Perceptions of Community and Risk Behavior Exposure for Youth in At-Risk Environments

Rosemary V. Barnett
University of Florida

Caroline Payne-Purvis
Mississippi University for Women

Gerald R. Culen
University of Florida

Perceptions of Community and Risk Behavior Exposure for Youth in At-Risk Environments

Abstract

This paper highlights an examination of the relationship between perceptions of community and risk behavior exposure for youth in at-risk environments. Data were collected from 133 youth enrolled in after-school programs in two communities over a three-year period. The *Youth Involved in Community Issues* (YICI) survey assessed youth perceptions of community on four subscales measuring support, involvement, connectedness, and environment. The *Social Behavioral Questionnaire* (SBQ), with subscales of access, frequency of use, social behaviors, and neighborhood, asked participants to report risk behaviors that they saw occurring within their local area. Linear regression analysis indicated that youth community (overall score) predicted risk exposure in the areas of perceived friend behaviors and behaviors seen within their community. The results of this study indicate the importance of youth awareness of community in relation to risk behaviors observed within their communities.

Keywords

At-risk youth, Community, Risk Behaviors, After-school programs

Creative Commons License

Cover Page Footnote

Perceptions of Community and Risk Behavior Exposure
for Youth in At-Risk Environments

Rosemary V. Barnett
University of Florida

Caroline Payne-Purvis
Mississippi University for Women

Gerald R. Culen
University of Florida

All youth need support from their communities if they are to mature into caring, responsible adults. As children develop into adolescents, they will become more aware of their relationship with their immediate surroundings, including their immediate neighborhood and greater community. Community programs, institutions, and individuals within those environments may actively support the transition by increasing youths' awareness of community issues over time. Particularly, youth may be encouraged to begin to identify their role as citizens in the local community and the relationship that exists between the neighborhoods that they reside in and the larger community area. This includes gaining awareness and understanding of behaviors that are developmentally appropriate and without risk as well as an awareness of those farther out on the greater risk continuum that will be detrimental to a positive developmental trajectory.

This personal growth can help them mature into responsible citizens, especially if adults lead them to community-based opportunities. These opportunities may also increase their positive perceptions of their local community environment, the support that they feel from their community, their connectedness to their community, and their own personal involvement in the community. Potentially, these opportunities may form some protection for youth residing in higher risk neighborhoods and communities, even when risk behaviors are occurring in their near environment.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (n.d.) has defined quality of life as "an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, values, and concerns" (para. 2). This quality of life can change for adolescents when they face challenges such as social isolation, inadequate supports, and school failure (Nota, Soresi, Ferrari, & Wehmeyer, 2011). Youth living in vulnerable environments have been found to have a lower quality of life than youth living in stable environments (Neira, Gore, Brune, & Hudson, 2008).

These youth may experience increased resilience by overcoming these environmental challenges and stressful situations. If they can gain in their ability to seek out and rely on others for support, they may potentially gain a sense of belonging to different significant social groups. In turn, this may lead to enhanced network building culminating in a support group and greater personal connections within their community.

Programs for youth placed at risk have attempted to provide a safe environment to bolster their protective factors, offset risk factors, and increase resiliency. Most after-school programs take place during the peak hours for detrimental behaviors that may impact the positive trajectory of these youth. By providing supports to youth and increasing their awareness of their community, it is hoped that youth will become more involved in local issues, develop a sense of pride, and become more connected. This is a challenging effort for this population who may feel isolated and disconnected due to extremely stressful living conditions, unstable family structures, and disorganized neighborhoods. While various studies have focused on aspects of quality of life, well-being, community, and asset building, few have considered the integrated effects of youth perceptions of community protective factors and perceived social behavioral risk factors.

