

Violent Acts and Violentization: Testing Violent Socialization Theory in SA Context

Examining the Process of Violentization of 78 Youth from
Gugulethu and Khayelitsha in the Western Cape

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2013



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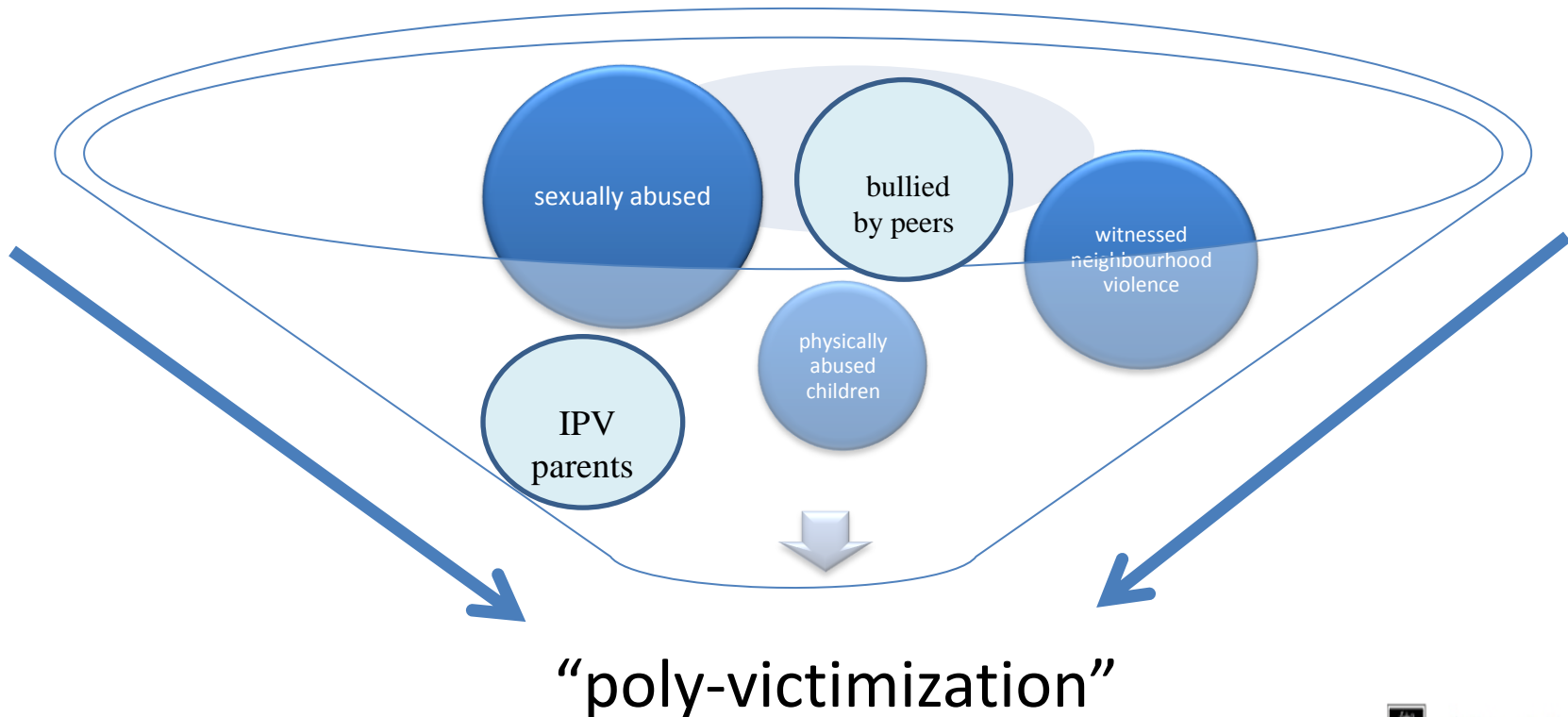
Some Stats...

- Rates of homicide, gender-based violence, and gang-related violence are currently among the highest in the world (Altbeker, 2007; Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009)
- Youth between 12 and 22 years of age are twice as likely as adults to be victimized by crime and violence (Burton, 2006)
- Youth between the ages of 10 and 29 years account for 48% of all violent deaths in the country (Foster, 2012), with rates of youth homicide being especially high in Cape Town's impoverished townships (Seedat et al., 2009).



