

EVALUATION OF A PROGRAM FOR REDUCTION OF CHILDHOOD AGGRESSION¹

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Summary.—The Peaceful Alternatives to Tough Situations (PATTS) was evaluated for reduction of childhood aggression. A quasi-experimental pre- and posttest comparison group design was used to evaluate 71 PATTS participants who were selected by school personnel or juvenile caseworkers due to prior aggression. The participants responded to the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised and a modified version of the Mauger Forgiveness Scale on the first and last group meetings. Analyses ($n=71$ PATTS; $n=35$ comparison group) indicated significant positive decreases in physical assault, psychological aggression, and vengefulness, and increased forgiveness of others in the PATTS group participants. There was also a reduction of school suspensions, principal referrals, or new criminal offenses for PATTS group participants.

Early antisocial behavior has been found to precede poor adjustment later in life (Farrington, Gallagher, Morley, St. Ledger, & West, 1988; Moffitt, 1994). The long-term effects of childhood aggressive behavior have been extensively studied and linked to a plethora of negative outcomes. These outcomes included drug use (Brook, Whiteman, & Finch, 1992), academic difficulties (Rose, Rose, & Feldman, 1989; Brook & Newcomb, 1995), reckless driving (Nagin & Farrington, 1992), delinquent activities (Nagin & Farrington, 1992; Elliott, 1994), marital violence (Elliott, 1994), and occupational difficulties (Brook & Newcomb, 1995).

Youthful antisocial behavior has been separated into early versus later onset or life-course-persistent versus adolescence-limited antisocial behavior (Moffitt, 1994). Researchers presented a grim prognosis for life-course-persistent antisocial behavior (Cummings, Ianotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1989; Rose, *et al.*, 1989). People with life-course-persistent antisocial behavior appeared to be socialized to this behavioral pattern through interaction with familial and primary caregivers, while adolescent-limited antisocial behavior was related to peer interaction (Moffitt, 1994). In turn, educators have become increasingly alarmed by the increase in early signs of conduct-disorder behaviors in elementary school-age children. Mature acts of deviance have become more prevalent among younger children (Bierman, Coie, Dodge, Greenberg, Lochman, & McMahon, 1992).

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For life-course-persistent aggressive behavior, researchers agree that early intervention is essential to divert individuals from a path of lifelong violence (Cicchetti & Nurcombe, 1992; Reid, 1993; Fraser, 1996; Beauchaine, Strassberg, Kees, & Drabick, 2002); Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). Early detection of aggressive behavior frequently occurred in school-like settings in which children were interacting with peers and reacting to the structure of the classroom environment (Connor, Carlson, & Chang, 2006). Early intervention and detection could stop the cycle in which a youth's interactive style leads to selection and contributing to environments that reinforce the aggressive style (Caspi, Bem, & Elder, 1989). This aggression could also lead to interactional continuity, which refers to the reciprocal interactions with others, in which aggressive children will elicit aggressive responses from others (Crockenberg, Leerkes, Jo', & Barrig, 2008; Zahn-Waxler, Park, & Usher, 2008). These patterns develop into a spiraling decline of opportunities for positive social skills acquisition and a lack of rewards for prosocial activities in the child's social environment (Tolan, Guerra, & Kendall, 1995).

Researchers have promoted earlier childhood interventions; however, adolescence-limited antisocial behavior also appears to be responsive to intervention (Lochman, 1988; Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Mitchell, & Fredrickson, 1997; Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000; Feindler & Starr, 2003). The Peaceful Alternatives to Tough Situations (PATTS) program is an early intervention designed for young children and adolescents. The goal of the present study was to provide preliminary evidence for the efficacy of PATTS.

Interventions for young children and adolescents who exhibit aggressive behaviors have a number of common features. For example, cognitive problem solving, in which the youth learned to interpret social situations in a less defensive manner, is highly recommended for aggressive youth of all ages (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Solomon, 1989; Lochman, 1992; Fraser, 1996; Deffenbacher, Lynch, Oettin, & Kemper, 1996; Beauchaine, *et al.*, 2002; Feindler & Starr, 2003). These researchers found that development of positive cognitive skills in aggressive youth improves their social competence, self-esteem, and aggressive behavior.