This study explores whether there is a relationship between youth perceptions of their own community and how these perceptions relate to the risk behaviors these youth are exposed to in their community. If they think positively about their community, yet still report that they observe risk behaviors where they live, is their perceived community awareness strong enough to offset these risks? These community perceptions may be associated with their overall well-being and quality of life and are, therefore, important to examine.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Scholars have agreed that Americans need to recognize that the experiences of youth are strongly connected at home, school, in the community, and later at work. Further, youth need more positive and constructive contact with adults, opportunities to participate in community activities, assistance with problems, and jobs that will offer a path to accomplishment (Newman, Fox, Flynn, & Christeson, 2000). When considering the neighborhood ecology of youth placed at risk and its impacts, scholars have also examined various risk and protective factors that exist within communities (Scales et al., 2001). Youth who are exposed to various behaviors, whether by older siblings, parents, neighbors, or their peers, may begin to normalize risk behaviors. Aggression, drug use, or gang involvement may become viewed as being typical for their environment and/or culture. The concept of "social toxicity" hypothesizes that vulnerable youth will be as bad as the socially toxic environment offers them the opportunity to be (Berk, 2006). These especially toxic circumstances place tremendous stressors on youth who are attempting to succeed at staying on a positive trajectory, while being constantly faced with these debilitating conditions on a daily basis.

Early community and neighborhood studies found that social norms directly or indirectly guide people's behavior. Sociologists and psychologists have described how behavior becomes internalized through a process of observations and participation to form values, morals and cognitive schemata (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Coleman, 1990; Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). Later research studies examined the powerful role that social norms play in regulating behavior across situations that may occur with youth placed at risk, such as prejudice and discrimination (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996), aggression (Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1999), and even in potentially positive things such as determining who is selected to play pickup basketball (Jimerson, 1999). Previous research has also focused on whether adults will get involved with young people in their community if they perceive a social expectation to do so (Scales et al., 2001). Many youth organizations have focused on meeting the unmet needs of youth to reinforce positive behaviors, while minimizing

negatives, through a positive youth development approach that is dependent on family and community development as it occurs in the context of the family, community, and society (Kress, 2007). The ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) has been the theoretical framework for theorizing about the layers of the environment that youth must navigate as they move outward from their home to those outer layers of greater exposure to risk including neighborhood, schools, community, and media.

More recent studies have examined the dynamics of youth and community in regard to positive outcomes. These include contributions of youth engagement to the development of social capital (Nathaniel & Kinsey, 2013); increasing youth knowledge, skills and engagement; finding a place in the community; how to learn about local community through media use (Barnett, Neely, Payne-Purvis, & Culen, 2014); and cultivating the community to close the achievement gap (Booker, Cleveland, Herrick, Rivera, & Tolkoff, 2010).

In promoting positive youth development for youth placed at risk through after-school programs and other prevention efforts, it has also been important to be aware of and consider the negative aspects of their living conditions, as well as the behavioral outcomes associated with these environments. Ericson (2001) reported that investigations on negative environmental outcomes for youth found that teens who do not participate in after-school programs are nearly three times more likely to skip classes or use marijuana or other drugs; they are also more likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and engage in sexual activity. Youth are more likely to engage in risk behaviors during after-school hours (3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.) as they are affected by what they see occurring in their own communities (After-School All-Stars, 2015; Newman et al., 2000).

Peer-group characteristics also have a tendency to become more destructive, marked by injurious behaviors and increased hostility, when the atmosphere is tense and competitive in their environmental conditions (DeRosier, Cillessen, Cole, & Dodge, 1994). Further, these group characteristics are more common in poverty-stricken neighborhoods with a wide range of stressors, including poor quality schools, limited recreational opportunities, and adult criminal subcultures (Pagani, Boulerice, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 1999). Therefore, it is important to make connections between risk behaviors that are becoming normalized in some communities, those that are often observed by other youth as a social norm and will possibly lead them to increased risky behaviors by internalizing those as the norm, and the more positive aspects of community that may be developed to offset these increased exposures to risk.

Social norms have the effect of stabilizing social expectations and establishing commitments to particular ways of acting in common social situations (Ensminger & Knight, 1997). Social norms are shared and establish consequences if behaviors deviate too far from the norm; therefore, youth learn from observing various behaviors in their neighborhoods and communities and considering which of those are accepted and rejected. The consideration of these behaviors by others becomes part of their moral development and determines whether their self-control and self-regulation in the process of considering a moral dilemma will lead to their participation in behavior that deviates from social norms of the greater society, such as state and local laws. Their personal moral development is, therefore, occurring simultaneously by internalizing what they see behaviorally as a norm and learning how to adopt their own behavior to societal standards. Prior research has explored

peer influences on risk behavior (Jaccard, Blanton, & Dodge, 2005) and the role of neighborhood and community in building developmental assets for children and youth with a focus on social norms among American adults (Scales et al., 2001).

