

Neighborhood Matters: Understanding Adolescent Mental Health in a Community Context

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INTRODUCTION

- Research has shown that the long-term effects of exposure to neighborhood violence is associated with increased risk for anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems (Tummala-Narra et al., 2014).
- Further, the effects of childhood trauma from community violence have been shown to persist into adolescence (Fowler et al., 2009).
- This study explores how neighborhood context may moderate the relationship between neighborhood violence and mental health.

Research Questions:

- Is there a relationship between neighborhood violence and the presence of internalizing and externalizing disorders in adolescents?
- Does neighborhood context moderate the relationship between exposure to neighborhood violence and the presentation of internalizing and externalizing disorders in adolescents?

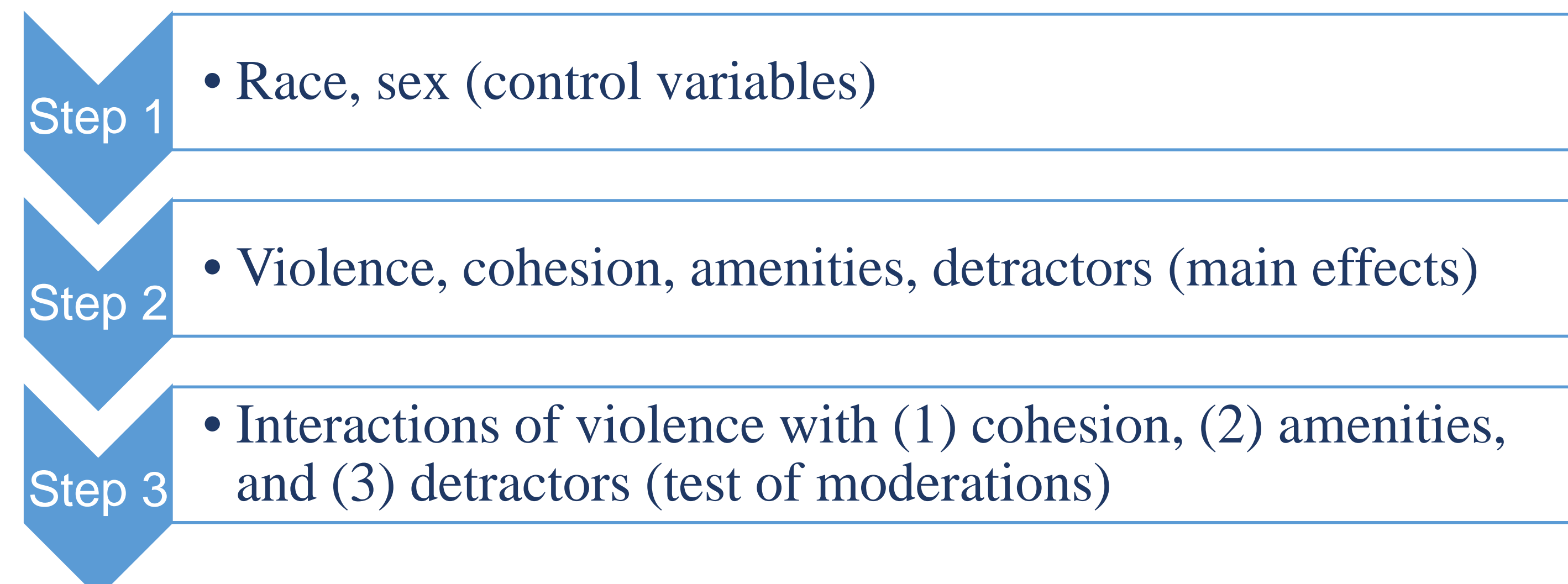
Hypotheses:

- There is a *significant, positive correlation* between experiencing violence in the neighborhood and the presence of internalizing and externalizing disorders in adolescents.
- As neighborhood cohesion *increases*, the relationship between experiencing violence in the neighborhood and presence of internalizing and externalizing disorders in adolescents *decreases*.
- As the number of neighborhood detractors *increases*, the relationship between experiencing violence in the neighborhood and presence of internalizing and externalizing disorders in adolescents *increases*.
- As the number of neighborhood amenities *increases*, the relationship between experiencing violence in the neighborhood and presence of internalizing and externalizing disorders in adolescents *decreases*.

