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Exploring Challenges School Social Workers Face When Advocating Services for Childhood Trauma and Abandonment

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Walden University

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Danielle Mozie

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Walden University
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Abstract

Exploring Challenges School Social Workers Face When Advocating Services for

Childhood Trauma and Abandonment

by

Danielle Mozie

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Work

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

School social workers focus on the growth and development of school-age youth by connecting students with resources in the school and community. One population that school social workers provide services for is youth with childhood traumatic backgrounds. This population may have increased behavioral problems, absenteeism, and lower academic achievement. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to better understand what challenges school social workers face when advocating services for school-aged youth experiencing trauma due to neglect from being abandoned. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory was the conceptual framework. Ten licensed master social workers employed as school social workers in the Midlands region of South Carolina were recruited from school districts and public information. Data were collected through semistructured interviews. The five themes that emerged from content analysis of interview data were as follows: set-aside intervention time for school social work and related services, a restricted school environment and involvement, awareness concerning the need for family support, barriers to services before COVID-19 and during and after the COVID-19 shutdown, and development of skills to provide services in unpredictable circumstances. Implications for positive social change include policy-level changes within schools to include daily time for social work services and mandated training in the field of social work for trauma-informed care and preparedness during unprecedented events. By implementing these changes, school leaders and policy makers may be able to provide school social workers with the support and services they need to promote the well-being of youth in their care.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my son Gregory. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation throughout this process. It is also dedicated to my dad, who always believed that I could achieve this goal.

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I would like to acknowledge the support of Dr. Donna Bliss and Dr. Thomas McLaughlin, who both served as my committee chair. Thank you for being available when I called with questions. Your support encouraged me to continue my doctoral capstone research and helped me to reach my lifetime goal. Thank you, Dr. McLaughlin, for listening to my concerns and for being patient.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The field of school social work addresses mental health, social and emotional, and academic concerns of students in primary- and secondary-level school settings (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). School social workers take on different roles depending on the direct or indirect services they provide to school-age youth, according to the School Social Work Association of America (2022). Direct services include immediate services of prevention, intervention, and crisis response for students such as coping with stress; grief; physical and sexual abuse; drug abuse; and school-related concerns related to achievement, bullying, and behavior. In providing direct services, the school social worker assumes the role of crisis interventionist, counselor, and assessor. In providing indirect services, the school social worker assumes the role of advocate, liaison, collaborator, and referral source; they advocate for the academic success and social and emotional well-being of students (Bent-Goodley, 2018; National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Other indirect services include community collaboration, community outreach, policy development, public relations, and special education services.

One group of school-age children and adolescents who receive services from school social workers are those exposed to childhood trauma. Exposure to childhood trauma can interfere with school performance and development (McKelvey et al., 2018). School social workers can advocate for appropriate school services for students exposed to childhood trauma that fit the needs of the students within the classroom and throughout

the school setting, help these students develop coping strategies, provide social and emotional support, and connect the student and family to resources in the community (Bent-Goodley, 2018; National Association of Social Workers, 2018; Pataky et al., 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). They advocate for children by working within the ecological systems identified by Bronfenbrenner (Cossar et al., 2019; Lloyd & Kepple, 2017). The systems are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986).

The gap in the research concerns the challenges that school social workers face when advocating services and resources for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. Abandonment is a form of childhood neglect that legally encompasses the unwillingness of a parent to retain custody of a child and the permanent or indefinite desertion of a child (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Rebbe, 2018). Neglect is one of multiple types of adverse childhood experiences that cause childhood trauma and pertains to the failure of a caregiver to provide basic needs of food, clothes, shelter, education, and medical treatment (Barto et al., 2018; Carmel & Widom, 2020; Rebbe, 2018).

Research indicates that neglect is heterogeneous, meaning children have different needs which makes a definition of neglect hard to concretely define (Barto et al., 2018; Carmel & Widom, 2020; Oshri et al., 2017; Rebbe, 2018). However, neglect in any area of the life of a child can lead to trauma and long-term problems (Barto et al., 2018; Carmel & Widom, 2020; Liel et al., 2020). This trauma can affect how well a child does in school and relates with peers and teachers (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Liel et al.,

2020; McKelvey et al., 2018). Social workers within a school setting advocate for appropriate services for childhood trauma based on the need of the child (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). These services provide academic and social and emotional support and multitiered interventions (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022).