What do we know?

1. We know from clinical and research practice that far too many children are exposed to abuse, violence, and crime
2. This exposure damages their mental and physical health



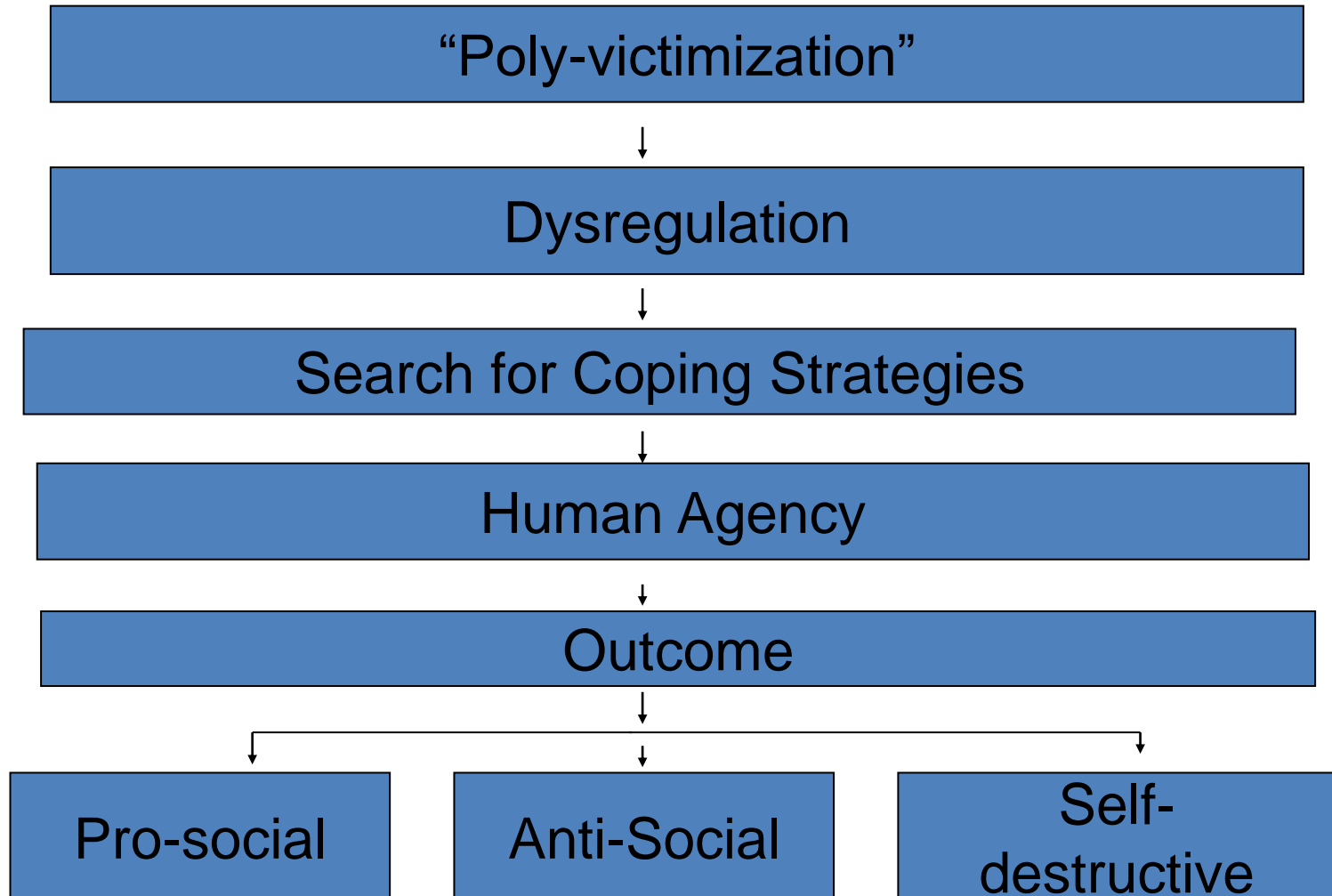
Childhood Exposure to Multiple Forms of Victimization

“poly-victimization” = Trauma

- **Events that are:**
 - life-threatening or
 - psychologically devastating to the point where
 - persons’ capacities to cope are overwhelmed
 - and that result in changes in brain circuitry and structures
 - Significant dysregulation (thoughts, feelings & behavior)
- **Childhood abuse and trauma:**

“abused children suffer from long-term mental, cognitive and social dysfunctions. Often, children who live through abuse grow up to become abusers themselves, creating a cycle of violence and abuse” (Siegel, 2011 in Holtzhausen, 2012).