METHODS

Data were retrieved from the 2011-2012 *National Survey of Children's Health* (NSCH), conducted through the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Sample:** 32,420 adolescents ages 12-17 (74.7% White, 47.6% female)
- Hierarchical logistic regressions predicting internalizing and externalizing disorders were computed using the following steps:



MEASURES

	Measures
Neighborhood Violence (Predictor)	- Child was a victim of violence or witnessed violence in their neighborhood
Internalizing Disorders (Outcome)	- Current depression diagnosis and/or anxiety diagnosis (yes/no)
Externalizing Disorders (Outcome)	- Current Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder diagnosis or conduct disorder / oppositional defiant disorder diagnosis (yes/no)
Neighborhood Context (Moderators)	- Neighborhood Cohesion ("cohesion"): Adolescents that live in supportive neighborhoods with trustworthy social networks, scale of 0-4. - Number of Amenities ("amenities"): Availability of parks, recreation centers, sidewalks, and libraries in the neighborhood, scale of 0-4. - Number of Detracting Elements ("detractors"): Presence of vandalism, rundown housing, or litter, scale of 0-3.

RESULTS

Main Effects:

- Adolescents exposed to violence were **2.4 times more likely** to present externalizing disorders (CI = 2.228, 2.658), and **three times more likely** to present internalizing disorders (CI = 2.876, 3.535).
- Adolescents living in neighborhoods with **high** cohesion were **less likely** to present both internalizing (OR = 0.652, CI = 0.611, 0.696), and externalizing disorders (OR = 0.763, CI = 0.722, 0.806). Detractors and amenities had no significant main effects.

Figure 1. The moderation effect of **detractors** on the relationship between violence and **internalizing disorders**.

For adolescents with **low** neighborhood detractors, exposure to neighborhood violence was related to **increased internalizing disorders**. (For those with high detractors, exposure to neighborhood violence had no impact on internalizing disorders).