After-school programs have been found to improve communities, reduce crime, increase safety, bring neighbors together, and foster community pride and ownership (After-School All-Stars, 2015). Students have reported that participating in after-school programs improved their ability to maintain self-control and avoid fights (Friedman & Bleiberg, 2002). Further, a relationship was found between low-school connectedness and potentially modifiable factors including extracurricular involvement, cigarette use, perceived health status, and frequency of school nurse visits (Bonny, Britto, Klostermann, Hornung, & Slap, 2000).

A landmark study examined how communities contribute to positive youth development by examining at-risk behaviors of vulnerable youth in different communities. It found that seven types of at-risk behaviors of youth (tobacco use, alcohol use, illicit drug use, sexual activity, depression/suicide, anti-social behavior, and school problems) in 28 of the healthiest communities were much lower than for those living in 28 of the least healthy communities in the United States (Blyth & Roehlkepartain, 1993). The main difference between the youth characteristics was that those living in healthiest communities seemed to draw on community strengths, such as more participation in structured activities and higher educational aspirations, while those in the least healthy communities were drawing on internal characteristics, such as self-esteem, to try and offset the risk behaviors. Further, youth with the greatest capacity to self-regulate were found to benefit the most from activity involvement, indicating a reciprocal relationship between the variables (Urban, Lewin-Bizan, &

Lerner, 2010). When youth are able to contribute to a set of shared norms or values, they are further able to identify their own set of interests within the greater social framework (Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). This potentially increases their connectedness with and commitment to their local community as well as assists them in finding their own individual identities within the greater community context.

It is important for youth to consider whether they might want to uphold the social behavioral norms found in their community by self-regulating their own behaviors. This indirectly is part of becoming an active and engaged participant in the community, and it is important to understand the role of youth as future adult citizens. This begins with their own behaviors, individually and collectively, as a subset of the greater population of their neighborhoods and communities. Perceived barriers to quality of life may include exposure to such deviant or risk behaviors; therefore, these behaviors must be considered, not just in regard to youth development, but also within the community context. Community development occurs when capacity building is increased, and capacity is developed when resources are mobilized by a community to identify and respond to its own needs (Kelly & Caputo, 2006). Community and youth development are, therefore, interdependent and provide a way for youth to engage in the larger community processes while growing personally and also benefitting the community.

For youth, a concrete concept of community is still materializing. The notion of community is morphed by their perceptions of the components of their area, such as the immediate environment, supports, connections, and involvement with those who share the local ecology. Likewise, youth become attuned to community behaviors that may be perceived as risk behaviors. These risk behaviors, which are

not conducive to a positive trajectory, are part of their early exposure to community and may make deep impressions upon their perceptions of the environments.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In particular, this study examined youth perceptions of their community in four main areas: environment, support, involvement and connectedness. Youth perceptions were also sought regarding their exposure to risk behaviors engaged in by others in their community. While this study does not attempt to establish specific local norms from the results, it does consider how youth perceive these risk behaviors in their local communities and neighborhoods and which perceptions of community variables may offset these risk behaviors. For this study, researchers hypothesized that youth with more positive perceptions of their community would report less exposure to risk behaviors engaged in by others in their community. In addition, researchers were also interested in ascertaining the predictive ability of these variables.

METHOD

Setting and Participants

Participants in this study were enrolled in after-school programs in two communities in central Florida over a period of three years; these after-school programs were funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Grant—*Florida Youth Involved in Community Issues*. The first community (C1) is located in a rural county and this community has high rates of drug use, crime and unemployment, and a predominately African-American population. The second community (C2) is located in a migrant agriculturally based county, and this community has a large Hispanic/Latino population that works in the agricultural sector.

The purpose of the funded project was to serve youth placed at risk and their families by providing after-school programs in communities where no comprehensive after-school programming existed for teens. The focus of the program content was to investigate timely and relevant issues within the respective communities. Teens in the program analyzed issues and learned how to become involved in the community decision-making process.

