Latino Adolescents’ Community Violence Exposure: After-school Activities and *Familismo* as Risk and Protective Factors

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**Abstract**

Low-income, urban adolescents are exposed to extremely high rates of witnessing and being victimized by community violence. Such violence exposure presents serious implications for youth’s development and psychological well-being. In a sample of 223 ninth-grade Latino adolescents, we examine: (1) what types of after-school activity participation increase or reduce adolescents’ risk for violence exposure and (2) the role of the cultural value of *familismo* in moderating the impact of violence exposure on adolescents’ psychological well-being. Our results indicate that spending unstructured leisure time with peers and participating in non-school sports and non-school clubs were associated with higher levels of community violence exposure, whereas adhering to the cultural value of *familismo* was associated with lower levels of violence exposure. Additionally, *familismo* moderated the positive association between violence exposure and depressive symptoms, but not posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. Implications of these results are discussed.

**Keywords:** community violence; extracurriculars; *familismo*; Latino

**Introduction**

Adolescents living in US cities are exposed to extremely high rates of community violence (Dempsey, 2002; Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2004). Moreover, a substantial body of research confirms that chronic community violence exposure is associated with a number of psychological consequences for both victims and witnesses (see Foster & Brooks-Gunn, 2009, for review), such as behavioral problems and delinquency (Gorman-Smith et al., 2004), depression (Dempsey, 2002), and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Ozer & Weinstein, 2004; Scarpa, Haden, & Hurley, 2006). Compared with other age groups, victimization by crime occurs most frequently among adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15 (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009). The higher rates of community violence exposure as well as the more serious consequences that adolescents tend to experience, compared with younger children, make adolescence a key developmental period in which to investigate these phenomena (Fowler, Tompsett, Braciszewski, Jacques-Tiura, & Baltes, 2009).

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To date, much of the research on adolescent community violence exposure has focused on African-Americans (e.g., Goldner, Peters, Richards, & Pearce, 2011; Richards et al., 2004); however, Latino adolescents in the USA are likewise disproportionately poor and likely to live in urban, high-crime neighborhoods (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2007). According to US census data (Macartney, 2011), 32 percent of Latino children live below the poverty threshold, compared with 17 percent of non-Hispanic Whites, and Latino youth represent the fastest growing group of youth in the USA. Such statistics highlight the importance of addressing the needs of this vulnerable population. Further, like adolescents of other racial/ethnic minority groups, Latino youth witness significantly more community violence than non-Hispanic Whites, on average (Hanson et al., 2006). Given that Latino youth may experience different types of violence at different rates than other racial/ethnic groups, there may also be different predictors of violence exposure and unique cultural strengths that buffer the negative sequelae of violence exposure (Ozer & Weinstein, 2004).

**Risk and Protective Factors for Adolescents’ Community Violence Exposure**

Although it is important to identify protective factors for youth following exposure to community violence, it is equally critical to identify ways to reduce or prevent exposure to violence before it occurs, to avert both the consequences and the violence exposure itself. Preventing the source of psychological distress before it develops is clearly the most effective way to eliminate the effects of violence exposure on adolescents’ well-being (Kliwer et al., 2004; Luthar & Goldstein, 2004). Eliminating neighborhood violence is a large-scale task requiring the resources of public health agencies, government officials, and law enforcement groups. However, psychologists can contribute by identifying factors and processes that protect adolescents from exposure to community violence and those that place others within the same neighborhoods at greater risk. Despite the need for this type of research, few researchers have examined factors that buffer youths’ risk of exposure (e.g., Gorman-Smith et al., 2004). Therefore, the first goal of the present study is to identify the risk and protective factors for adolescents’ exposure to community violence.

Many studies have focused on demographic characteristics as risk and protective factors for community violence exposure (Richters & Martinez, 1993), such as socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, gender, and age (e.g., Gorman-Smith et al., 2004; Stein, Jaycox, Kataoka, Rhodes, & Vestal, 2003). It is well established, for example, that poor, urban, racial minority youth are at greater risk for violence exposure; however, other risk and protective factors may be more amenable to change through intervention. It is, thus, imperative that we identify non-demographic factors that differentiate youth who witness and experience more vs. less violence while living in similar neighborhoods.

**After-school Activities: Employment and Unstructured Time with Peers**

Drawing upon the ecological/transactional model of community violence (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993), increasing autonomy and independence offers young adolescents greater freedom to select their own leisure activities and thereby influence their everyday experiences (Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006). We propose that the activities in which urban, Latino adolescents spend their after-school time (at school, in their community,
or in family contexts) involve practical, everyday choices that may directly affect their exposure to urban violence. Indeed, most exposure to violence, victimization, and delinquent activity among adolescents occurs in the after-school hours, peaking around 1500 h (Newman, Fox, Flynn, & Chriteson, 2003). Hence, this study examines several protective and risk factors that may affect adolescents’ community violence exposure after school: part-time employment, unstructured time with peers, extracurricular activities, and *familismo*.