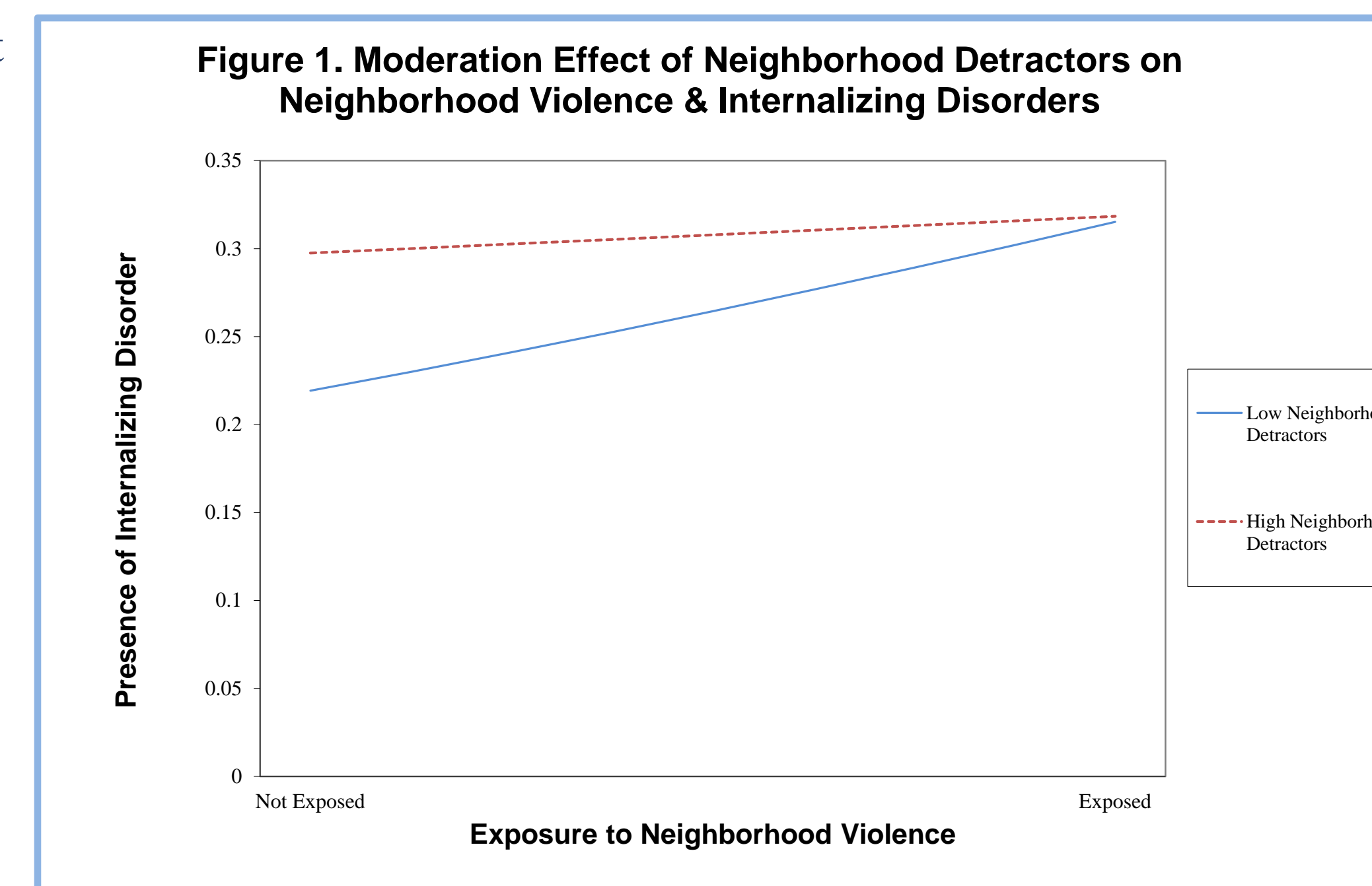