There were 163 participants involved in the after-school programs during the 3-year period under study; however, 30 of the participants were enrolled in multiple years resulting in 133 distinct participants. The youth ranged in age from 11 to 19 years with a mean age of 13.26; 50.3% were female and 49.7% were male. Race/ethnicity of participants was as follows: African American (73%), Hispanic (16%), White (8.6%), and Other (2.4%). All participants were in middle (65.6%) or high school (34.4%). Community 1 (C1) participants comprised a majority of the sample (76.1%) with Community 2 (C2) representing 23.9% of the sample.

Instrumentation

Two separate instruments were designed and selected for research use. The primary instrument, *Youth Involved in Community Issues* (YICI) (Barnett, Payne-Purvis, & Culen, 2010) has the objective of assessing youth demographics, grade, type of community, other aspects of their community, and their relationships with adults. Thirty-eight items are in two indices, *You and Your Community* (20 items) and *Knowledge of Community Issues* (18 items). This study utilized data from the *You and Your Community* index, which has four sub-categories (*Community Environment, Community Support, Community Involvement,*

and *Community Connectedness*) that combined provide an overall measurement of the youth community perspective. The four sub-categories each have five items measured on a 5-point scale (Strongly Disagree = 1; Strongly Agree = 5); these items are presented by category in Appendix A. All items in the *You and Your Community* index were combined into a single composite youth community (YC) score for use in data analyses. The Cronbach's alpha score for this overall measure of youth community reflects strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.898$).

The *Social Behavioral Questionnaire* (SBQ) has the objective of assessing youth perceptions of risk behaviors occurring in their local community and the respondents' own risk behaviors. It consists of six sections with the topics of Demographics, Access, Frequency of Use, Age of First Use, Social Behaviors, and Neighborhood. Items are measured on a 5-point scale (Strongly Disagree = 1; Strongly Agree = 5). For the purpose of this study, researchers focused on items that assessed participants' exposure to risk behaviors in the community, not on respondents' own identified risk behaviors. Researchers analyzed responses to individual items included in the *Frequency of Use, Access, Social Behaviors, and Neighborhood* sections that addressed participants' exposure to risk behaviors in the community. Then researchers created exposure to risk scores in four areas, *Access, Friends, Gangs*, and *Seen Behaviors,* by summing responses to selected items from the SBQ; Appendix B lists these risk exposure areas and associated SBQ items.

Data Collection

The grant-funded after-school programs took place over a three year period (2009–2010, 2010–2011, 2011–2012) in the two communities. Prior to data collection, parents signed consent forms for all students participating in the after-school programs. Two separate surveys were administered to all youth participants in both communities. Data collection took place at the end of each academic school year (May/June) over multiple days. A total of 163 surveys were completed by the 133 participants during the 3-year data collection period (the additional 30 surveys were completed by participants who returned multiple years).

To explain the survey procedures, informed consent documents were presented to each youth participant and read aloud prior to data collection. Paper copies of the surveys were provided to students in small groups to allow for privacy while completing them. Each survey contained an identification number, and students' names were collected separately from the surveys to ensure parental consent had been obtained. Survey administrators were available to assist students who had difficulty reading. Student participants were encouraged to ask questions regarding the survey in order to respond as honestly as possible. The after-school staff members were not present for the data collection, and students were assured that the staff would not see individual responses to ensure confidentiality. Survey administrators reviewed each survey upon completion to ensure all items had been answered or initially omitted.

Analysis

Initial analyses conducted included Pearson bivariate correlations and linear regressions to examine the relationships between youth perceptions of community (independent variable), as measured by a composite youth community (YC) score based on responses to the YICI instrument, and responses to selected individual items (dependent variables) from the SBQ that addressed participants' exposure to risk behaviors in the community. Pearson bivariate correlations and linear regressions were also calculated to examine if relationships existed between youth perceptions of their

community (YC) and exposure to risk scores in four areas: *Access*, *Friends*, *Gangs*, and *Seen Behaviors*. To determine strategies to reduce potential risk taking behaviors among the participants, it was important to examine if there was a relationship between youth community perceptions and exposure to risk areas, and, if a relationship was identified, to determine the nature of any predictive relationship.

