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Coping Power in the City:

Promoting Safety and Coping Skills in Baltimore City High Schools

2015-CK-BX-0023

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Final Summary Overview

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## Final Summary Overview

### Study Purpose

This project was a comprehensive and multi-partner response to ongoing youth violence-related challenges in Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS). The project was led by BCPS, with research, evaluation, and training supports from Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and University of Virginia (UVA), along with mental health services and implementation support from Sheppard Pratt Health System (SPHS). The overarching goal of the project was to determine the impact of the Coping Power in the City (CPIC) Program, an indicated preventive intervention for youth screened at risk of aggression based on the early adolescent and elementary versions of the Coping Power Program (Lochman & Wells, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004). Specifically, through this award, CPIC was culturally- and contextually-adapted for Black early adolescents transitioning to high school in Baltimore City; it built on a developmentally-adapted middle school version called Early Adolescent Coping Power (see Bradshaw et al., 2017). CPIC provides programming for urban high schoolers and supports for teachers and school police.

The three major aims of this project were to: 1) Develop and refine the existing evidence-based *Coping Power* model and assess the acceptability and feasibility of the integrated approach among City Schools 9<sup>th</sup> graders and BCPS Police Officers; 2) Test the efficacy of *Coping Power* for improving student mental health and school safety and reducing aggressive behavior using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design with students in 10 BCPS high schools; and 3) Evaluate the broader impacts of the multi-component CPIC initiative (including the BCPS Officer training and closed-circuit television [CCTV] installation in participating schools) on officer knowledge and student behaviors and perceptions. Toward that end, we worked in close consultation with the original developer, Dr. John Lochman (University of Alabama) in 2016 to

developmentally, culturally, and contextually adapt the Coping Power program, then piloted the adaptation (CPIC Program) to ensure feasibility and acceptability, fulfilling Aim 1. For Aim 2, we launched a RCT in fall 2016, whereby we successfully recruited, enrolled, and randomized students from 10 high schools. We collected student- and teacher-reported surveys at baseline, post-test, and 1-year follow-up for three cohorts of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students (2016-2020). Finally, for Aim 3, all Baltimore City School Police Officers (regardless of assignment to participating schools) were eligible and invited to participate in multiple trainings throughout the project implementation period; we collected survey data from a subset of participating officers. The trainings focused on threat assessment and de-escalation; youth mental health first aid; crisis intervention and mental/behavioral health de-escalation, and supporting school police wellness.

### **Project Design and Method**

#### **Aim 1: Adaptation and Feasibility Testing of Coping Power for Baltimore City 9th Graders**

Dr. Duane Thomas, a licensed clinical psychologist and the lead clinician on our research team from the Sheppard Pratt Health System (SPHS) led the developmental, cultural, and contextual adaptations to establish the adapted CPIC Program. Dr. Thomas spearheaded an iterative, community-based participatory research (CBPR; Israel et al., 2015) adaptation process that included revisions to the intervention manuals for high school students and their parents. We engaged in biweekly feedback meetings with researchers and clinicians involved in a federally-funded trial of a middle school adaptation of Coping Power, including the original developer of the Coping Power Program, Dr. Lochman, to make the initial adaptations. Specifically, a series of meetings solicited feedback regarding adaptations to the curriculum. Adaptations were also informed by student focus groups at two BCPS high schools. Thereafter, our team conducted a pilot of the adaptations, in spring and early fall 2016, in 2 BCPS high schools prior to the first

year of implementation (fall 2016). We also received feedback from school counselors, clinicians, and other relevant staff regarding the implementation of select modules from the adapted curriculum with students as part of their ongoing daily work (see Final Results for details).