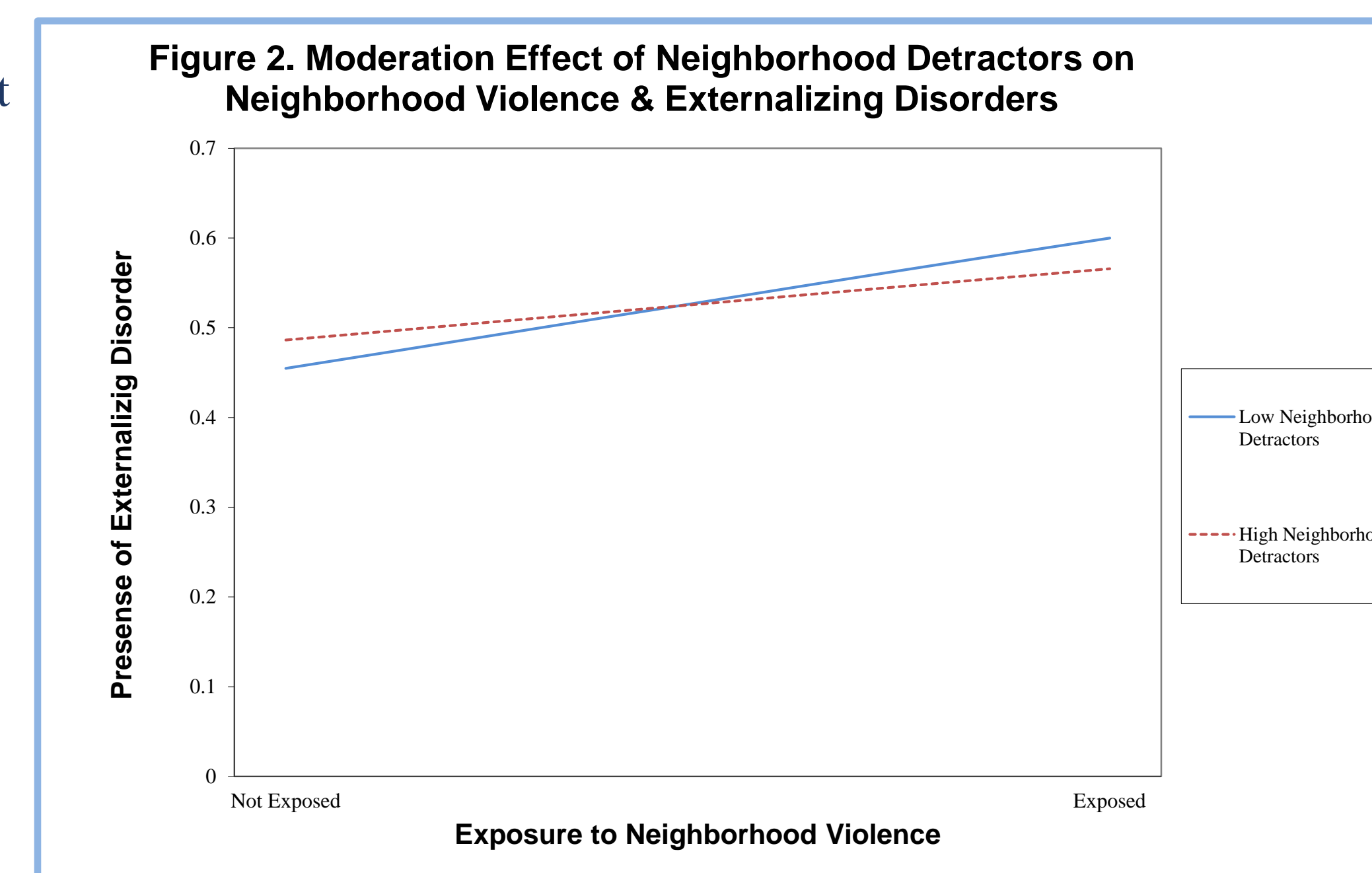