RESULTS

This study was based on the premise that youth having positive perceptions of their local community would serve as a protective factor for exposure to risk behaviors experienced in their community.

Table 3 presents significant bivariate correlations for the youth community (YC) perceptions variable and selected items from the SBQ associated with exposure to risk behavior and corresponding linear regression analyses. Results indicated that statistically significant negative relationships existed between youth perceptions of their community and the following exposure to risk items: seen marijuana ($r = -.181$, $p = .022$), seen other illegal drugs ($r = -.203$, $p = .010$), seen gangs ($r = -.174$, $p = .027$), friends use tobacco ($r = -.218$, $p = .006$), friends drink alcohol ($r = -.206$, $p = .009$), friends use marijuana ($r = -.175$, $p = .027$), friends use other illegal drugs ($r = -.219$, $p = .005$), and easy access to alcohol ($r = -.166$, $p = .035$). These results reflect a slight trend for participants with more positive perceptions of their community to have less reported exposure to risk behaviors in their community environment. While significant in each of the linear regression equations presented in Table 3, youth community perceptions explain a limited amount of variance (range of 2.8% to 4.8%) for the identified risk exposure variables.

Table 4 presents bivariate correlations for the youth community (YC) variable and exposure to risk behavior scores in four areas—*Access*, *Friends*, *Gangs*, and *Seen Behaviors*—and corresponding linear regression analyses. For these analyses, the researchers aimed to examine if a predictive relationship existed with the youth community (YC) variable acting as both an independent and dependent variable to determine the better predictor. Is the youth community perception variable a better predictor of exposure to risk behaviors or is the exposure to risk behavior score a better predictor of youth community perceptions? The youth community (YC) variable was significant in the linear regression equation when the following exposure to risk behavior scores were entered as a *dependent variable*: *Friends* ($\beta = -.386$) and *Seen Behaviors* ($\beta = -.348$). The following exposure to risk behavior scores were each significant in the linear regression equation when the youth community (YC) variable was entered as a *dependent variable*: *Friends* ($\beta = -.121$) and *Seen Behaviors* ($\beta = -.086$). The predictive relationship between youth perceptions of community overall and both *Friends* and *Seen Behaviors* was stronger when the exposure to risk behavior variable was the dependent variable as evidenced by the larger beta weights. These results reflect a slight, yet significant, trend for participants with more positive perceptions of their community to have less reported exposure to risk behaviors in the areas of *Friends* (friends using tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs) and *Seen Behaviors* (frequency of exposure to others using tobacco, alcohol, and/or illegal drugs; others participating in gang activity; others carrying weapons). While significant as an independent variable in the linear regression equations for *Friends* and *Seen Behaviors*, youth community perceptions explain a limited amount of variance (3.0% and 4.7%, respectively) for these two risk exposure areas.

Table 3

Exposure to Risk Behavior Items and Youth Community (YC) Perceptions: Significant Pearson Correlation and Linear Regression Results

SBQ Scale	Dependent	Independent	R	R²	F	P	β
Neighborhood	Seen Marijuana	YC	.181	.033	5.382	.022	-.409
	Seen Other Illegal Drugs	YC	.203	.041	6.828	.010	-.452
	Seen Gangs	YC	.174	.030	4.986	.027	-.395
Frequency of Use	Friends Use Tobacco	YC	.218	.047	7.921	.006	-.433
	Friends Drink Alcohol	YC	.206	.042	7.047	.009	-.399
	Friends Use Marijuana	YC	.175	.031	4.986	.027	-.332
	Friends Use Other Illegal Drugs	YC	.219	.048	8.013	.005	-.398
Access	Alcohol Access	YC	.166	.028	4.522	.035	-.375

Table 4

Exposure to Risk Behavior Areas and Youth Community (YC) Perceptions: Pearson Correlation and Linear Regression Results