Youth who are trained in more effective ways to handle conflictual situations and mediate interpersonal conflicts also appeared to reduce their aggressive behavior (Prinz, Blechman, & Dumas, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Johnson, *et al.*, 1997). Further, increases in prosocial conflict-resolution-skills training is associated with reduced aggression (Prinz, *et al.*, 1994). It has been shown that many youth need to learn to take time before responding to conflict situations, acquire mediation skills, and learn to walk away from conflicts (Beauchaine, *et al.*, 2002). Researchers have shown that many aggressive children possess inadequate cognitive repertoires for dealing with peer conflicts by taking 15 sec. before they respond to conflicts, they

are better able to utilize positive conflict skills (Rabiner, Leinhardt, & Lochman, 1990). Based on the link between adolescence-limited antisocial behavior and peer pressure, it seems imperative that aggressive adolescents be empowered to turn away from negative peer pressure (Moffitt, 1994; Brook & Newcomb, 1995).

Children spend a great deal of the day at school and this has a critical influence on attitudes about conflict-resolution skills. For example, when the teacher does not effectively address phenomena such as name-calling, excluding, or teasing, the message is sent that such behavior is acceptable or tolerated (Vitale, 2001). Other developmental models of aggressiveness include the proactive and reactive aggression and peer delinquency model (Fite & Colder, 2007), the mediational model revisited (Morrow, Hubbard, McAuliffe, Rubin, & Dearing, 2006), the coping confidence and aggression model (Blechman, Prinz, & Dumas, 1995), disruptive friends' characteristics and delinquency in adolescence models (Vitaro, Tremblay, & Kerr, 1997), and relational aggression in early childhood (Crick, Ostrov, & Appleyard, 2004). It is important that school policies encourage prosocial behavior and quickly address conflict resolution (Oishi, Rothman, & Snyder, 2007). This would serve to promote a safe school atmosphere and provide modeling of nonviolent conflict resolution so a child can learn appropriate social skills (Oishi, *et al.*, 2007; Perren, Stadelmann, & von Wyl, 2007).

Also, many aggressive actions are retaliatory in nature and related to prior injustices. Along these lines, Worthington and Wade (1999) defined unforgiveness as the delayed emotions of resentment, hostility, hatred, bitterness, anger, and fear that arise after ruminating about a transgression. It appeared key to aggression management that youth learn to reach a state of forgiveness or at least reduce the amount of unforgiveness or vengefulness (Wade & Worthington, 2003).

The Peaceful Alternatives to Tough Situations (PATTS) program was developed by Williams (1993) with the goals of increasing youths' positive conflict-resolution skills and reducing vengeful and aggressive behavior. PATTS has three separate curricula: (1) Kindergarten to Grade 2, (2) Grades 3 to 5, and (3) middle to high school. In each age level, empirically based interventions on conflict management and reduction were included. The curriculum is focused on teaching cognitive strategies for managing conflict, resistance to peer influence and conflict-resolution skills, identifying and verbalizing affect, and recognizing and expressing forgiveness. All curricula are highly interactive with role plays, games, and skill review. Each topic is taught in nine 1-hr. weekly sessions.

PATTS also emphasizes the necessity for integrating the child's primary support network into the program. A parents' night is offered to all PATTS participants as an opportunity to inform the parents of the new conflict-res-

olution skills their children have learned. This is intended to encourage the parents or guardians to support their children in utilizing newly acquired skills. Support from teachers is also useful, as the program is conducted within the school system. Accordingly, PATTS provides teacher training so that teachers can utilize the strategies during actual classroom conflicts. Facilitators received 8 hrs. of direct training prior to facilitating a group. PATTS was administered to youth in traditional school settings, alternative school settings, and in groups based on juvenile court referrals. A traditional school setting is defined as a school that is based on face-to-face contact between teachers and students organized through lectures, seminars, tutorials, and case studies, while an alternative school setting refers to public schools set up by states or school districts to serve populations of students who are not succeeding in the traditional public school environment. Alternative schools offer students who are failing academically or may have learning disabilities or behavioral problems an opportunity to achieve in a different setting. While there are many different kinds of alternative schools, they are often characterized by flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios, and modified curricula (Conley, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to test the efficacy of PATTS in reducing physical and psychological aggression in youth ages 5 through 18 years, utilizing the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised and Mauger Forgiveness Scale. It was hypothesized that the PATTS-trained participants would be less aggressive, have better conflict resolution skills, and be more forgiving of others than the comparison group.