Figure 2. The moderation effect of **detractors** on the relationship between neighborhood violence and **externalizing disorders**.

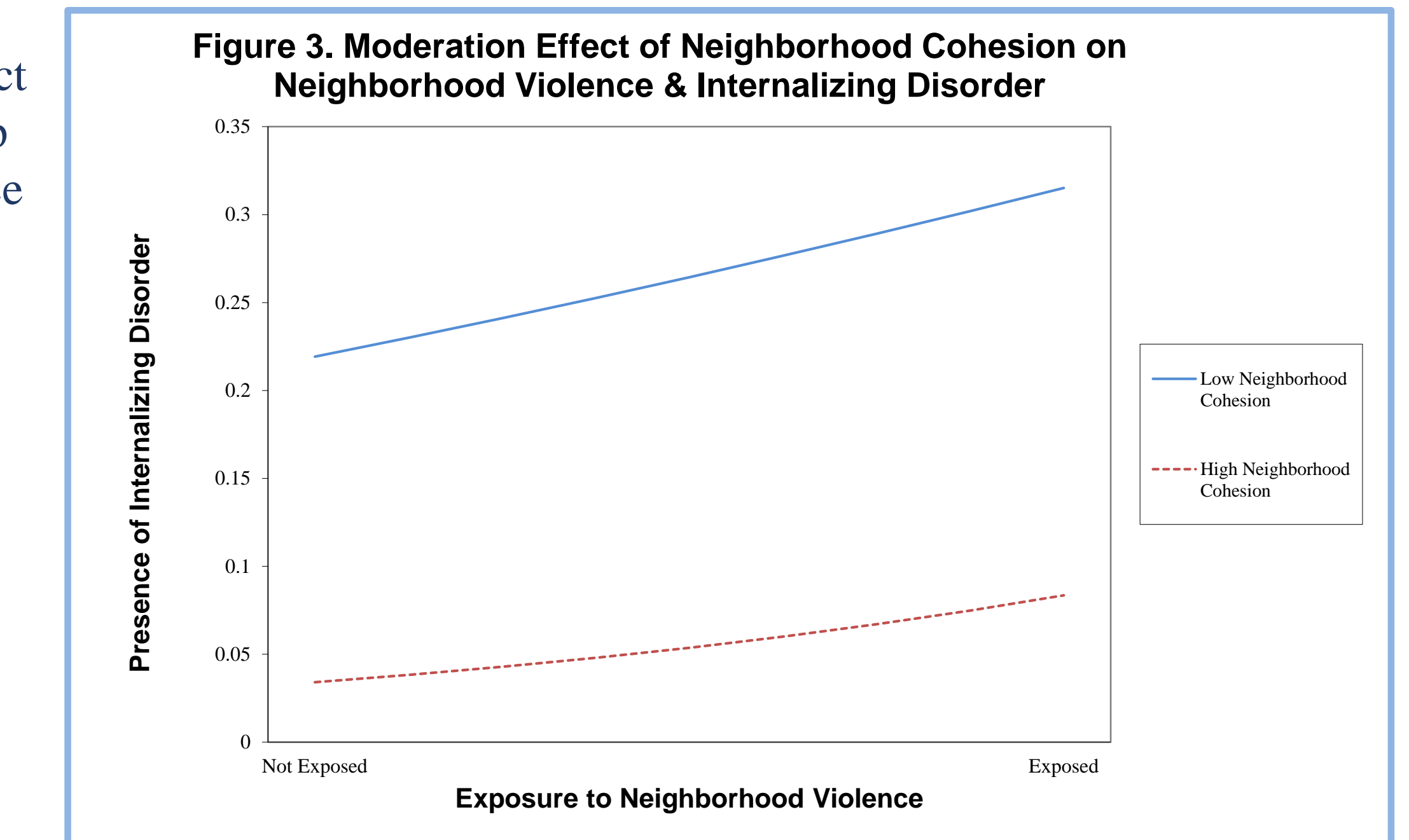
For adolescents with **low** neighborhood detractors, exposure to neighborhood violence was related to a **steeper increase** of **externalizing disorders** than those with high neighborhood detractors.



RESULTS (CONT.)

Figure 3. The moderation effect of **cohesion** on the relationship between neighborhood violence and **internalizing disorders**.

Adolescents with **low** neighborhood cohesion had a **greater** incidence of **internalizing disorders** than those with high neighborhood cohesion and this difference was greater when both groups were exposed to violence.



DISCUSSION & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Study Highlights & Implications:

- These findings supported the body of research that demonstrates the negative effects of neighborhood violence on mental health outcomes of adolescents.
- Results also highlighted the potential protective factor of strong support networks in reducing the presence of internalizing disorders in adolescents exposed to neighborhood violence.
- Analyses of detractors in this study suggested that adolescents residing in communities of low neighborhood detractors had greater increases in poor mental health outcomes when they were exposed to neighborhood violence than adolescents residing in communities of high neighborhood detractors.

Future Directions:

- No significant moderation effect was found when neighborhood amenities were aggregated. However, future research should explore the extent to which exposure to specific neighborhood amenities that promote positive youth development (e.g., recreational after-school programs, young leaders clubs) impacts the relationship between neighborhood violence and mental health outcomes.
- Research should also further examine neighborhood cohesion to determine specific protective factors for internalizing disorders, as this study only examined the presence of trustworthy adults.
- Future research may seek to understand the role of neighborhood detractors more in depth to determine why adolescents living in areas of low neighborhood detractors experienced an increased internalizing disorders and a steeper increase of externalizing disorders than adolescents living in areas of high neighborhood detractors.
- Specific neighborhood detractors should be studied for determining targetable areas of intervention.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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