Traumatic Life Events, Dysregulation, Agency, Outcome (Gilgun, 2007)



Linking Poly-victimization to Violent Socialization

- *“People are what they are as a result of the social experiences that they have undergone in their lives”* (Athens: 2008: 7).
 - Most social experiences, however, are trivial; they pass in an almost endless stream, quickly over and quickly forgotten.
 - Some social experiences are significant consequential and unforgettable:
 - Lasting impact upon people’s lives and are remembered weeks, months and years afterward, leaving a permanent mark upon people regardless of their wishes (Athens, 2008:7).

- Athens' (1992) conceptual model of violent socialization explicates the reason why some individuals choose to employ violence as a preferred method of dealing with everyday social encounters.
- The purpose of this study is to examine the social process of violentization of South African youth from two Western Cape communities; Gugulethu and Khayelitsha making use of Athens' Process of Violentization Theory (Athens, 1992, 1997, 2003).

Process of Violentization Theory

- Athens developed the Process of Violentization Theory describing four stages in the development of violent perpetrators, namely; ***brutalization, defiance, violent performances and virulency.***

Stage 1: Brutalization

- This stage involves the teaching and demonstration of violent behavior, which includes threatening to use physical force, observing the use of physical force, and learning how to use physical force.
- **Three distinct experiences:**
 1. **Violent subjugation;** one or both of the guardians or parents of a child use physical force to discipline, intimidate, control or hurt the child, whether from ignorance, personal frustration or their own experiences, the result is a battered, suffocated, scared, tortured and/or humiliated child
 2. **Personal horrification;** during this experience, the child witness someone close to them such as a mother, brother, close friend or schoolmate undergo violent subjugation (Athens, 2008). Although not as physically traumatic as violent subjugation, it can be even more psychologically damaging.
 3. **Violent coaching;** entails the parent or significant other person instructing or “coaching” the child through a variety of techniques to take violent action against others (Athens, 2008).

Stage 2: Defiance

- The child takes a conscious decision to make the brutalization stop
- As the child grows up a response pattern develops; ***if provoked, attack especially if there is a chance you can win the fight.***

Critical questions remain, “Will I be able to do it, to be violent enough to succeed? Can I hurt someone else and get away with it?”

Stage 3: Violent Performances

- The child makes a conscious decision to hurt someone else
- Most boys or girls wait for a **major provocation**
 - It can be a direct physical attack by a family member or a shoving match after a ball game.
 - Victory may move the process of becoming violent forward, defeat may push it back.
- Hazing and bullying other children is a testing out phase of what adults will allow (James, 2004). Success may push a young person to the fourth stage, virulency.

Stage 4: Virulency

- The child is now recognised in his or her community as being a violent person.

The stage has three elements:

- 1. Violent notoriety** (gains a reputation for violence).
- 2. Social trepidation** (people begin to treat him differently – he feels invincible).
- 3. Malice** (desire to harm others or to see others suffer - makes a firm resolution to attack or kill if provoked).

Research Sample

- 78 Youth Offenders attending Diversion Program at REALISTIC during December 2011 – February 2012
- 31 Gugulethu and 47 Khayelitsha
- 70 Male respondents, and
- 8 Female respondents
- Ages ranged between 13 – 21 years old
- In testing the Process of Violentization Theory for the South African context, use was made of a 59 Item Violentization Socialization Scale (VSS, Athens, 1992, 1997, 2003).