Dependent	Independent	R	R²	F	P	β
Access	YC	.144	.021	3.340	.069	-.321
YC	Access	.144	.021	3.340	.069	-.070
Friends	**YC**	**.216**	**.047**	**7.730**	**.006**	**-.386**
YC	**Friends**	**.216**	**.047**	**7.730**	**.006**	**-.121**
Gangs	YC	.065	.004	.667	.415	-.091
YC	Gangs	.065	.004	.667	.415	-.046
Seen	**YC**	**.173**	**.030**	**4.867**	**.029**	**-.348**
YC	**Seen**	**.173**	**.030**	**4.867**	**.029**	**-.086**

Note. Significant results are marked in boldface.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study present a clearer picture of the relationship between youth perceptions of their community and their exposure to risk behaviors within the immediate environment. Preventionists and community workers can consider these results as they move toward fostering effective after-school and prevention programs targeting youth placed at risk, as the objective of most programs is to provide youth safe environments free from the pressures associated with substance abuse and violence. Consistent negative relationships existed between the community and exposure to risk variables, which interpret into powerful real world applications. As youth perceptions of their community increased, i.e., became more favorable, reported exposure to risk behaviors decreased, in regard to not only visible risk behaviors of individuals in the community, but also, more specifically, to the risk behaviors of their friends. Therefore, youth perceptions of their local community not only play an interrelated presence in their daily lives, they serve as a means of potentially protecting them from exposure to risk behaviors of others.

While not a proven causal relationship, the findings do provide evidence of relationships between the protective factor (youth perceptions of local community) and the risk factors (exposure to risk behaviors). Youth development practitioners and after-school program professionals can consider this information toward using a more holistic approach to promoting positive youth development. Incorporating key features that will enhance positive developmental settings may reinforce the desired positive social norms. These features may include physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships with adult leaders and role models, providing opportunities to belong, opportunities for skill building, and the integration of family, school and community efforts (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

By building more awareness among youth of what is occurring in their local community, practitioners and professionals can teach youth how to interpret what they are seeing, experiencing, and internalizing. This may help youth understand the connectedness that they have with their community and its impact when they internalize the visual triggers surrounding them. This may, in turn, lead to the ability of program practitioners and preventionists to translate this into prevention programs that teach youth that community stimuli must be managed and filtered appropriately. If it is positive stimuli, youth may be encouraged to become more involved and connected to those aspects of community. If it is negative stimuli, youth may be taught that this can result in a behavioral response that can be detrimental to their personal well-being and quality of life. Therefore, a focus on heightening awareness of local risk factors in the ecology of neighborhood and community and how they can be translated into decision-making skills for those youth in high-risk environments is critical to support youth in continuing on a positive developmental trajectory. Further research in this area will explore other dimensions and domains of neighborhood and community factors that may be internalized and manifested behaviorally until a greater understanding of how to use this to protect those youth most vulnerable and at risk is determined.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that youth perceptions of community overall may provide protective factors for vulnerable youth living in stressful environments. Implications for field practitioners, such as after-school program leaders, youth development professionals,

and youth prevention workers are to continue to increase efforts toward increasing resiliency for youth placed at risk. By focusing on building strengths in the community and empowering youth to build the capacities and skills they need to become healthy and contributing citizens, it will shift their focus from problems to solutions.

An environment that promotes a sense of belonging, community service and a climate of high expectations will encourage youth to look beyond the immediate local environment into the future. When youth become more involved in their local community, they become more invested and protective of it. Potentially, this may pay off in the long run by having youth so proud of their community and their role in it, that they would reverse the cycle of negative behaviors occurring by their peers, as well as minimize their own potential for risk-taking behaviors.

The results of this study indicate that the significant negative relationships found between the variables provide support for community-based after-school programs that link youth to their community. The ability to understand their role, connectedness, and empowerment as a result of integrating youth into issues that will make the local community a better place will serve to strengthen their developmental outcomes. Youth living in chronic poverty and disorganized, vulnerable areas especially need to find their way out of these stressors. Community involvement puts significant emphasis on problem solving, systems interaction, and community building (Jones & Silva, 1991).

