How Do Social Skills, School Factors, and Problem Domains Differ Between Urban and Non-Urban High School Freshmen Students?

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Addressing students’ social-emotional learning needs is critical for their success, particularly during their transition into high school. This paper examines the associations among social skills (e.g., communication, assertion), problem areas (bullying, hyperactivity, externalizing and internalizing problems), and school factors (sense of school membership, commitment to school) between urban and non-urban freshmen students during their first semester in high school. Ninth grade students in one urban New Jersey high school (63.9% Hispanic, 31.2% Black; n=285) and another non-urban high school in Central Illinois (44.4% White, 41.1% Black; n=270) completed the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) survey. Composite measures of social skills and problem domains were used for the analysis. Independent sample t-tests revealed urban students reported significantly lower levels of social skills and sense of school membership, and higher levels of problem domains as compared to non-urban students. Additionally, correlation analyses found among urban students, higher levels of social skills were positively associated with higher commitment to school and sense of school membership, and lower problem areas. However, for non-urban students, only social skills were significantly negatively correlated with problem areas. Findings suggest greater attention on the school context is needed for urban students when they enter high school. The discussion highlights areas for future research, including longitudinally understanding the social-emotional learning needs of students through high school, and examining for gender and race/ethnicity differences with other outcomes (e.g., grades, attendance, disciplinary referrals).
INTRODUCTION
Social skills (SS) are important in understanding problem behaviors. Urban, teens, little is known about the relations among SS, PB, and the school context for non-urban and non-urban high school freshmen students.

RESEARCH QUESTION:
What associations can be derived from the correlation between social skills, problem behaviors, and school attitudes amongst urban and non-urban freshmen students?

DATA
Two schools of eighth grade students, one urban high school in New York and another non-urban school in Chicago, data collected in Semester 1.

MEASURES
Social Skills: Based on the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS). Mean of domain communication, cooperation, assertion, empathy, empathy, engagement, and self-control (α = .89).
Problem Domain: From the SSIS and Mean of a domain: Emotionalizing, Disrupting, Regulatory, Internally (α = .90).
Commitment to School (α = .89) Problem Domains: All questions; “people in school are friendly to me,” “I am ready to graduate from this school,” “people are friendly to me” (α = .89).

METHOD
Compared Urban Score of SS, PB, and School Context: → Correlation between relations among SS, PB, and School Context: → Correlation analysis

RESULTS
Mean Scores of Social Skills, School Factors, Problem Domains Between Urban and Non-Urban School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Urban Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Non-Urban Mean (SD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Skill Frequency</td>
<td>1.86 (0.58)</td>
<td>1.93 (0.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to School</td>
<td>2.95 (0.47)</td>
<td>2.96 (0.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of School Membership</td>
<td>3.31 (0.61)</td>
<td>3.32 (0.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Domain:</td>
<td>0.76 (0.32)</td>
<td>0.60 (0.41)</td>
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FINDINGS:
Findings highlight that urban students, when compared to non-urban students, reported statistically significant lower scores on social skills (p ≤ .01), sense of school membership (p ≤ .001) and problem domains (p ≤ .05).

Correlations Among Social Skills, School Factors, Problem Domains For Urban and Non-Urban School

Urban School

Social Skills Frequency
Commitment to School
Sense of School Membership
Problem Domain: Non-Urban School

Non-Urban School

Social Skills Frequency
Commitment to School
Sense of School Membership
Problem Domain:

For the urban school, all hypothesized relationships were significantly correlated.

For the non-urban school, only social skills were significantly correlated with problem domains.

LIMITATIONS
Student self-reports could reflect socially driven answers.
Cross-sectional correlation study does not allow for longitudinal inferential to be made.
Results are based on Semester 1.
Did not account for gender/ethnic differences.
Study conducted in one urban and one non-urban location. Results were collected in two different states. They are not necessarily generalizable to other school contexts.

CONCLUSIONS
Prevalent findings: highlights the differential role of school in the relations between SS and PB amongst urban and non-urban contexts.
Findings suggest that higher scores on non-urban students in school might be more important among urban students or they once high school. Why? May relate to population density. Defined may be influential for students.
Why school may not be related to SS and PB in non-urban setting. Perhaps students’ structure, better school supports in this non-urban school.

AREA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
Continued testing: Multifaceted analysis using structural equation modeling to understand the direct effects of SS and PB and the indirect effects through school context.
Looking at other outcomes (grades, attendance, disciplinary problems) and differences in gender, race/ethnicity.
Longitudinal study: understand how the relations among SS, PB, school commitment through grade progression.

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