

# The Impact of Social and Mental Health Risk on Academic Outcomes in a Sample of Junior High School Students in Chile

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## **Background:**

- \* Skills for Life (SFL) is one of the largest school-based mental health (MH) programs in the world, and a recent evaluation of SFL has provided evidence of significant improvements in behavioral and academic outcomes for participating students.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Another study of the program documented the association between measures of MH problems in first grade with psychosocial functioning in third grade and academic achievement in fourth grade.<sup>3</sup>
- Since recent studies have found a relationship between social determinants of health and psychosocial functioning, 4,5 the current study explored the impact of social versus mental health (MH) risks in predicting academic outcomes in a cohort of junior high school (sixth to eighth grade) students.

### **Methods:**

- ❖ Participants: Junior high school students (N=14,290) from schools participating in SFL
- \* MH risk as measured on the following screens:
  - 1. Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation-Re-Revised (**TOCA-RR**)<sup>2</sup>
  - 2. Pediatric Symptom Checklist-Chile-33 item Youth Self-Report (**PSC-CL-33-Y**)<sup>6</sup>
- ❖ Six social risks in sixth grade were investigated:
  - 1. Father absence (additional item on PSC-CL-33-Y)\*
  - 2. Family social isolation (additional item on PSC-CL-33-Y)
  - 3. Family mental illness (additional item on PSC-CL-33-Y)
  - 4. Child chronic illness (additional item on PSC-CL-33-Y)\*
  - 5. Gender (school records)\*
  - **6. Family welfare participation** (Ministry of Education records)
- Low grade point average (GPA) in eighth grade (scoring in the lowest 16% of GPAs; < 16%) was investigated as the outcome measure

\*The three strongest individual sixth grade social risks that impacted eighth grade GPA

#### **Results:**

- ❖ Students who scored at-risk on the TOCA-RR in sixth grade were more than two times more likely to have a low GPA in eighth grade compared to students with no risk (20.6% vs. 8.2%, p<.001).</p>
- ❖ Students who scored at-risk on the **PSC-CL-33-Y** were also more likely to have a low eighth grade GPA compared to students with no risk (14.7% *vs.* 9.0%, *p*<.001).
- ❖ Being at-risk on three or more of the six social risk factors significantly increased the likelihood of GPA risk from 20.6% to 25.8% for students with TOCA-RR risk and from 14.7% to 17.9% for those with PSC-CL-33-Y risk.

#### Sixth Grade **Sixth Grade TOCA-RR Risk PSC-CL-33-Y Risk** Not At-Risk At-Risk Not At-Risk At-Risk *p*<.001 *p*<.001 Low eighth grade GPA Low eighth grade GPA 8.2% 20.6% 14.7% 9.0% **Social Risk factors (>= 3) Social Risk factors (>= 3)** Low eighth grade GPA Low eighth grade GPA 25.8% 17.9%

## **Conclusion:**

- ❖ Although MH risk was the strongest predictor of academic risk, social risk factors also contributed to lower academic achievement two years later.
- This finding suggests that to improve poor academic performance, a comprehensive approach is required which includes both MH interventions and social supports.





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