Getting youth involved in community issues is also an essential element of community building. All members of the community can play a role in creating environments that will lead to an adolescent's healthy development. Creating commitment between its members makes them feel a responsibility to engage in making their community a better place. It takes on more meaning when groups work together to take action to resolve issues and foster leadership. By promoting youths' resilience, confidence, and responsibility, with particular attention paid to community norms and youth/adult interpersonal relationships, communities can get youth more involved and integrated into the process of positive transformation of negative community climates. Practitioners and researchers must work together to deepen the engagement of communities in the positive development of young people to sustain and grow the residential area that will eventually become theirs as they mature into responsible, actively engaged adults.

REFERENCES

After-School All-Stars. (2015). *Need for after-school*. Retrieved from http://www.after schoolallstars.org/programs/need-for-after-school/

Barnett, R. V., Neely, J. C., Payne-Purvis, C., & Culen, G. R. (2014). At-risk youth in after-school programs: How does their use of media for learning about community issues relate to their perceptions of community connectedness, community involvement, and community support? *Journal of Youth Development Special Issue: Media and Youth Development: An Overview of Issues, Theory and Research, 9*(1), 157–169.

Barnett, R. V., Payne-Purvis, C., & Culen, G. (2010). *Youth Involved in Community Issues.* Unpublished instrument. Gainesville: University of Florida.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Berk, L. E. (2006). *Child development* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Blyth, D. A., & Roehlkepartian, E. C. (1993). *Healthy communities, healthy youth: How communities contribute to positive youth*

development. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.

Bonny, A. E., Britto, M. T., Klostermann, B. K., Hornung, R. W., & Slap, G. B. (2000). School disconnectedness: Identifying adolescents at risk. *Pediatrics, 106*, 1017–1021.

Booker, V., Cleveland, A., Herrick, K., Rivera, W., & Tolkoff, L. (2010). *The mystic zone: Cultivating the community to close the achievement gap.* Retrieved from http://ase.tufts.edu/uep/degrees/field_project_reports/2010/Team_6_Final_Report.pdf

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological model of human development. In T. Husén & T. N. Postlethwaite (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education (*2nd ed., Vol. 3, pp. 3–27). Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

Cohen, D., Vandello, J., Puente, S., & Rantilla, A. (1999). "When you call me that, smile!" How norms for politeness, interaction styles, and aggression work together in southern culture. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 62*, 257–275.

Coleman, J. S. (1990). *Foundations of social theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

DeRosier, M. E., Cillessen, A. H. N., Cole, J. D., & Dodge, K. A. (1994). Group social context and children's aggressive behavior. *Child Development, 65*, 1068–1079. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.ep7252756

Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED465844)

Ensminger, J., & Knight, J. (1997). Changing social norms: Common property, bride wealth, and clan exogamy. *Current Anthropology, 38*, 1–44.

Ericson, N. (2001). *The YMCA's teen action agenda*. Retrieved from Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention website: https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/fs200114.pdf

Friedman, L. N., & Bleiberg, M. S. (2002). The long-term sustainability of after-school programs: The After-School Corporation's strategy. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2002*(94), 19–39. doi: 10.1002/yd.04

Huesmann, L. R., & Guerra, N. (1997). Children's normative beliefs about aggression and aggressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72*, 408–419. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.72.2.408

Jaccard, J., Blanton, H., & Dodge, T. (2005). Peer influences on risk behavior: An analysis of the effects of a close friend. *Developmental Psychology, 41*, 135–147. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.41.1.135

Jetten, K., Spears, R., & Manstead, A. S. R. (1996). Intergroup norms and inter-group discrimination: Distinctive self-categorization and social identity effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*, 1222–1233. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.71.6.1222

Jimerson, J. B. (1999). "Who has next?" The symbolic, rational, and methodical use of norms in pickup basketball. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 62*, 136–156.