Neighborhood activities, such as part-time employment, may protect adolescents from community violence by keeping youth occupied with work in a safe place. However, having a job is also linked to negative adolescent outcomes, such as substance use, problem behaviors, promiscuity, and teenage parenting (Capizzano, Tout, & Adams, 2000). In fact, one group of researchers found that part-time employment was actually associated with greater levels of victimization (Capizzano et al., 2000). Clearly, further research is needed to determine the role of employment in adolescent community violence exposure.

Youth often spend after-school time in unsupervised activities with friends. Using experience sampling method, Goldner et al. (2011) reported that time spent with older peers and time spent in public outdoor places (not, e.g., private porches) was associated with greater exposure to community violence. Moreover, such unstructured, outdoor time with peers is linked to behavioral and academic problems for low-income adolescents in dangerous neighborhoods (Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999; Richards et al., 2004), but not necessarily for middle-income youth (Kerrebrock & Lewit, 1999). These findings suggest that unsupervised leisure time may be detrimental because of the danger youth experience in their neighborhoods in the absence of protective supervision (Pettit et al., 1999). In fact, Richards et al. (2004) found that community violence exposure mediated the relation between unmonitored time spent with peers and adolescent delinquency, suggesting that unstructured peer time may be an especially potent risk factor for adolescents’ exposure to community violence.

**Extracurricular Activity Involvement**

Participation in extracurricular activities has been linked with a host of positive developmental indicators, including psychological well-being, academic performance, social identity formation, moral development, and emotion regulation (Larson & Brown, 2007; Mahoney et al., 2006; Wood, Larson, & Brown, 2009). Extracurricular activities, in general, are also associated with fewer problem behaviors and less time with deviant peers (Barber, Stone, & Eccles, 2010; Hardaway, McLooy, & Wood, 2012; Mahoney et al., 2006). Indeed, one study found that adolescents’ extracurricular activity involvement was associated with less exposure to community violence (Richards et al., 2004). However, low-income, urban youth spend significantly less time in organized activities than their higher SES, suburban counterparts (Pedersen & Seidman, 2005). Poor parents may restrict adolescents’ participation in activities due to difficulties with transportation and high program costs.

Although extracurricular activity involvement is generally protective for urban youth, research has demonstrated that developmental outcomes depend on the specific types of activities in which youth participate. Thus, a critical next step for researchers is to assess involvement in a range of individual activities not simply overall activity participation (Barber et al., 2010). For instance, participation in prosocial activities,
such as volunteering and religious groups, is consistently linked with positive adjustment among youth (Eccles & Barber, 1999). In contrast, outcomes for participants of performing arts activities are more diverse, including both higher rates of risky behaviors as well as better academic outcomes (Barber et al., 2010; Eccles & Barber, 1999).

The impact of activity participation may, to some extent, depend on the activity’s context and level of structure. For example, although the involvement in school-based clubs is consistently associated with positive academic outcomes (Eccles & Barber, 1999), non-school programs may actually promote behavior problems among participants (Mahoney, Stat tin, & Magnusson, 2001; Pedersen & Seidman, 2005). Some community ‘drop-in’ centers offer youth after-school activities but provide limited structure and adult supervision (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002), possibly permitting more exposure to violence in the community. Sports are also associated with alcohol use and delinquency, perhaps because of heightened opportunities for unstructured socializing with friends and deviant peers (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). Therefore, like non-school clubs, participation in sports—especially community-based sports that occur outside of school—may be linked to greater violence exposure. Given the differential risks and benefits of particular activities, our study examines each type of activity separately as it relates to violence exposure.

Familismo as a Protective Factor

By identifying the moderators of the link between violence exposure and mental health outcomes, researchers have uncovered protective mechanisms that buffer the impact of community violence exposure on adolescents’ well-being (Ceballo, Ramirez, Hearn, & Maltese, 2003; Dempsey, 2002). To shed light on protective factors specifically addressing Latino adolescents, one goal of the present study is to investigate the Latino cultural value of familismo as directly related to adolescents’ violence exposure and as a moderator of the relation between community violence exposure and psychological well-being. Despite the enormous diversity that exists among Latino families, certain cultural values, like familismo, are among the commonalities frequently shared across Latino families (Cruz-Santiago & Ramirez Garcia, 2011). In particular, familismo entails having a strong sense of unity and loyalty to one’s family, prioritizing family over personal needs, and relying upon family for instrumental and social support (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). In our study, we concur with Halgunseth et al. (2006) and others (Halberstadt & Lozada, 2011) that the value of familismo is distinct from specific parenting strategies but that it most likely underlies many parenting decisions for Latino parents. Although familismo may contribute to positive parenting, it is conceptualized as an overarching construct encompassing values and belief systems.