## **Aim 2: Testing the Efficacy of CPIC in BCPS High Schools**

**Participants.** Schools were identified and approached for participation by BCPS. School administrators were informed of study procedures, including randomization of participating students to receive intervention or school-as-usual, and provided voluntary consent for school participation. In total, 11 high schools agreed to participate in the study, including one school that was recruited and enrolled to replace a school that closed. Subsequently, teacher ratings of aggressive behavior were used to screen all 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Across the 11 participating schools, teachers completed a 6-item screener of youth proactive and reactive aggression for approximately 5,800 students (Dodge et al., 1997). We used a cutoff score to identify approximately 30% percent of youth demonstrating the most elevated aggressive behavior in the schools; the students in the top 30<sup>th</sup> percentile on aggressive behavior were eligible for recruitment. Parents of eligible students (i.e., those with the highest levels of teacher-rated aggressive behavior problems) were contacted by CPIC clinicians to obtain informed consent until we reached our goal enrollment number each school year in the allotted timeframe (approximately 180 students per year/cohort). In total, we recruited 516 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 11 BCPS high schools for participation in the RCT. Enrollment occurred across three cohorts, with the first cohort recruited in the 2016-17 school year ( $n = 175$ ), the second in the 2017-18 school year ( $n = 186$ ) and the third in the 2018-19 school year ( $n = 155$ ). As such, the overall consent rate among eligible participants was 94.85%, with a 5.15% decline/not consented rate (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Youth Consent Rate by Cohort**

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	All Cohorts
<b>Eligible for Recruitment</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>544</b>
<b>Not Consented</b>	<b>21*</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>28</b>
Reason: Parent Declined	21	3	4	28
<b>Consented and Randomized</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>516</b>
	89.29%	98.41%	97.48%	94.85%

**Study Design.** Recruited students were randomized within school to either receive CPIC ( $n = 256$ ) or a business-as-usual ( $n = 260$ ) condition, using a stratified randomization procedure to ensure balance in conditions by gender and baseline screener score. The study design featured longitudinal data collection at three timepoints (baseline, post, and 1 year follow-up in the year after the intervention) for each cohort.

**Data Collection.** Multi-informant data were collected, including: 1) student-report survey data on school climate, including their perceptions of safety and relationships with peers and adults at school, including school police (Bradshaw et al., 2014) and self-reported social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes on the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC), Second Edition (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004); 2) teacher report on student behavior using the BASC and Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation – Checklist (TOCA; Bradshaw & Kush, 2020); 3) observer-reported data using the School Assessment for Environmental Typology (SAfETy; Bradshaw, Milam, Furr-Holden, & Lindstrom Johnson, 2015) regarding school layout, school ownership, disorder, and surveillance in all non-classroom environments (e.g., outside property, stairwells, hallways, etc); 4) school PBIS fidelity data using the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET; Sugai et al., 2001) and Individual Student Support Systems Evaluation Tool (ISSET; Debnam, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2012; Lewis-Palmer et al., 2005); and 5) post-training self-report survey data were collected from school police officers who participated in CPIC trainings, which

were offered to all officers on the force (including officers assigned to schools other than CPIC project schools) on their priorities, roles, and characteristics (Lambert & McGinty, 2002).

**Intervention Supports.** The CPIC Program included clinician-led groups and individual sessions for 9<sup>th</sup> grade youth demonstrating teacher-reported aggressive behaviors, along with separate sessions for their parents and teachers. These sessions are a component of the intervention to support students' generalization of new skills. Like the original Coping Power Program, the adapted student and parent CPIC manuals are based in Lochman and Wells (1996, 2002) social-cognitive model of youth aggression, targeting improvement in student social cognitive appraisals, social problem solving, and parenting practices. Starting in the 2016-2017 school year, a staff of five clinicians provided in-service trainings to teachers at our partnering schools, focusing on orienting school staff to the CPIC intervention. Clinicians held periodic individual meetings with student participants for general "check-ins" or when necessary to go over content material missed. Clinicians also met with teachers on a weekly basis to brief them on session content; they also met with other school personnel to cover similar briefings, and with school police officers at least twice a week for planning and support. Clinicians invited parents to attend the parent sessions described above. The lead clinician (Dr. Thomas) met biweekly with clinicians on a one-to-one basis during set supervision times at SPHS or by requests at the facility, school sites or by phone to offer supplemental guidance with clinical responsibilities. In the third cohort (2018-19 school year), we undertook a novel approach for delivering content to parents, focused on a text message "nudge" engagement strategy. Parents received a text message after each youth session with a corresponding infographic that summarized content delivered in the youth group session. In addition to providing information, each infographic

contained a behavioral nudge with prompts for discussion and/or activities so that parents could reinforce key content.