METHOD

Participants

PATTS participants were youth ($n=71$) ages 5 to 18 years who were selected by school counselors or juvenile court personnel. Inclusionary criteria included prior aggression in the school setting; referrals from judges, intake counselors, and probation officers; number of principals' referrals; suspensions; aggressive episodes; and fights from the prior school semester. Exclusionary criteria included lack of reality orientation, severe violence, lack of attendance, and presence of siblings in the same group. No one was excluded from the program and no prescreening was done. PATTS was provided to seven public schools from urban and rural communities, one alternative school for academically delayed, behaviorally challenged students, and juveniles from the local court system.

The waitlist comparison group participants for the current study were selected using the same inclusion and exclusion criteria as the PATTS participants. The comparison group drawn from the juvenile court system was selected from a waiting list of those ordered by the youth court to partici-

pate in the PATTS program given their aggressive behavior. The comparison group participants were selected from the same schools or court system as the PATTS group to maintain demographic similarity. The researchers were unable to follow a clear matching procedure since they were collecting data in an applied field setting (schools) and participants were referred for behavioral problems. Socioeconomic data were not available; however, researchers did find comparable schools for treatment and comparison groups so groups would be roughly similar. The number of participants included 71 PATTS and 35 comparison group students, for a total of 106. Approximately 69% of the students were African American, 31% Euro-American, and 1% Other, such as Hispanic or American Indian. Boys were approximately 74% of the program participants. Participants came from both urban and rural settings (Hampton and Gloucester County, VA).

Materials

The Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) has good reported reliability and validity (Barling, O'Leary, Jouriles, & Vivian, 1987; Cappell & Heiner, 1990; Caulfield & Riggs, 1992). The scale assesses frequency and severity of partner abuse but is readily adapted to measure interpersonal conflict and features of conflict management. It yields information on psychological aggression, negotiation, physical assault, and physical injury. For the present sample, Cronbach alpha was .81 for Psychological Aggression, .76 for Negotiation, .85 for Physical Assault, and .57 for Physical Injury.

The Mauger Forgiveness Scale (Mauger, Perry, Freeman, Grover, McBridge, & McKinney, 1991) was modified from a dichotomous to a 5-point Likert-type scale using anchors of 1: Strongly agree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, and 5: Strongly agree.

Questions are related to forgiveness of self and of others. Summed ratings represent each of these constructs, with higher scores being associated with lower tendencies toward forgiveness. The Mauger Forgiveness Scale has good reliability and validity (Mauger, *et al.*, 1991). The authors concluded that the subscales, Forgiveness of Others and Forgiveness of Self, measure "distinct constructs, and are predominately sampling different classes of behavior" (p. 174). Forgiveness of Others has demonstrated 2-wk. test-retest stability ($r = .94$) and reasonable internal consistency ($\alpha = .79$). For purposes of this study, Forgiveness of Others was the primary variable of interest; Forgiveness of Self was not examined.

With respect to validity, Mauger, *et al.* reported findings from a factor analytic study with different factor loadings for each of the scales. Forgiveness of Others loaded on a factor named Alienation from Others, which included subscales names Cynicism, Negative Attitude toward Others, and Pas-

sive Aggressive Behavior. The Forgiveness of Self scale loaded on Negative Self Image, Self Control Deficit, and Motivation Deficit scales. The Forgiveness of Self and Forgiveness of Others scales were modestly correlated ($r = .37$), suggesting weakly related processes (Mauger, *et al.*, 1991).