According to the ecological/transactional model of community violence, protective factors at any ecological level may compensate for the effects of risk factors at the same and other levels (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993). Consequently, the macrolevel cultural factor of familismo may protect against violence exposure by making the family context an appealing alternative to spending time in the neighborhood (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). For instance, youth who feel a strong sense of familismo may be more likely to return home after school to fulfill familial obligations, thereby reducing their encounters with community violence. Indeed, certain findings suggest that familismo cultivates greater reliance on and more time spent with parents and family members (Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, & Cabrera, 2012), which are, in
turn, negatively related to violence exposure among urban youth (Goldner et al., 2011; Richards et al., 2004). Thus, *familismo* may represent a culturally specific way in which after-school activities influence Latino adolescents’ exposure to urban violence.

In addition to protecting adolescents from exposure to violence, we propose that the cultural value of *familismo* may also moderate the influence of violence exposure on Latino adolescents’ psychological well-being. Although no previous studies, to our knowledge, have explored cultural values as moderators of the impact of violence exposure, several findings indicate that positive family processes support youths’ well-being amidst community violence. For example, family support and time spent with one’s family attenuate the effects of community violence exposure on anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms (Overstreet, Dempsey, Graham, & Moely, 1999; Scarpa et al., 2006). Furthermore, *familismo* is associated with greater psychological well-being and less depressive symptoms among Latino adolescents (Locke, Newcomb, Duclos, & Goodyear, 2007). Guided by these findings, the second goal of our study is to determine whether *familismo* moderates the impact of community violence exposure on Latino adolescents’ psychological well-being.

**The Current Study**

Rather than comparing across ethnic groups, this study focuses on risk and protective factors for community violence exposure and its negative sequelae among poor Latino adolescents. A primary aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how these factors operate within this particular at-risk group. Although a great deal of research involving racial/ethnic minority youth is comparative, psychologists increasingly emphasize the importance of conducting culturally sensitive, within-group research (Luthar & Goldstein, 2004; Tucker & Herman, 2002). Within this framework, two overarching goals guide the current study: first, we seek to determine what after-school activities place poor, urban Latino adolescents at greater or lower risk for community violence exposure, and second, we explore whether *familismo* buffers the impact of such exposure on their psychological well-being.

The hypothesized conceptual models for both goals are displayed in Figure 1. Given the lack of research on part-time employment and community violence exposure, we have no specific hypothesis about this relation. Regarding our first goal, our specific hypotheses are as follows: (1) More unstructured time with peers will be associated with higher rates of community violence exposure, (2) Involvement in non-school
sports and non-school clubs will be associated with more community violence expo-
sure whereas involvement in other types of extracurricular activities will be associated
with less violence exposure, and (3) Familismo will be linked to lower rates of
community violence exposure. To address our second goal, we hypothesize that (4)
Community violence exposure will be associated with lower levels of psychological
well-being, and familismo will moderate this relation such that the link will be weaker
among adolescents who endorse higher levels of familismo.

Method

Sample

Participants were 223 ninth-grade students from three high schools in two cities within
two Northeastern states. Adolescents’ mean age was 14.5 years (standard deviation =
.69), and the sample was 61 percent female. All participants identified themselves as
Latino. Sixty-one percent further identified as being of Dominican ethnicity (members
of their family of origin were immigrants from the Dominican Republic). Dominicans
comprise 19.8 percent of the Latino population in the Northeastern USA, with 45.3
percent of Dominican children under 18 years old living below the poverty line
compared with 38.9 percent of Latino children overall and 9.0 percent of non-Latino
White children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Other ethnicities reported included
Colombian, Mexican, and Puerto Rican. Seventy-six percent of the participants were
born in the USA, and the majority (85 percent) spoke both English and Spanish at
home. The participating students resided in a total of 28 different census tracts,
indicating a geographically diverse sample.

The participants attended three high schools in impoverished, Northeastern cities. Of
the three high schools, one was a parochial school and the other two were public
schools. One of the public schools was uniquely structured around students’ career
interests: One division focused on health and human services (HHS) and the other
emphasized math, science, and technology (MST). This public school and the paro-
chial school were located in the same city and included the same census tracts.
Thirty-one percent of Latino individuals in this district lived below the poverty
threshold compared with 12 percent of the entire US population (U.S. Census
Bureau, 2007). The violent crime rate was 917 per 100 000 residents, compared with
the national crime rate of 474 per 100 000 people (U.S. Department of Justice,
2006). At the parochial school, 85 students participated in the study, and 68 percent
of the school’s student population was eligible for free or reduced lunch. At the
public school, 47 students from the HHS division and 43 from the MST division
participated in the study. Eighty-two percent of the total student population in the
HHS section and 77 percent in the MST section were eligible for free or reduced
lunch. The second public school was located in a different city, with a violent crime
rate of 573 per 100 000 residents (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006). Among Latinos
living in this district, 35 percent lived below the poverty threshold (U.S. Census
Bureau, 2007). Forty-eight students participated at this school, and 96 percent of the
total student population was eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Procedure

All ninth-grade students at each of the schools were provided with consent forms and
recruitment letters, describing the study, to take home to their parents. All study
materials were translated into Spanish and back-translated, and both English and Spanish versions were sent home with students. Students with parental consent completed self-report questionnaires (in either English or Spanish) in a quiet classroom during the school day. Only seven students opted to complete the questionnaire in Spanish, and bilingual research assistants were available to assist. The questionnaire took approximately 2 hours for students to complete, including several breaks. Each participant received a $30 gift card to a local movie theater or shopping mall as a token of appreciation.

