Project Title: The Effects of Community Violence on Children in St. Louis and Cape Town

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Project Summary

The primary objective of the project is to investigate the relationship between exposure to community violence and behavioral and psychological symptoms in a sample of approximately 250 children living in St. Louis, Missouri, and a sample of approximately 250 children living in the Cape Town, South Africa area. The design of the research is a survey, with regression analysis to test for the effects of community violence (and the effects of mediating and moderating variables) on psychological distress. The research is a collaborative project between the Department of Sociology and the School of Social Work at UM-St. Louis (Nancy Shields and Lois Pierce) and the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at UMC (Kathy Nadasen and Sharyn Spicer).

This research will ultimately provide data that would allow us to work with schools and social service agencies to design and implement programs to assist children with PTSD and other distress symptoms resulting from exposure to community violence. Because the study draws on our own and other scholarly work, we anticipate that joint scholarly publications and presentations on children and community violence will be other outcomes of the work. Due to the complexity of the project, we anticipate that data collection will conclude in May 2007, and the findings will be disseminated from June-December 2007. The research has been funded by the University of Missouri Research Board.

Cape Town Visit

In February and March of 2006, Nancy Shields from the Department of Sociology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis visited the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of the Western Cape for the purpose of pretesting instruments, translating instruments, and training interviewers. There are five schools in the surrounding townships of Cape Town that are participating in the project, with the approval of the South African Department of Education. Pretest interviews were conducted with 21 children in three schools in townships surrounding Cape Town (Levanna Primary in Lavender Hill, Liwa Primary in Nyanga, and Sonderend Primary in Mannenberg), and visits were made to the other two schools to make arrangements for data collection that will begin in April 2006 (Khayelitsha No 1 Primary in Khayelitsha and Tafelsig Primary in Mitchell’s Plain). The principals in all five schools were extremely open and cooperative. Some revisions were made in the instruments to make them culturally appropriate, and it was also determined that the instruments worked better with somewhat older children (ages 10-12).
The pretesting also served the purpose of training three of the interviewers who will be involved in primary data collection. The investigators also met with the interviewers to discuss research procedures. One of the interviewers was fluent in both English and Xhosa, and the other two were fluent in both English and Afrikaans. The interviewers translated the instruments to the children as the investigators conducted the interviews. It was determined that it would be desirable to have a standard translation of all the instruments, and arrangements were made with the Iilwimi Sentrum at the University of the Western Cape to translate and back-translate all of the instruments.

The project also has the support of the South Africa Safe Schools project, directed by Nariman Khan. Kathy Nadasen and Nancy Shields met with her to discuss possible future intervention programs that might be developed as a result of the research. Nancy Shields also met with Lindsay Clowes (Social Work), Diana Gibson (Anthropology) and Anita Maurtin-Caincross (Staff Development, Gender Studies) to discuss the project and possible future collaborations.