Jones, B., & Silva, J. (1991). Problem solving, community building, and systems interaction: An integrated practice model for community development. *Community Development, 22*(2), 1–21. doi: 10.1080/15575339109489937

Kelly, K., & Caputo, T. (2006). Case study of grassroots community development: Sustainable, flexible and cost-effective responses to local needs. *Community Development Journal, 41*, 234–245. doi: 10.1093/cdj/bsi052

Kress, C. (2007). *Essential elements of 4-H youth development*. Retrieved from http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov

Nathaniel, K. C., & Kinsey, S. B. (2013). Contributions of youth engagement to the development of social capital through community mapping. *Journal of Extension*, *51*(1). Retrieved from http://www.joe.org /joe/2013february/tt7.php

Neira, M., Gore, F., Brune, M. N., & Hudson, T. (2008). Environmental threats to children's health: A global problem. *International Journal of Environment and Health, 2*, 276–292. doi: 10.1504/ IJENVH.2008.020922

Newman, S. A., Fox, J. A., Flynn, E. A., & Christeson, W. (2000). *America's after-school choice: The prime time for juvenile crime, or youth enrichment and achievement.* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED445823)

Nota, L., Soresi, S., Ferrari, L., & Wehmeyer, M. (2011). A multivariate analysis of the self-determination of adolescents. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 12*, 245–266. doi: 10. 1007/s10902-010-9191-0

Pagani, L., Boulerice, B., Vitaro, F., & Tremblay, R. E. (1999). Effects of poverty on academic failure and delinquency in boys: A change and process model approach. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *40*, 1209– 1219.

Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Hintz, N. R., Sullivan, T. K., & Mannes, M. (2001). The role of neighborhood and community in building developmental assets for children and youth: A national study of social norms among American adults. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *29*, 703–727.

Sherrod, L. R., Flanagan, C., & Youniss, J. (2002). Dimensions of citizenship and opportunities for youth development: The what, why, when, where and who of citizenship development. *Applied Developmental Science*, *6*, 264–272.

Urban, J. B., Lewin-Bizan, S., & Lerner, R. M. (2010). The role of intentional self-regulation, lower neighborhood ecological assets, and activity involvement in youth development outcomes. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, *39*, 783–800. doi: 10.1007/s10964-010-95 49-y

World Health Organization. (n.d.). *WHOQOL: Measuring quality of life.* Retrieved April 23, 2015, from http://www.who.int/health info/survey/whoqol-qualityoflife/en/

****

Rosemary V. Barnett is a Professor of Youth Development and Public Policy at the University of Florida. Most of her research studies and publications have focused on various risk and protective factors for adolescent/emerging adult risk behaviors.

Caroline Payne-Purvis is a health educator who specializes in health risk-taking behaviors among adolescents and emerging adults. She is an Assistant Professor of Public Health Education at Mississippi University for Women.

Gerald R. Culen conducts research on projects related to environmental education programs and youth development and is the Principal Investigator for the CYFAR After-School Program.

****

Appendix A

You and Your Community Index Items* Used to Create
Composite Youth Community (YC) Perceptions Score

Community Environment

- My community is a good place to live.
- I feel safe in my community.
- My community does not have fun things to do.
- My community is clean.
- I enjoy being in my community.

Community Support

- I feel supported by my community.
- My community cares about me.
- Adult leaders in my community are concerned about my needs.
- Adults in my community are my role models.
- There are adults I can talk to in my community.

Community Involvement

- Youth are very involved in the local community.
- I am very involved in my community.
- I would like to be more involved in my community.
- I am very motivated to be involved in my community.
- I feel very valued by my community as a result of my community involvement.

Community Connectedness

- Youth in my community have a voice.
- I feel connected to my community.
- I am not interested in what goes on in my community.
- I am able to influence decisions that affect my community.
- I do not feel I have a positive impact on my community.

*Items obtained from Barnett, R. V., Payne-Purvis, C., & Culen, G. (2010). *Youth Involved in Community Issues.* Unpublished instrument. Gainesville: University of Florida.

Appendix B

Social Behavioral Questionnaire (SBQ):
Exposure to Risk Areas and Items Used in Data Analysis

Friends

    Do your friends
- Use tobacco?
- Drink alcohol?
- Use Marijuana?
- Use other illegal drugs?

Gangs

    During the past 12 months, how often have you
- Thought about joining a gang?
- Talked to gang members?
- Seen gangs?

Seen Behaviors

    During the past 12 months, how often have you
- Seen tobacco used?
- Seen alcohol used?
- Seen marijuana used?
- Seen other illegal drugs used?
- Seen gangs?
- Seen people carrying a weapon?

Access

    How easy is it to get
- Tobacco?
- Alcohol?
- Marijuana?
- Other illegal drugs?