Measures

Unstructured Time with Peers. A single item asked the participants how often they spent time hanging out with friends in a usual week. The item was coded on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 0 (does not spend unstructured time with peers) to 4 (spends unstructured time with peers at least four times per week).

Extracurricular Activities and Employment. Participants were asked how many times per week they engaged in part-time employment and in each of six organized extracurricular activities: organized sports (e.g., basketball team, track team; each participant specified whether teams were school-related or not), school clubs (e.g., student government, yearbook), non-school clubs (e.g., community recreation center), music or art activities (e.g., choir, art club), volunteering (e.g., providing service at a hospital), and religious groups (e.g., church youth group; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Each item reflected the weekly frequency of activity engagement, from 0 (does not engage in this activity) to 4 (engages in this activity at least four times per week). We divided school-related and non-school-related organized sports into two separate categories according to participants’ specifications.

Familismo. Familismo (sense of family loyalty, support, and commitment) was assessed using the Multiphasic Assessment of Cultural Constructs (Gaines et al., 1997). Adolescents’ responses to 10 questions ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. A total familismo score for each participant reflected the mean of these items, with higher scores indicating greater familismo. The scale included statements such as, ‘I cherish the time that I spend with my relatives’, and ‘In my opinion, the family is the most important social institution of all’. This scale demonstrated acceptable internal validity and internal consistency in other studies (Gaines et al., 1997) and had a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 in our sample.

Community Violence Exposure. Students’ levels of community violence exposure were measured with the survey of exposure to community violence (Richters & Martinez, 1993). This scale consisted of 20 items that asked how often certain violent incidents had been experienced in the adolescent’s lifetime, using a 9-point Likert scale ranging from (1) never to (9) almost every day. A personal victimization subscale consisted of 10 items that asked participants how often they had been directly victimized by various acts of community violence. An example question was, ‘How many times have you yourself been chased by gangs or individuals?’ Responses for these items were summed, creating a total personal victimization score for each participant with higher scores reflecting greater victimization by community
violence. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .80 in our sample. A witnessing violence subscale consisted of 10 items that asked the participants how often they have seen or directly witnessed various acts of community violence. An example question was, ‘How many times have you seen someone else attacked or stabbed with a knife?’ Responses for these 10 items were also summed. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .84 in our sample. Previous research suggests that parents often underestimate their children’s reports of experiencing and witnessing violence, making this self-report scale an appropriate measure of adolescents’ community violence exposure (Ceballo, Dahl, Aretakis, & Ramirez, 2001; Richters & Martinez, 1993).

Depressive Symptoms. The Child Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1981) was administered to gauge participants’ depressive symptoms within the 2 weeks prior to taking the survey. One item regarding suicidality was omitted from this 26-item measure in order to comply with a school’s wishes. This widely used measure presents a group of three statements, and adolescents are asked to choose which one best describes how they have been feeling. A sample cluster of statements is, ‘I am sad once in a while’ (0), ‘I am sad many times’ (1), and ‘I am sad all the time’ (2). Scores were summed, creating a total score for each participant ranging from 0 to 52, such that higher scores indicated greater depressive symptoms. The CDI has well-established validity and reliability, and Cronbach’s alpha was .86 in our sample.

Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms. The Child Posttraumatic Stress Reaction Index (Pynoos & Nader, 1993) assessed how often participants experienced PTSD symptoms. This scale consisted of 19 items on a Likert scale ranging from (1) never to (5) most of the time. Responses were summed to create a total score with possible values from 19 to 95, such that higher scores reflected more PTSD symptoms. Sample items from this scale included, ‘How often do you startle easily or feel jumpy and nervous?’ and ‘How often do you have thoughts about something bad that happened in the past even when you don’t want to?’ Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .93 in our sample.