### **Aim 3: The Baltimore City School Police Force Training Series and CCTV Installations**

All officers within the Baltimore City School Police Force (BCSPF) were invited to attend the training series for the purpose of professional development in skills identified as key to support Baltimore City Public Schools high school students. In an effort to build a robust partnership between the project team and the school police the lead clinician to inform the development of these trainings, Dr. Thomas, spent time shadowing officers and held several formal and informal meetings with the Interim Chief, members of his leadership team and school police officers at their headquarters and in schools. As part of these efforts, he assessed their professional development priorities as a department and as members of the wider law enforcement community and solicited their guidance on effective ways to integrate school police into planned intervention activities. In addition, he shadowed school police officers and participated in “ride alongs,” which provided insight on what it is like to be a school police officer serving BCPS, which formatively shaped the development of content and foci of the training series. As a result, training content areas included threat assessment, crisis intervention, youth mental health first aid, racial literacy and cultural responsiveness, and stress management. See Table 2 for the specific trainings and participant attendance. Note that the force originally comprised 126 officers as of 2016, but the size of the force diminished considerably over the subsequent several years (i.e., approximately 40 officers retired or were laid off by the BCSPF, leaving an estimated 85 officers by 2018).



**Table 2. Summary of Training Sessions for Police**

	Training	Partnering Trainer	Participants
March 2016	Youth Mental Health First Aid Certification (8-hr training)	Mental Health Association of Maryland	20 officers
April 2016	Threat Assessment & De-Escalation Skills (8-hr training)	Dr. Dewey Cornell Lt. James Booker	59 officers
July 2016	Youth Mental Health First Aid Certification (8-hr training)	Mental Health Association of Maryland	16 officers
Jan 2017	Crisis Prevention & Intervention (8-hr)	Crisis Prevention Institute	~100 officers
Aug 2017	Crisis De-escalation (2-day training)	Winners Circle Tactical Solutions & Coppin State	15 officers
Nov 2017	Coping Power & School Police Training (1-hour)	Dr. Duane Thomas, Baltimore City College	~100 officers
Nov 2018	Wellness, Racial Trauma, & Student-Officer Relationship Building (4-hour training)	Dr. Howard Stevenson	84 officers

In addition to the training series, new CCTV cameras were installed in all 11 schools based on an identified need by Baltimore City Public Schools to update their video surveillance technology, which were out-of-date and no longer functioning in the CPIC project schools. Each school was provided with a maximum of 16 Interlogix interior and/or exterior vandal dome cameras. Eight of the cameras were placed in universal locations across the 11 schools. Remaining cameras were placed in locations, which school administration referred to as “hot spots” (i.e., places where student bullying and other forms of violence or illicit activities more frequently occurred). In addition, video surveillance technology footage was integrated within one of the Crisis Intervention trainings to promote data-informed decision-making in crisis situations and model exemplar responses.

## Findings

**Aim1. Cultural, Contextual, and Developmental Adaptation and Initial Piloting.** Revisions to student and parent manuals document the adapted CPIC Program and were led by Dr. Thomas

and included feedback sessions with BCPS youth, parents, and the original developer as described above. Based on these sources, data-informed adaptations were made to the student and parent versions of the manual as follows: added representation of more racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in graphics, images, and videos used in the intervention; incorporated cultural expressions, contemporary language (e.g., “sparking” instead of “journaling” at the beginning of each session), and scenarios germane to BCPS 9<sup>th</sup> graders into manuals to promote student buy-in and acceptability; added a Coping Power “pledge” to set positive behavioral expectations during group sessions and the school day; added a higher degree of interactive content to promote generalization of new skills among BCPS participants; included activities and strategies to encourage discourse around different contextual realities and pressing neighborhood risks specific to urban youth of color, while building their capacity for resilience; and, added consideration of cultural-focused developmental models that might serve as additional theoretical backdrops for the development and adaptation of the intervention.