Violent Socialization Scale (VSS)

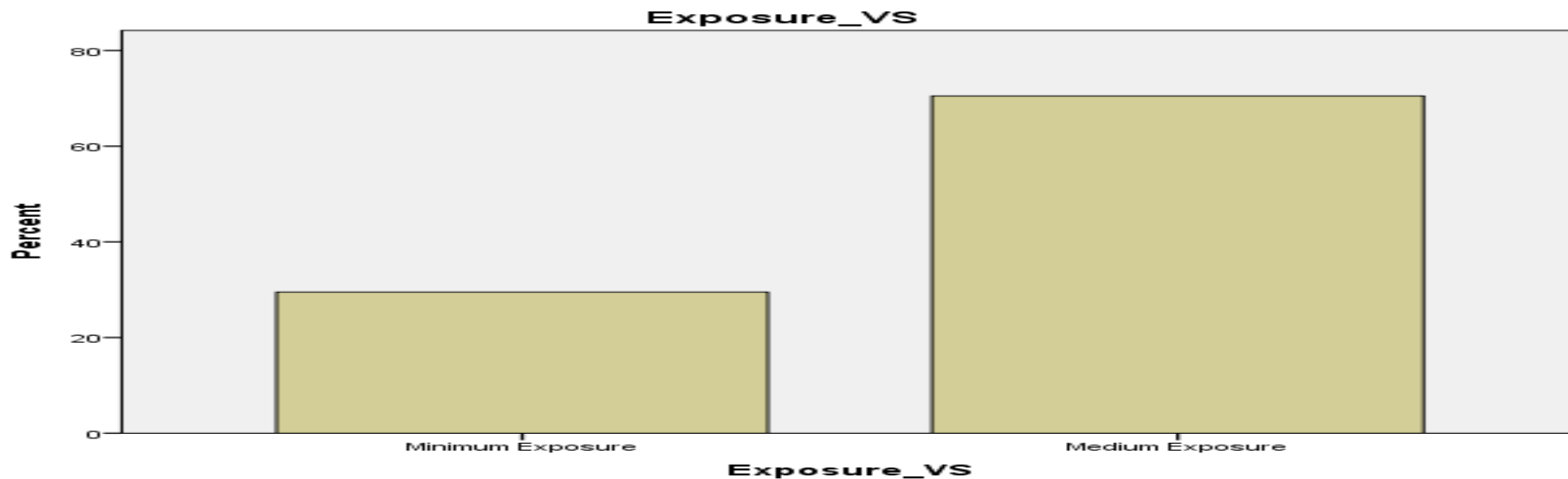
- VSS consists of 59 items (Likert Type Scale) drawn from Athens Theory of Violentization
 - Participants asked to respond to various Likert Type Statements on a scale from 1 (never / not at all) – 6 (Frequently / almost always)
 - Also asked to indicate relationship with perpetrator (i.e. Father, Mother, Stepfather, etc.)
- Violent Subjugation (19), Personal Horrification (11), Violent Coaching (9), Virulency (9), Defiance (6) & Violent Performance (5)

Reliability of individual components

Component	Cronbach Alpha
VS	.914
PH	.935
VC	.815
Be	.809
VP	.577 (Excluded from Analyses)
Vi	.834

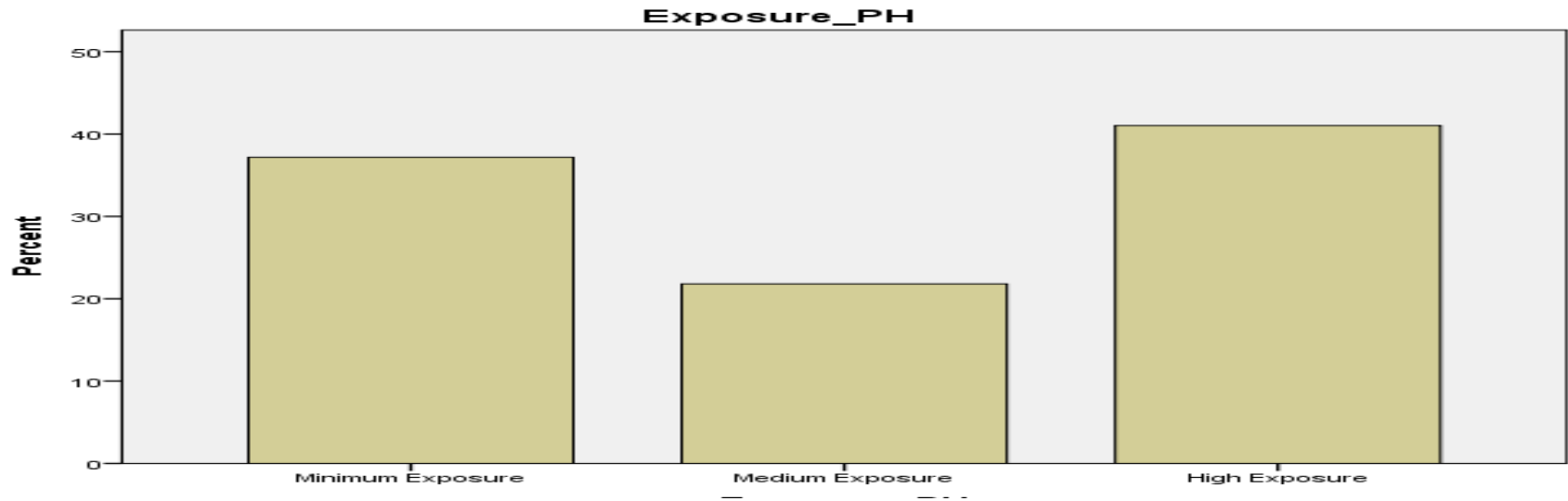
Each component (as categorized by documentation provided) was examined for internal reliability using the Cronbach Alpha. Values higher than 0.7 indicate good reliability.