Results

The majority of our participants experienced both personal victimization and witnessing community violence in some form. A quarter of the sample reported being chased by gangs and nearly three-quarters reported seeing someone holding a gun or knife. Further, 21 percent of the students had witnessed a shooting. Witnessing violence was more common than personal victimization. Table 1 displays the correlations among all control, independent, and dependent variables. As expected, there was a high and significant correlation between personal victimization and witnessing violence ($r = .78$, $p < .001$). In addition, the psychological well-being variables of depression and PTSD were significantly correlated ($r = .55$, $p < .001$), suggesting that these symptoms were comorbid in many of the participants. Preliminary analyses also revealed significant mean differences in sex, employment status, participation in music or art activities, and unstructured time with peers among the three schools. Therefore, we statistically controlled for students’ school membership in the following primary analyses.
### Table 1. Correlations with Means and Standard Deviations for All Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Controls</th>
<th>After-school activities</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Violence exposure</th>
<th>Well-being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Student’s Sex</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Student’s Age</td>
<td>14.54</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unstructured Peer Time</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>—0.05</td>
<td>—0.04</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Employment</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>—0.02</td>
<td>—0.09</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. School Sports</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>—0.19**</td>
<td>—0.02</td>
<td>—0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Non-school Sports</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>—0.17*</td>
<td>—0.03</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. School Clubs</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Non-school Clubs</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>—0.03</td>
<td>—11</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Music/Art Activities</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Volunteer Work</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Religious Groups</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Familismo</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Victimization</td>
<td>17.86</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Witnessing</td>
<td>22.48</td>
<td>11.53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Depression</td>
<td>10.57</td>
<td>7.28</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. PTSD</td>
<td>24.53</td>
<td>14.35</td>
<td>.29***</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder; SD = standard deviation.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$. 
Goal 1: What After-school Activities Increase the Risk for Community Violence Exposure?

To examine the hypotheses addressing our first goal, we performed two ordinary least squares hierarchical regressions, one for each of the dependent variables, personal victimization and witnessing violence. We examined witnessing and victimization separately, because previous studies have shown that different factors may differentially influence these outcomes. In the first step of each model, we entered demographic controls, including sex, age, three school dummy variables, and two ethnicity dummy variables. We considered the two specialized sections of the divided public school as separate school variables for statistical control purposes. At the second step, we entered the hypothesized predictor variables. Table 2 shows the results of the regression analyses predicting community violence exposure.

### Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Community Violence Exposure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Victimization (ΔR², β, SE)</th>
<th>Witnessing (ΔR², β, SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex¹</td>
<td>−.08 (1.30)</td>
<td>−.04 (1.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.14† (1.89)</td>
<td>.07 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Dummy 1ᵇ</td>
<td>−.08 (1.91)</td>
<td>−.08 (2.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Dummy 2</td>
<td>−.07 (1.76)</td>
<td>−.08 (2.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Dummy 3</td>
<td>−.07 (1.67)</td>
<td>−.004 (2.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity Dummy 1ᶜ</td>
<td>.07 (1.79)</td>
<td>.14 (2.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity Dummy 2</td>
<td>.14 (2.01)</td>
<td>.15 (2.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td>.21*** (2.21** , .20** )</td>
<td>.19*** (2.20** , .20** )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstructured time with peers</td>
<td>.21** (1.45)</td>
<td>.20** (1.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>.14† (2.63)</td>
<td>.09 (1.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Sports</td>
<td>.05 (2.42)</td>
<td>.12 (2.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-school Sports</td>
<td>.23** (2.52)</td>
<td>.16* (2.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Clubs</td>
<td>.08 (2.68)</td>
<td>.03 (1.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-school Clubs</td>
<td>.17* (2.46)</td>
<td>.22** (2.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music/Art Activities</td>
<td>−.10 (1.46)</td>
<td>−.08 (1.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Work</td>
<td>−.07 (2.63)</td>
<td>−.07 (1.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Groups</td>
<td>−.02 (2.66)</td>
<td>.05 (1.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familismo</td>
<td>−.27*** (1.83)</td>
<td>−.24*** (1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total R²</strong></td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Beta coefficients are reported from the step at which the variable was entered.

¹ Male = 0, female = 1.

ᵇ Dummy coded school variables compared with parochial school.

ᶜ Dummy coded ethnicity reflecting Dominicans, followed by Puerto Ricans, compared to 'other' Latino groups.

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, † Marginally significant (p = .05).
analyses with demographic characteristics and after-school activities predicting community violence exposure. The final models predicted 25 percent of the variance for personal victimization and 22 percent for witnessing violence, and each accounted for significantly more variance than the control models for victimization \( \Delta R^2 = .21, \Delta F(10, 187) = 5.24, p < .001 \) and witnessing \( \Delta R^2 = .19, \Delta F(10, 187) = 4.43, p < .001 \). As seen in Table 2, students who spent more time per week in unstructured socializing with peers were more likely to be victims and witnesses of community violence. Among extracurricular activities, participation in non-school-related sports and non-school clubs was significantly and positively associated with both victimization and witnessing violence,\(^1\) although participation in school-related sports and school clubs was not associated with either outcome. Part-time employment was marginally positively associated with victimization. Lastly, \textit{familismo} was significantly and negatively associated with both personal victimization and witnessing violence.

Goal 2: Does Familismo Moderate the Link between Violence Exposure and Well-being?