Initial developments and adaptations to the intervention were presented to the *Coping Power* teams from AU, UVA, and JHU as part of a joint teleconference that took place during the first week of July 2016 in order to obtain critical reactions to proposed modifications and to solicit advice on other adaptations that may be required to help achieve the project’s stated goals. Further refinements to the student and parent manuals were presented during biweekly multi-site phone conferences and final drafts of the documents were reviewed and approved by the intervention developer and key members of his team in late September 2016.

An important project activity for Year 1 was the recruitment of pilot City high schools to further inform the development and adaptation of the Coping Power intervention prior to implementation of the final model. School district personnel selected two high schools that

agreed to pilot the adapted versions of the curriculum in spring 2016, and early fall 2016; these schools were not part of the RCT. Feedback from school staff and students ( $n=25$ ) from the two pilot schools provided useful information to guide adaptations to the student manuals and considerations for the school police component, including input on initial engagement activities with youth, content of presented scenarios, and feedback on the infusion of student leadership activities, teacher mentors, and school police integration as part of proposed intervention activities. Further details on the adapted intervention can be found in a paper recently published in a peer-reviewed journal by Thomas et al. (2021).

**Aim 2. Test the efficacy of Coping Power in the City.** To assess the impact of CPIC on student mental health and aggressive behavior, as indicated by teacher-reported (BASC and TOCA scales) and student-reported (BASC scales) student social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes, we ran a series of preliminary intent-to-treat (ITT) linear growth models (i.e., to assess the impact of the intervention on behavioral outcomes over time). In each of these models, we examined linear growth in each focal outcome over time (i.e., pre-, post-, and follow-up time points) and centered time at follow-up to estimate the ITT impact of CPIC on growth and at the follow-up time point. The initial set of analyses focused on teacher-reported BASC composites and TOCA scales suggested that CPIC was not significantly associated with growth trajectories; more specifically, intervention and control students did not have statistically significant differences in teacher-reported behavioral trajectories. CPIC was predictive of between-group differences in teacher-report of BASC adaptive skills at follow-up, such that students participating in the CPIC intervention demonstrated significantly greater adaptive skills at follow-up. These significant between-group differences at follow-up were not observed for teacher-reported BASC externalizing, internalizing, or school problems composites or TOCA

scales. However, trajectories over time do not appear to be linear for every outcome, and thus additional analyses exploring potential non-linearity are also underway. Similarly, preliminary analyses suggested no significant impacts of CPIC on growth or group differences at follow-up for student-reported BASC composites (i.e., school problems, internalizing, inattention/hyperactivity, or personal adjustment). However, additional analyses exploring non-linearities are in progress. In summary, the results to date suggest that CPIC students had significantly greater teacher-reported adaptive skills at follow-up; no other analyses suggested statistically significant impacts of the CPIC program.

**Aim 3. Broader impacts of the multi-component CPIC initiative (including the BCPS Officer training) on officer knowledge and student behaviors and perceptions.**

To address Aim 3, we tested the impact of the CPIC student intervention on student-reported perceptions of school police officer fairness and caring. Specifically, we ran a series of preliminary ITT growth models. In each of these models, we examined linear growth in each focal outcome (i.e., police officer fairness and caring, as reported by students) over time (i.e., pre-, post-, and follow-up timepoints) and centered time at follow-up to estimate the ITT impact of CPIC on growth and at the follow-up timepoint. Preliminary analyses suggest that CPIC was not significantly associated with student-reported perceptions of school police officer fairness or caring over time (i.e., growth) or at follow-up.

