

TITLE: The Social Capital Networks of Cool Girls, Inc. Participants

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Introduction: Social capital, defined as access to community members who serve as reliable sources of information and are willing to provide support and guidance, is an important contributor to positive youth development (Jarret, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Ferguson, 2006). One organization in Atlanta, Cool Girls, Inc., aims to promote positive development amongst socioeconomically disadvantaged girls by increasing their social capital networks. In this descriptive study, we explore social capital networks among three groups: Cool Girls participants enrolled for a year or more, new Cool Girls participants, and a demographically matched comparison group. We posit that participants with one or more years' enrollment will report greater access to supportive others and higher levels of support from others with five domains: academics, goal-setting, general support and guidance, sexual health, and problem solving.

Method: As part of a larger evaluation of Cool Girls, Inc., we administered baseline surveys to all Cool Girls ($N=195$), and comparisons ($N=63$) (overall $N=258$, ages 8-15, 79.5% African American, 94.9% receive free/reduced lunch). Participants nominated three individuals with whom they could seek support within each of the five aforementioned domains. We coded responses based on type of relationship (e.g., parent, peer, adult relative) and will conduct ANOVAS to compare the total number of different helpers and the percentage of domains containing a minimum of one helper among the three groups.

Results: The three groups reported similar levels of social capital across academics, general support and guidance, sexual health, and problem solving. However, Cool Girls reported significantly less access to help with goal-setting than comparisons ($F(1, 239)=5.21, p=.023$). Overall, the composition of social capital networks was similar across the three groups, with parents, related adults, and related peers being among the most frequently identified.

Discussion/Conclusion: Literature surrounding the study of adolescent development supports the idea that social capital contributes to a child's positive development (Ferguson, 2006). By providing insight into the girls' social capital networks at the baseline assessment, this study hopes to inform further studies about change over time in social networks, and the role social capital plays in youth development program effectiveness.

References:

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