Our fourth hypothesis proposed that community violence exposure would be associated with psychological well-being, and that the cultural value of \textit{familismo} would moderate this relation. To address this hypothesis, we conducted four separate hierarchical ordinary least squares regressions, displayed in Table 3. Familismo, victimization, and witnessing variables were centered before being entered into the models (Aiken & West, 1991). In the first regression predicting depressive symptoms, we entered demographic control variables in the first step. Sex was significantly associated with depression, such that girls experienced more depressive symptoms than boys, on average. Ethnicity was also significantly associated with depression, with Dominican adolescents reporting more depressive symptoms than Puerto Ricans and other ethnicities. In the second step, personal victimization and \textit{familismo} were entered to investigate these main effects. This model accounted for significantly more variance than the control model \( \Delta R^2 = .12, \Delta F(2, 202) = 14.60, p < .001 \). Victimization was significantly and positively related to depressive symptoms, such that more victimization was related to more depression. Familismo was significantly and negatively related to depressive symptoms, indicating that stronger values of \textit{familismo} were associated with less depression. In the third and final step, we entered the interaction term to investigate whether \textit{familismo} moderated the effect of personal victimization on depressive symptoms. The interaction was significantly associated with depressive symptoms, and the third model accounted for 21 percent of the variance in depressive symptoms, significantly more than the previous main effects model \( \Delta R^2 = .02, \Delta F(1, 201) = 5.10, p < .05 \). The significant interaction effect is illustrated in Figure 2. For adolescents who endorsed low levels of \textit{familismo}, there was a strong association between victimization and depression whereas for adolescents with high levels of \textit{familismo}, the association between victimization and depression was significantly attenuated.

In the second regression, predicting PTSD symptoms, we followed the same procedure as above. The third model accounted for 24 percent of the variance in PTSD symptoms, which was not significantly more than the previous main effects model \( \Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(1, 196) = 1.49, p = .225 \). Among the controls, sex was significantly associated with PTSD such that girls experienced more PTSD symptoms than boys, on average. Although personal victimization was significantly and positively related to
PTSD, such that greater victimization was associated with more PTSD symptoms, the interaction was not significant.

In the next set of regression analyses, we followed the same procedures as above, replacing the independent variable of personal victimization with witnessing violence. Because personal victimization and witnessing were highly correlated, we investigated their effects in separate regression models to avoid multicollinearity. The results of the analyses with witnessing violence were similar to those reported for personal victimization. The final models accounted for 21 percent of the variance in depressive symptoms, which was significantly more than the previous main effects model $\Delta R^2 = .02, \Delta F(1, 201) = 5.79, p < .05$, and 20 percent in PTSD symptoms, which was not significantly more than the previous main effects model $\Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(1, 196) = 1.20, p = .276$. In the second step of the models, witnessing community violence was significantly and positively associated with depressive symptoms ($\beta = .17, p < .05$) and PTSD symptoms ($\beta = .24, p < .001$). Thus, witnessing violence was related to greater depression and PTSD.

The interaction between witnessing and familismo was significantly related to depressive symptoms, indicating that for adolescents who endorsed low levels of familismo, there was a strong association between witnessing and depression; whereas

### Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Well-Being with Victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Depressive symptoms</th>
<th>PTSD symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex $^a$</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Dummy 1 $^b$</td>
<td>.17†</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Dummy 2</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Dummy 3</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity Dummy 1 $^c$</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity Dummy 2</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td>.12***</td>
<td>.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familismo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3</strong></td>
<td>.02*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization $\times$ Familismo</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total $R^2$</strong></td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Beta coefficients are reported from the step at which the variable was entered. PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder.

$^a$ Male = 0, female = 1.

$^b$ Dummy coded school variables compared to parochial school.

$^c$ Dummy coded ethnicity reflecting Dominicans, followed by Puerto Ricans, compared to ‘other’ Latino groups.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; † Marginally significant ($p = .06$).
for adolescents with high levels of familismo, this association was significantly attenuated. The interaction between witnessing and familismo, however, was not associated with PTSD symptoms.

**Discussion**

This study investigated: (1) after-school activities as predictors of community violence exposure; and (2) the role of familismo as a moderator of the relation between community violence exposure and psychological well-being among poor, urban Latino adolescents. As one of only a few studies to examine predictors of community violence exposure itself, in addition to its negative outcomes, this study makes an important contribution to the violence exposure literature. Although the present study lacks the design strengths of some larger, longitudinal studies, it provides an important balance to these findings by uniquely focusing on poor, Latino youth and contributing to an understanding of the processes associated with community violence exposure. In our sample, the frequency of community violence exposure was extremely high, mirroring other reports with urban adolescent samples (Gorman-Smith et al., 2004) and underscoring the need to target this population in efforts to minimize violence exposure.