With regard to outcomes for police officers specifically, because data were collected at post only following officer trainings, we are not able to draw conclusions about the impacts of specific trainings. However, other studies were conducted to better understand the broader impacts of officer knowledge and practices on student behaviors and perceptions. Specifically, a paper published by our team with findings relevant to Aim 3 was led by Bottiani et al. (2020). As

summarized in this paper, we found no positive associations between student perceptions that their school police were caring and any of the student engagement outcomes (i.e., culture of equity, academic motivation, attitudes towards teachers and attitudes towards school). These findings are consistent with prior research showing the lack of an association between school police and student behaviors (Jackson, 2002), but were inconsistent with prior research showing school police presence was linked to lower levels of school connectedness (Theriot, 2016). Nonetheless, student perceptions that their school police officer(s) were caring did attenuate the association between perceived discrimination and negative school attitudes, suggesting that relationships with school police, when perceived as positive by students, may play an important role in mitigating the negative effects of perceived discrimination on school disconnection. We examined associations cross-sectionally in this study, so cannot make causal inferences from the analyses.

A third manuscript that builds on data collected from school police lead by Dr. Katrina Debnam is currently under review. In this study, data from the school police survey ( $n = 28$ ) and a focus group with a small group of officers ( $n = 5$ ) were analyzed to explore the daily experiences and activities of school police. Themes from the focus group included the school police attempts to navigate change in policies and procedures in the school system; the community contexts of the school system and its impact on school police duties; and role ambiguity, including differences in how school police perceived their roles within schools compared to how others saw them. The study's findings suggest the importance of clarity related to the roles, responsibilities, and trainings and supports for school police officers. Results also call attention to underlying tensions between school police officers and positive youth development in an era where school police presence in schools is highly debated.

## Implications

**Intervention Finding Implications.** Findings from this project will be used to enhance our knowledge of the efficacy of an adaptation of the Coping Power evidence-based intervention in preventing aggression in urban, Black high school students and have significant implications for urban school districts that are concerned with the role and deployment of school police officers. The project has contributed to advancing a basic understanding of the processes necessary to make cultural adaptations to evidenced-based approaches to yield comprehensive culturally responsive interventions for youth attending urban secondary schools. Another contribution has been our burgeoning findings on effective ways to promote partnerships between school resource/police officers, university-based researchers, clinicians and community stakeholders in efforts to reduce violence and other risk behaviors among urban youth. Notably, teachers and other staff commented on noticeable improvements in the conduct and decision-making of CPIC students. Preliminary findings suggest that CPIC students demonstrated greater teacher-reported adaptive skills at follow-up than comparison students. However, the analyses do not suggest that CPIC impacted student- or teacher-reported emotional or behavioral outcomes, nor did CPIC (student intervention) impact student perceptions of officers.

**School Police Implications.** Though findings from Bottiani et al. (2020) did not reveal significant effects of CPIC on student-reported perceptions of school police officer fairness or caring, our work with the school police was timely in light of national uprisings related to police brutality in summer 2020, which have prompted shifts in national dialogue on the topic of investment in policing, including policing in schools. Some school districts, under increased pressure to defund the police, have terminated school resource officer contracts and divested in policing in schools (Balingit et al., 2020). In fact, during the years CPIC was being implemented,

Baltimore City significantly reduced the number of officers in its school police force. These decisions were based on a variety of factors, including research suggesting that the presence of police in schools increases likelihood of student arrest for minor offenses (i.e., disorderly conduct) (Gottfredson et al., 2020), which can set youth on harmful trajectories consistent with concerns about the criminalization of student conduct in the classroom and the school to prison pipeline (Barnes & Motz, 2018). Our study findings highlight the need for training officers *if* police are deployed to schools to ensure the role of officers in urban schools is beneficial and not iatrogenic.

**Dissemination.** Results have been disseminated to communities of interest through regular meetings, reports, and presentations with school principals and BCPS leadership. We also distributed a [research brief](#) summarizing the Bottiani et al. (2020) findings to the Maryland State PBIS Leadership Team. Additional presentations occurred at professional meetings, including grantees' meetings hosted by NIJ. Additional peer-reviewed publications are underway. This work also informed subsequent grant applications to the National Institute of Mental Health and the Institute of Education Sciences.

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