Procedure

The PATTS participants in the school system were referred by teachers, principals, and school counselors for their prior aggression at school. Participants were not randomly assigned into PATTS versus comparative groups, as this was a quasi-experimental design performed within a school setting. PATTS participants from the juvenile court system were referred by the judge, intake counselors, or probation officers. Parents of participants signed authorization for their child to participate in the PATTS groups and completed a packet of questionnaires which included a demographic form. Parents and teachers were given the opportunity to obtain only general feedback about their child's scores either through direct group facilitator contact or by telephone.

All PATTS curricula involved a 9-wk. (1-hr. sessions) modularized program. The Kindergarten through Grade 2 (5 to 8 years) focused on prosocial behavior such as cooperating with others, using caring words, and responsible behavior. It incorporated anger management skills (e.g., ways to calm down, learning to stop and think before taking action). Several assessment questions were deleted from the test as they were not applicable to elementary schoolchildren. Facilitators also read the assessment questions to the students and helped children with completing answers. For Grades 3 to 5 (8 to 11 years) and middle-high school (11 to 18 years) levels, the focus was on positive communications skills, calming techniques, recognizing triggers of anger, accepting responsibility for behavior, and nonviolent conflict-resolution skills. The middle school participants had an additional group session during which peer refusal was addressed, while the high school group had an additional session on consequences of violence, since research has indicated high school students are more readily able to recognize the long-term consequences of conflict resolution (Horne, Stoddard, & Bell, 2007).

The facilitators and cofacilitators for the groups were master's and bachelor's degree counselors from a local nonprofit counseling agency. The facilitators met weekly to collaborate with the school counselor about participants' progress. All facilitators were given 8 hrs. of specific training by the PATTS curriculum developers.

At the time of a student referral, school personnel tabulated the number of referrals, suspensions, aggressive episodes, and fights from the prior school semester. These data were collected by principals again on completion of the 9-wk. curriculum. Each participant from Kindergarten to Grade 12

and the juvenile court were administered the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised and Mauger Forgiveness Scale as pre- and posttests.

The comparison group from the school system was referred in the same manner as the PATTS group. These groups were administered the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised and Mauger Forgiveness Scale and were told "this questionnaire was a way for us to understand how boys and girls handled conflicts." The comparison group was not informed that they would be participating in the PATTS group in the future, but they were placed in a PATTS group 10 wks. later and administered the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised and Mauger Forgiveness Scale as both pre- and posttests. To the juvenile court comparison group were mailed both scales and a stamped envelope 10 wks. prior to attending their first session. Eight of the 10 questionnaires were returned. The court comparison group was administered the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised and Mauger Forgiveness Scale as a posttest on their first day of PATTS group. While researchers enrolled the comparison group after a 10-wk. period, data for those groups were not included in the present analysis.

For children in Kindergarten through Grade 2, a valid, age-appropriate test on conflict-resolution skills was not found, so descriptive data, such as the number of referrals to a principal, suspensions, aggressive episodes, and fights, were gathered for the semester prior to their participating in PATTS and then again after participating in the PATTS program.

Prior to group participation, court personnel obtained the criminal convictions of PATTS participants from the juvenile court system. A 6-mo. follow-up to specify recidivism rates for additional convictions since completing the PATTS program also occurred.

RESULTS

A quasi-experimental (nonrandomized) pretest-posttest comparison group design was used to evaluate the outcome measures from the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised and Mauger Forgiveness Scale. Since the dependent variables (the test scores) were theoretically related, a multivariate of analyses of covariance with pretest effects on both scales as covariates indicated overall significant differences between the PATTS group ($n = 71$) and comparison group ($n = 35$; Wilks lambda = .81; $F_{5,95} = 4.41$, $p < .001$). Subsequent univariate analyses indicated the PATTS group scored significantly lower on the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised Psychological Aggression (self-reported instances of aggression) ($F_{1,99} = 12$, $p < .001$) and Physical Assault ($F_{1,99} = 11.43$, $p < .001$) subscales than the comparison group. The two groups did not score significantly differently on the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised subscales Negotiation ($F_{1,99} = .11$, $p < .74$) and Physical Injury ($F_{1,99} = 2.29$, $p < .13$).