With respect to our first goal of identifying what after-school activities predict community violence exposure, holding a part-time job was marginally associated with
victimization, but not witnessing violence. This finding provides some support for previous research indicating that holding a part-time job and work intensity are associated with victimization, as well as aggression and delinquency (e.g., Capizzano et al., 2000). Drawing on these findings, having a job may lead some adolescents to engage in more problem behaviors—perhaps because of exposure to older peers or access to money that can be used for leisure purposes—thus increasing their engagement in violence. Working adolescents may also increase their risk of exposure by traveling to and from work, especially during evening hours, and by working in dangerous areas of their neighborhoods where community violence is more likely to occur. A deeper investigation into the nature of Latino youth’s employment will provide a clearer picture of how employment may affect violence exposure.

Our results supported our first hypothesis: More unstructured time with peers was significantly associated with higher levels of both victimization and witnessing violence. It may be the mere location of such socializing, the unstructured nature of the activity, or both of these factors that link unstructured socializing with community violence exposure for youth. Although participants were not asked where they tend to socialize, it most plausibly occurred in their neighborhood. Hanging out in the neighborhood is also likely to coincide with a lack of supervision by parents and other adults. Consequently, both the location and the lack of structure or supervision are likely to increase youths’ risks for violence exposure. Because research demonstrates that unstructured time with peers is linked to behavioral and academic problems for low-income adolescents in dangerous neighborhoods, it may be that community violence observed while socializing mediates the relation between unstructured time with peers and behavioral problems (Pettit et al., 1999; Richards et al., 2004). In addition, the absence of adult supervision may increase the likelihood of having peer conflict escalate into violence; however, like most measures of community violence exposure, ours did not differentiate between peer violence and general community violence, precluding a direct test of this hypothesis. Future research that specifies who is engaged in the community violence to which adolescents are exposed is an important priority (Fowler et al., 2009).

Our second hypothesis was partially supported by our results, in that greater participation in both non-school organized sports and non-school clubs was associated with exposure to community violence. However, participation in other types of extracurricular activities (school sports, school clubs, music and art clubs, volunteer organizations, and religious groups) was not associated with violence exposure. Because boys tend to participate in sports at higher rates than girls, the implications of our findings are particularly relevant for boys, who may be at greater risk for community violence exposure (Gardner et al., 2009). This pattern of results may reflect certain commonalities between participation in sports and clubs that occur outside of school, such as minimal adult supervision and more unstructured socializing time with peers. For example, Mahoney et al. (2001) found that recreation centers with little structure, originally designed to benefit and protect participants, actually increased adolescents’ levels of criminality. The non-school clubs available to adolescents in our sample may have comprised similar community centers, providing little structure and adult supervision. Likewise, recent evidence suggests that participating in sports is associated with delinquency because of heightened opportunities for unstructured peer socialization and engagement with deviant peers, which may be more prevalent in community settings (Gardner et al., 2009). Thus, the relations between involvement in both non-school sports and non-school clubs with violence...
exposure may be partly due to unstructured time with peers, which, as previously discussed, was linked with community violence exposure. Future research is needed to test this theory of mediation.

Additionally, it is possible that non-school clubs and sports, like unstructured peer socializing, take place in more dangerous areas of the community than do school-based activities, thereby increasing participants’ likelihood of being exposed to violence. Some preliminary support for this hypothesis comes from a study in which participation in community-based clubs was negatively associated with youth’s psychological well-being, but only in neighborhoods characterized by high levels of violence (Fauth, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007). In view of the high rates of violent crime in the neighborhoods from which our sample was drawn and the high levels of violence exposure that participants reported, adolescents in our study may have experienced more exposure to violence by spending time in community-based activities. In fact, because both school and non-school sports were considered ‘organized’, they presumably involved some structure and supervision, making the location of non-school sports a distinguishing characteristic between the two and perhaps the primary reason why only non-school sports were related to community violence exposure. Importantly, because of the cross-sectional design of our study, the direction of effects cannot be established.

Our results underscore the importance of considering different types of activities separately in examining the potential benefits or disadvantages of poor youths’ after-school activities. Further, our findings suggest that participation in extracurricular activities may not protect adolescents from community violence exposure, and in fact, participation in some types of community-based after-school activities may even be linked to greater violence exposure. However, a recent finding suggests that participation in extracurricular activities protects youth who have already been exposed to high levels of violence by attenuating the association between community violence exposure and externalizing problems (Hardaway et al., 2012). Therefore, the most effective solution for decreasing adolescents’ violence exposure and its negative effects is not to eliminate participation in extracurricular activities altogether, but rather to modify the specific factors associated with certain activities that are linked to greater risk.

In line with our third hypothesis, the results indicated that the high levels of familismo were associated with lower rates of victimization and witnessing community violence. Although we cannot determine the direction of effects, one possible interpretation of this finding is that Latino adolescents who have a strong sense of familismo are more likely than others to spend their after-school time with family in a protective context. Greater endorsement of familismo may also indicate adolescents’ receptiveness to parental monitoring, motivating them to avoid situations in which community violence occurs. Indeed, some evidence suggests that in poor, high-risk neighborhoods, Latino adolescents may view parental monitoring as an expression of concern and caring (Ceballo, Kennedy, Bregman, & Epstein-Ngo, 2012; Crockett, Brown, Russell, & Shen, 2007; Halgunseth et al., 2006). Whereas future research is needed to elucidate the precise mechanism, strengthening family ties may be an important strategy for the prevention of community violence exposure.