School personnel identify students who are experiencing trauma for services through traditional means and newer programs and interventions. Traditional responses to identifying students are observations of social and emotional disruptions in the school setting and records of misbehavior and suspensions (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). A student's emotional state, peer relationships, and developmental disruptions such as brain trauma and learning disabilities are indicators for identification of children experiencing trauma (Berg, 2017). Children experience neglect medically, educationally, physically, emotionally, socially, and through abandonment (Barto et al., 2018; Carmel & Widom, 2020; Cohen et al., 2021; Rebbe, 2018; Wert et al., 2018). Therefore, to identify students exposed to neglect, school personnel can review attendance records at schools for increased absenteeism (McKelvey et al., 2018). Other methods to identify children experiencing neglect are the use of surveys and direct services of counseling (Carmel & Widom, 2020; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Different programs and interventions that have been used in schools to help identify and serve students with social and emotional concerns are response to interventions, multitiered support services,

and trauma-informed schools (Pataky et al., 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). School social workers work with these programs and interventions to ensure that all students are identified for services and receive the services based on the individual need (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). More insight on the challenges that school social workers face when advocating services and resources for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment may highlight policy changes and training opportunities that promote improved child welfare outcomes.

In this chapter, I review the effects of childhood trauma on students' development and school performance. The research problem and purpose of the study are discussed as well as the research question. The conceptual framework for the research is identified, and alignment is made with the research problem and question. I also provide information on the nature of the study; define key concepts; and discuss the assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the research and its potential significance to social change and the social work profession. In Chapters 1 and 2, I provide detailed information on the effects of neglect on the healthy growth and development of children and on response to interventions, multitiered support, and trauma-informed schools.

Background

The gap in the literature was on the firsthand experiences of licensed master social workers (LMSWs) in a school setting when faced with challenges in advocating services for childhood trauma due to neglect caused by abandonment. School social workers advocate by linking school, home, and community to support the student

(National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Linking these areas that involve the school-age youth requires the school social worker to work within the ecological systems of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Ecological systems are the environments children interact in that affect their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). Microsystem is the immediate environments like home and school that surrounds the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Lloyd & Kepple, 2017). An example of microsystem is the relationship and interaction between parent and child. Mesosystem involves the interrelationship between two or more environments in the child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The interrelationship between a parent and their child's teacher is an example of mesosystem. The parent's involvement with the school influences how the child does academically, socially, and emotionally at school (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Exosystems indirectly influence the student's development and achievement (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). A parent's work schedule and the impact of that schedule on school involvement is an example of exosystems (see Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The macrosystem includes influences of culture and beliefs of the student, school, and other environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). An example of macrosystem is the dominant culture of society that dictates position of power and acceptable norms (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Chronosystem is the last system and includes events that occur over time that have a profound effect on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). An example of chronosystem is a youth's transition to school for

the first time. How the individual adjusts to those events influence their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

School social workers engage in advocacy to link these systems to create support for students by providing multitiered interventions and referrals to resources for mental and behavioral health services (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). In this study, I examined the challenges that hinders school social workers from advocating services. I used Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological system theory, with its key concepts of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, as a conceptual framework.

Childhood trauma occurs when a child is exposed to a real or perceived threat (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Exposure to trauma can be caused by nature, death, witnessing of violence, or abuse and neglect inflicted on a vulnerable child by a caretaker or someone with no connection with the child (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Exposure to childhood trauma increases mental health problems and decreases quality of life when accessing basic needs, education, employment, and health resources (Avery et al., 2021; Bosch et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2021). Mental health concerns and poor quality of life can be short-term or lifelong (Bosch et al., 2020; Haselgruber et al., 2020; Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). However, individuals react to the exposure of trauma differently (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017;

McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Resilience during traumatic events can help with coping (Milstein, 2019). When individuals are exposed to trauma their reserve of strengths and supports help them during the traumatic event (Milstein, 2019).

However, exposure to trauma is debilitating, and cumulative childhood trauma can increase the likelihood of severe mental health and emotional and behavioral regulation problems such as depression, anxiety, drug addiction, and risky sexual behaviors (Haselgruber et al., 2020; Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; Liel et al., 2020; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Trauma caused by neglect is also detrimental to the development of a child and can lead to depression, eating disorders, poor cognitive development, juvenile delinquency, and school dropout (Coffino et al., 2020; Freisthler et al., 2017; Kobulsky et al., 2020; Stirling, 2019). School social workers have a crucial role in providing support to students experiencing childhood trauma (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). They provide this support by advocating services based on the need of the child (School Social Work Association of America, 2022).

Childhood trauma has an effect on school functioning (Coffino et al., 2020; Kobulsky et al., 2020; McKelvey et al., 2018; Stirling, 2019). The impact on schools relates to the response and resources that schools provide to students (Pataky et al., 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Exposure to trauma can affect attendance; relationships with peers, teachers, and staff; discipline; and grades (Barto et al., 2018; McKelvey et al., 2018). To address the prevalence of childhood trauma and its effects on students,

educational leaders and school board members with school districts have implemented trauma-informed schools and multitiered support services (Pataky et al., 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018).