Finally, the PATTS group scored significantly lower on the Lack of

Forgiveness of Others scale than the comparison group ($F_{1,99}=12.57$, $p<.001$). Since higher scores signify less forgiveness of others, this indicates the PATTS group showed significant decreases in vengefulness and significant increases in forgiveness of others than did the comparison group (larger numbers on lack of forgiveness of others signify less forgiveness). Posttest means, with pretests as covariates, for all dependent variables for the PATTS and comparison groups are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
PEACEFUL ALTERNATIVES TO TOUGH SITUATIONS (PATTS; $n=71$) AND COMPARISON ($n=35$) GROUPS'
POSTTEST MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS WITH PRETEST MEANS AS COVARIATES

Group	Lack of Forgiveness		Aggression		Negotiation		Assault		Injury	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	PATTS	42.2*	9.3	14.3*	12.2	15.0	10.4	19.3*	17.5	6.2
Comparison	48.5	11.4	21.3	11.6	12.9	9.9	27.5	18.0	8.3	8.7

* $p<.001$.

Descriptive data for behavioral indicators for students in Kindergarten through Grade 2 who had attended the PATTS program were collected for all 71 students participating in the PATTS program in the Hampton school system. These students showed a 24% decrease in suspensions, 45% decrease in referrals to the principal, and a 24% reduction in school-reported fighting. The researchers only had age group information for each participant; there was no access to exact age or sex, so no statistical tests could be applied for these variables.

Additional descriptive data were gathered for the participants from the local juvenile justice office by the probation supervisor who reviewed the criminal records of all youth who participated in the PATTS program 6 mo. after completing the program. This was done to specify recidivism rates for violent crimes. Youth who participated in the PATTS program through the juvenile court system also had only a 17% recidivism rate of crime 6 mo. after completing the program, which compares with the overall 36% recidivism rate for the Hampton juvenile justice system. No statistical analyses could be performed. Note also, no teachers, peers, or parents rating scales were administered.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to evaluate the efficacy of the PATTS program in reducing physical and psychological aggression in youth, ages 5 through 18 years. The findings indicated that after attending the PATTS program, moderate improvement was evident in data on the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised in Psychological Aggression and Physical Assault. Significant differ-

ences in the PATTS and comparison groups were evident for students in Grades 3 to 5 and in middle and high school curricula. The PATTS group scored significantly higher on Forgiveness of Others on the Mauger Forgiveness Scale. The students who participated in the PATTS program showed a 24% decrease in expulsions, 45% decrease in suspensions, 45% decrease in referrals to the principal, and a 24% reduction in apprehended fighting behavior in comparison to the prior semester when they did not participate in the PATTS program. Analyses for Kindergarten through Grade 2 showed no significant difference in the measured aggressive behaviors. However, this age group showed a decrease in suspensions, referrals to the principal and apprehended fighting behavior.

It is important to note that many of the Physical Injury items listed in the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised were of an extreme nature such as scalding, hospitalization due to a conflict, or broken bones. The majority of the subjects did not appear to experience such extreme physical injury during conflicts, and this accounts for lack of significant differences in physical injury as an index of the efficiency of the PATTS program. This subscale was simply not appropriate for this study.

One limitation of the study was the lack of random assignment to groups. Therefore, the theoretical benefits of random sampling were not gained. However, the researchers controlled for this through the use of a comparison group and pretests as a covariate as they assessed changes on posttests. Also, the researchers did not track any parental involvement statistics for group members. The researchers did, however, discuss the importance of supporting and modeling nonviolent behavior for their children in both a parents' newsletter and during a parents' night.

In summary, analyses indicated significant positive change occurred in the PATTS group in the areas of decreased physical assaults and psychological aggression and increased willingness to forgive. Scores for the PATTS and comparison groups were not significantly different on the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised subscales of Negotiation and Physical Injury. A reduction of suspensions, principal referrals, and new criminal offenses was found. Support for the program's efficacy was indicated. Although preliminary, the PATTS program shows promise as an effective intervention for reduction of childhood aggression.

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