Exposure to Violent Socialization items 1 – 19



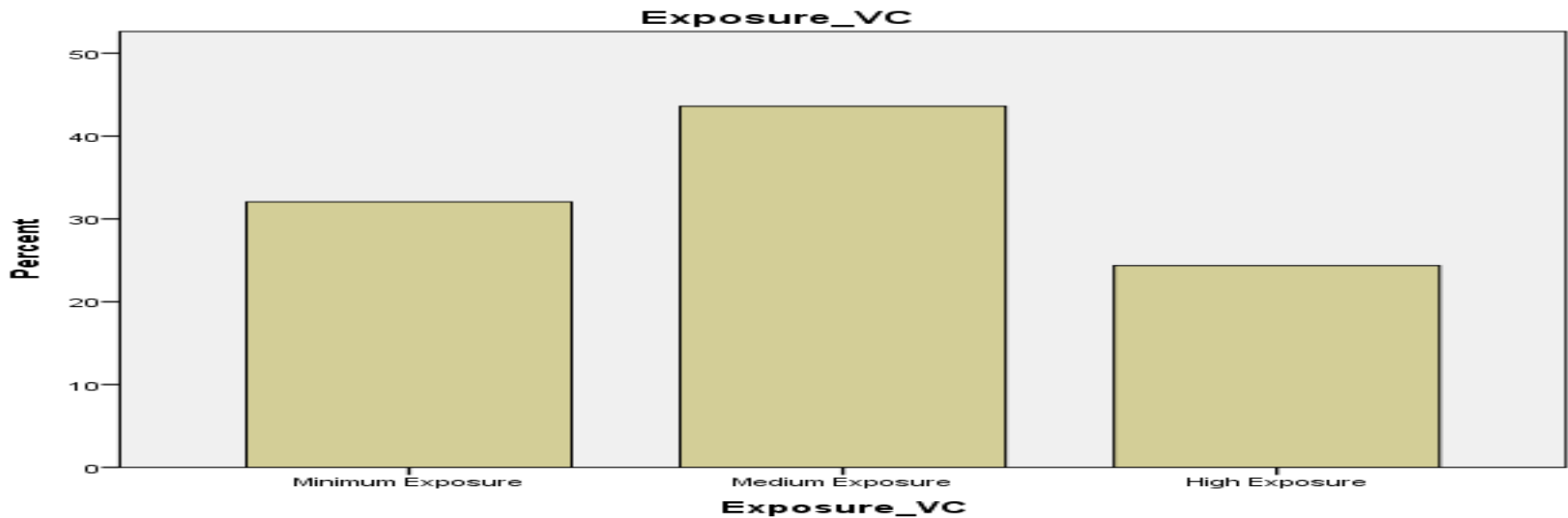
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Minimum Exposure	23	29.5	29.5
	Medium Exposure	55	70.5	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0

Exposure to Personal Horrification items 20 – 30



		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Minimum Exposure	29	37.2	37.2	37.2
	Medium Exposure	17	21.8	21.8	59.0
	High Exposure	32	41.0	41.0	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