Trauma-informed schools involve all members of the school environment (Frankland, 2021; Morton & Berardi, 2018; Pataky et al., 2019; Tabone et al., 2020). In these schools, personnel create a culture of compassion where students are supported and provided strategies and interventions (Frankland, 2021; Morton & Berardi, 2018; Pataky et al., 2019). Multitiered support services are available to all students, and the level of services increase with the severity of the problem (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). However, trauma-informed schools have not been implemented in all U.S. school-districts, and even though multitiered services are available to all students, there are still some students who do not receive needed services (Pataky et al., 2019; Zeng et al., 2019). These issues continue to add to the problem with the indirect service provided by school social workers when advocating services for students experiencing trauma.

Current researchers have identified several known challenges that school social workers face when working with childhood trauma and neglect. Those challenges are defining, identifying, and reporting trauma and neglect; building trust; and providing education (Berg, 2017; Coffino et al., 2020; Cohen & Thakur, 2021; Freisthler et al., 2017; Kobulsky et al., 2020). Neglect is a heterogeneous phenomenon (Camel & Widom, 2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Oshri et al., 2017; Stirling, 2019). Therefore, the general definition does not fit every form of neglect (Camel & Widom, 2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2019). Due to its heterogeneity, some forms of neglect may

be unintentionally overlooked and underreported (Camel & Widom, 2020; Cohen & Thakur, 2021; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2019). Greco et al. (2017) studied what factors led school staff members ($N = 184$) in Barcelona, Spain, to underreport child maltreatment (p. 24). The findings showed that over 74% of the employees had suspected at least one case of child maltreatment, but only 27% reported the maltreatment (pp. 25-26). Greco et al. noted that some reasons for underreporting were lack of knowledge and training, fear that the reporting would have a negative effect on the victim, uncertainty of their responsibility, and lack of understanding on what information needed to be reported. Greco et al.'s findings align with other findings from similar research on the topic.

Berg (2017) identified several challenges for school social workers when identifying youth with traumatic backgrounds. These included building trust, being trauma-informed, and offering continual education. The study found that building trust with students with traumatic backgrounds was a challenge because the students did not always feel comfortable sharing difficult experiences with someone before developing a connection. Cossar et al. (2019) studied disclosure practices of youth who have adverse childhood experiences of abuse and neglect. Cossar et al. found that cognitive, linguistic, and social development affected disclosure of abuse and neglect because the youth may not be able to recall the events or understand the meaning of abuse depending on their age. Also, family dynamics and cultural norms present as a challenge to a child building trust and disclosing adverse childhood experiences (Cossar et al., 2019). Berg noted that education was a challenge because continual education on trauma by school social

workers and school staff was needed to recognize and understand the effects of childhood trauma (see also Morton & Berardi, 2018).

In this research, I sought to expand knowledge on the challenges that school social workers face when advocating services for youth with traumatic backgrounds due to child neglect caused by abandonment. I identified general childhood trauma but specifically looked at trauma caused by abandonment. Child abandonment is neglect and can lead to trauma (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Liel et al., 2020). The present study may help to identify ways that the field of school social work could improve in advocating for services needed for students experiencing trauma. The findings could also inform leaders in the field about strategies for increasing the initial onset of services provided.

Problem Statement

The research problem was a lack of knowledge of the challenges that school social workers face with advocating services for children with traumatic backgrounds dealing with neglect caused by abandonment. To understand the research problem, in Chapters 1 and 2, I provide peer reviewed information on childhood trauma, neglect, and the effects that trauma and neglect have on childhood development. Exposure to traumatic events can occur during infancy, toddlerhood, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Levenson, 2017; Pataky et al., 2019). Adverse experiences of physical and sexual abuse, neglect, violence, natural disasters, death of a loved one, substance abuse, oppression, health disparities, parental incarceration, drug dependency of caregiver, and economic hardship are all identified in the peer-reviewed literature as causes of childhood trauma (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019). McKelvey et al. (2018)

noted that adverse childhood experiences can cause externalized behavior problems. Externalizing behaviors resulting from childhood trauma include juvenile delinquency and aggression (Kobulsky et al., 2020; McKelvey et al., 2018; Stirling, 2019). Childhood traumatic experiences can negatively impact school success, school and home behaviors, health, and development and lead to substance dependency, violence, suicide, and juvenile delinquency and incarceration (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018).

In this study, I examine the effects of childhood trauma and neglect in general, but specifically focus on abandonment because of the gap in the literature within the field of school social work on strategies for addressing this form of childhood trauma.

