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TITLE: Neighborhood Structural Characteristics and Social Processes Moderate the Etiology of Children's Social Problems

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ABSTRACT:

Neighborhood is a key context for children's social competence. Researchers have emphasized the need to consider neighborhood social processes (e.g., community monitoring and social cohesion) alongside the more standard examinations of neighborhood structural characteristics (e.g., poverty and community resources). However, studies have overlooked children's individual-level characteristics. As a consequence, little progress has been made in identifying the potential etiologic mechanisms through which neighborhood influences children's social competence. We examined a sample of 6-11 year old twin pairs that were oversampled for disadvantage (N = 1030), evaluating social cohesion, informal social control, available resources, and extent of problems as etiologic moderators of children's social competence. We also tested various definitions of neighborhood, including all neighbor reports within 1km, 5km, and 10km of the twin family homes and within census boundaries. We found that, across most definitions of neighborhood, both neighborhood social processes (informal social control and social cohesion) moderated genetic influences on children's social

problems, such that as informal social control or social cohesion increased, the amount of variance accounted for by genetic factors in social problems decreased. We also examined the structural characteristics of the neighborhood. We found that extent of problems within census boundaries moderated genetic influences on social problems, such that as problems increased, the variance explained by genetic factors in social problems increased. The results suggest that structural characteristics and social processes may operate via the diathesis stress model in regards to children's social problems, such that genetic factors are more influential in deleterious neighborhood contexts.

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