

# Violence exposure, aggressive cognitions and violence high-risk behaviors among Colombian youth:

The moderating role of community belongingness.

**THE GIST:** Exposure to violence may influence youth outcomes. We researched three aspects of violence exposure: 1) witnessing violence, 2) victimization, and 3) armed conflict. More specifically, we looked at how these aspects related to Colombian youth's external behaviors through the indirect influence of aggressive thoughts and the moderating role of community belongingness. Externalizing behaviors include observable behaviors like aggression, delinquency, and substance use that may affect other people. We surveyed 3,483 high school students in Colombia. Findings indicate that all three aspects of violence exposure were related to youth showing externalized behaviors. Armed conflict and witnessing of violent acts could kind of predict internalized behaviors through the indirect effect of aggressive thoughts.

**THE TAKEAWAY:** Youth in Latin America, particularly in Colombia, are disproportionately affected by community violence and armed conflict, shaped by economic, social, and political instability. Colombia's decades-long conflict, driven by poverty, social inequity, gang activity, and drug trafficking, highlights the importance of understanding both risks and protective factors in addressing violence. Context plays a crucial role in shaping behaviors, influencing whether youth engage in externalizing behaviors or pursue positive change. Effective prevention and intervention strategies must consider these social factors to create culturally responsive solutions that enhance engagement and long-term impact.