Exposure to Violent Coaching items 31 – 39



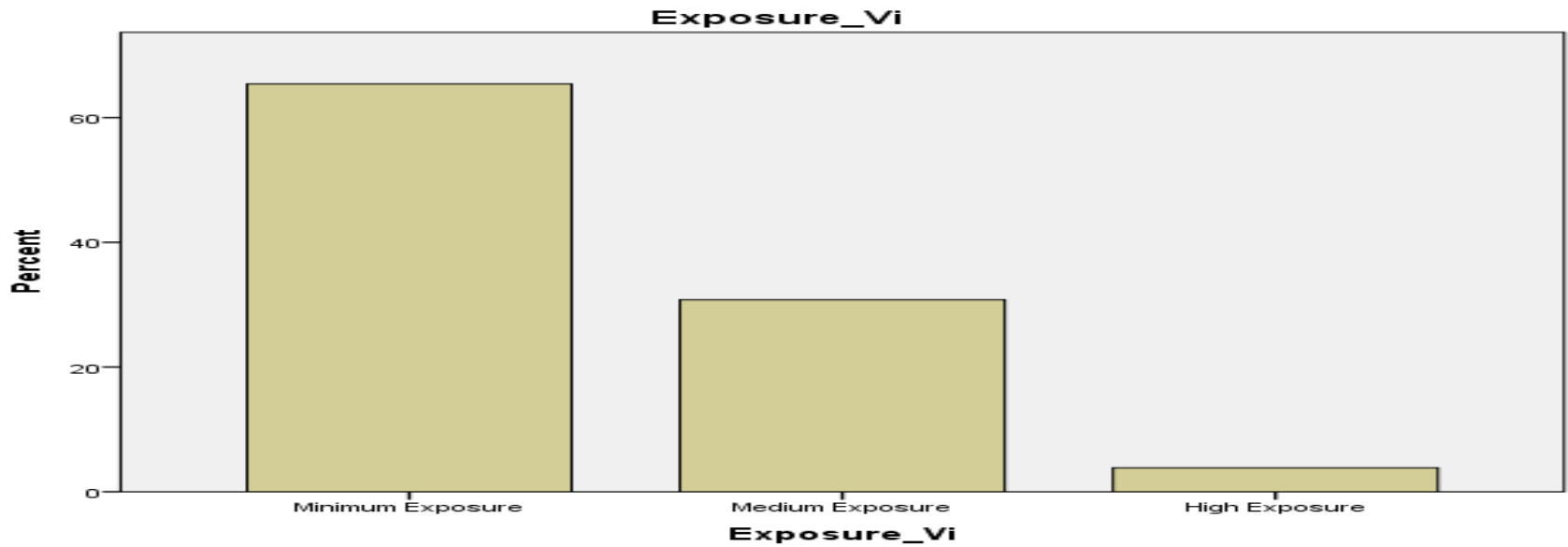
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Minimum Exposure	25	32.1	32.1	32.1
Valid Medium Exposure	34	43.6	43.6	75.6
Valid High Exposure	19	24.4	24.4	100.0
Total	78	100.0	100.0	

Exposure to Defiance items 40 – 45



	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Minimum Exposure	25	32.1	32.1	32.1
Valid Medium Exposure	32	41.0	41.0	73.1
Valid High Exposure	21	26.9	26.9	100.0
Total	78	100.0	100.0	

Exposure to Virulency items 51 - 59



		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Minimum Exposure	51	65.4	65.4	65.4
	Medium Exposure	24	30.8	30.8	96.2
	High Exposure	3	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

Overall Exposure

(using the average of the various components)



	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Minimum Exposure	4	5.1	5.1	5.1
Valid Medium Exposure	64	82.1	82.1	87.2
Valid High Exposure	10	12.8	12.8	100.0
Total	78	100.0	100.0	

Concluding Remarks

- Preliminary analyses indicate Medium Exposure (87%) to the Violentization Process
- **Personal Horrification** (41%) is a central socialization component in teaching young people to be violent
- Is this the missing component that differentiate Life Course Persistent Offenders (LCP – 13% High Exposure) and Adolescence Limited Offenders (AL – 64% Medium Exposure)?