Addressing our second goal of determining whether familismo moderates the link between community violence exposure and psychological outcomes, we found partial support for our fourth hypothesis. First, both victimization and witnessing violence were significantly associated with depressive and PTSD symptoms, suggesting that Latino adolescents exposed to more violence experience greater psychological
distress. Further, greater endorsement of *familismo* was linked to fewer symptoms of depression and PTSD, and *familismo* moderated the relations between both personal victimization and witnessing violence on depressive symptoms, but not PTSD symptoms. Specifically, the relation between victimization and depressive symptoms was weaker among Latino adolescents with greater endorsement of *familismo* than among those with lower values of *familismo*. This ‘protective-stabilizing effect’ suggests that maintaining a strong sense of *familismo* may keep depressive symptoms low, even in the high-risk context of severe violence exposure, whereas those with low *familismo* experience more depression with increasing violence exposure (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). The practical significance of the protective-stabilizing effect of *familismo* is striking in light of the clinical cutoff score on the CDI measure of depression. Figure 2 shows not only that *familismo* buffers the effect of community violence exposure on depressive symptoms, but also that *familismo* may make the difference between adaptive functioning and more serious symptomatology. Hence, fostering *familismo* among Latino adolescents in high-crime neighborhoods may minimize the need for later interventions.

Whereas *familismo* may confer a protective effect against depressive systems, it does not do so for PTSD symptoms, supporting findings based on a similar construct of family support (Overstreet et al., 1999). One possibility for this differential effect is that the relation between violence exposure and PTSD is so robust that even the strongest family ties are not an effective buffer. Indeed, evidence suggests that community violence exposure is more strongly associated with PTSD than other outcomes and that Latino youth are significantly more likely to experience PTSD symptoms when exposed to community violence than are non-Hispanic youth (Fowler et al., 2009). Identifying the mechanism by which *familismo* protects against depression may shed light on why it does not moderate the effect of violence exposure on PTSD symptoms. For instance, adolescents with high *familismo* values may experience a great deal of family support, which may help them process violence emotionally. Such family support, however, may not ameliorate more automatic posttraumatic reactions, such as anxiety responses to everyday triggers and reminders of past traumatic events. Whereas PTSD symptoms are a common reaction to community violence, depressive symptoms are less typical (e.g., Fowler et al., 2009). Therefore, more factors may mediate the link between violence exposure and depression than between violence exposure and PTSD, possibly making the former link more easily buffered by protective factors, such as *familismo*.

Several limitations to the present study must be considered in interpreting our results. First, the study was cross-sectional in design, limiting inferences of causation between independent and dependent variables. Second, all measures were self-report. Thus, our only index of reliability was internal consistency, as we lacked multiple respondents. Third, our measures did not assess gang membership that may influence the extent of violence to which youth are exposed. Finally, the sample in this study was fairly unrepresentative in that it consisted primarily of poor, Dominican, and Puerto Rican ninth graders from urban neighborhoods in the Northeast, and our findings may thus not generalize to other Latino adolescents in the USA.

Despite these limitations, this study makes an important contribution to understanding the relations between how adolescents spend their after-school time and exposure to community violence. Focusing primarily on a Dominican and Puerto Rican sample, we identify several activities that are associated with community violence exposure yet are amenable to change—unstructured time with peers and participation in non-school...
sports and clubs. Equally important, the endorsement of *familismo* was directly associated with less violence exposure while also buffering the negative link between violence exposure and psychological well-being.

**References**


Acknowledgments

Funding for this study was provided to the second author by the National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID) and the Office of the Vice President for Research in the College of Literature, Science and the Arts (LSA) at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
We are indebted to many welcoming school administrators and staff as well as to the students whose willingness to share their experiences made this study possible. We are also grateful for the research team’s enormous contributions to this study. Additionally, we wish to thank Nancy Hill for her thoughtful feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript.

Note

1. In order to determine whether unstructured socializing with peers might account for the relations between non-school-related sports/clubs and community violence exposure, we conducted post hoc mediation analyses. Unstructured socializing did not mediate these relations for either victimization or witnessing. However, unstructured socializing was measured as a separate activity from non-school sports/clubs, not as a characteristic of these activities. Moreover, non-school-related sports were specifically described as ‘organized’ (e.g., having adult supervision). Thus, these results confirm only that unstructured socializing with peers outside of non-school sports/clubs does not mediate the association between non-school sports/clubs and violence exposure; they do not address whether participation in non-school sports/clubs includes unstructured socializing that may account for this link.