some caveats in the absence of a longitudinal design. For example, Richards and her colleagues have observed that youth with elevated antisocial behavior are more likely over time to encounter violence in the community than are youth with lower levels of antisocial behavior (Richards et al., 2004). Further, not modeling behavior-genetic effects and accounting for cross-generational relations can temper conclusions regarding the role of family violence in youth adjustment (Dubow, Huesmann, & Boxer, 2003). However, given that many of the items on

our political violence measure represent phenomena largely out of the control of individual youth that might occur fairly randomly, this study does appear to support the conclusion that youth are detrimentally impacted by their experiences with political conflict and violence.

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