Abandonment is neglect and can occur during childhood due to incarceration of a parent, out-of-home placement, and unsafe living environments (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Xia & Lam, 2020). In the United States, neglect is the most common form of childhood abuse (Carmel & Widom, 2020). In 2017, 74.9 % of children experienced neglect (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019, p. 22). Possible behaviors from caregivers that could lead to neglect of a child are incarceration (Xia & Lam, 2020), lack of resources, loss of employment, drug abuse, and loss of residence (Liel et al., 2020).

Research indicates that youth who experience neglect have worse cognitive and academic problems and higher rates of mental health symptoms, physical health problems, delinquency, and violence (Avery et al., 2021; Carmel & Widom, 2020; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020).

School engagement and attendance are impacted by childhood trauma (Carmel & Widom, 2020; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). Traumatic experiences decrease school engagement (Carmel & Widom, 2020; McKelvey et al., 2018; Pataky et al., 2019) and increase absenteeism (McKelvey et al., 2018). McKelvey et al. (2018) noted that students with traumatic backgrounds are more likely to have an individual education plan (IEP) and disruptive classroom and school behaviors. An IEP is specific to the student who is receiving special educational services due to a disability that hinders educational progress (Gelbar et al., 2018). The services provided in the IEP are based on the needs of the student (Gelbar et al., 2018). Within the IEP there are measurable goals based on the need of the student to achieve academic, behavioral, and functional progress (Gelbar et al., 2018). Avery et al. (2021), Morton and Berardi (2018) and Tabone et al. (2020) noted that schools can provide an opportunity for students experiencing trauma to receive services that address trauma. Trauma-informed services provided in schools can improve psychosocial functioning and academic success (Frankland, 2021; Morton & Berardi, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020).

School social workers provide multitiered services to children and adolescents experiencing trauma, which include universal support for all students and individualized support for students with severe social and emotional concerns (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Multitiered services meet the needs of students by providing support where teachers and staff recognize signs of psychosocial problems and school social workers and other school mental health providers screen and utilize evidence-based services (Pataky et al., 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). An

essential role of school social work is to link ecological systems to the direct and indirect services provided to students to promote academics and social and emotional functioning (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). The national school social work practice model helps with legitimacy and consistency in the specialty by identifying the specific direct and indirect services that school social workers should perform in a school setting (Crutchfield et al., 2020; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). The model identifies a framework for a specific level of education needed, credentials, practice, and evaluation of services for the field of social work (Crutchfield et al., 2020; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). The three domains of the practice model include providing evidence-based education and mental health services, promoting a school culture of learning, and accessing school and community resources (Crutchfield et al., 2020, p. 189; School Social Work Association of America, 2022).

School social workers provide counseling and interventions to students to improve academic performance and well-being (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Direct trauma-informed services can help to reduce trauma symptoms in a school setting (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). Trauma-informed services are services that are based on understanding trauma and the effects of trauma on the individual (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). However, services and support provided by school social workers are different among states and school districts, which leads to school social workers not always following the national school social work practice model (Bent-

Goodley, 2018; Harrison, 2018). Phillippo et al. (2017) addressed the concerns that school social workers use fewer evidence-based practices that focus on multitiered services and are less likely to use universal screening tools and monitor for progress in services provided to students. Instead, Phillippo et al. found that school social workers spend a disproportionate amount of time engaged in individual services with students with persistent mental health and behavioral problems and concerns. Phillippo et al. identified diverse roles and responsibilities and school climate as the reasons that school social workers use individual services instead of evidence-based multitiered services for students with persistent mental health and behavioral problems. Harrison et al. (2018) researched professional practices of school social workers measured by standards of the National Association of Social Work and found that the school social workers in the study were inconsistent with prioritization of interventions and practice areas because of diverse responsibilities in the school setting. Advocacy was also found to be low because of the diverse roles (Harrison et al., 2018). The inconsistent use of evidence-based practices and diverse roles among school social workers leads to a decrease in identification of students experiencing trauma, the mental health services provided within a school setting, and the linking of resources for students (Bent-Goodley, 2018; Harrison, 2018; Mersky et al., 2019).

The peer reviewed literature provides substantial information on trauma that addresses the number of children in the United States experiencing multiple traumatic events before the age of 18, how those traumatic experiences impact school performance and behaviors, and the role and services of school social workers within a school setting

(Creswell-Baez et al., 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018; Zeng et al., 2019). Information specifically on neglect and the effect of the maltreatment can also be found in the literature. Even though there is extensive research on childhood trauma and the adverse effects of trauma, problems are still prevalent with providing services and resources within schools. Tabone et al. (2020) indicated that children continue to be under identified for services and schools are the likely organization that will provide the initial services. Phillippo et al. (2017) provided information on the problem with school social workers not frequently using evidence-based multitiered services and universal screenings. Bent-Goodley (2018) and Harrison (2018) referenced the problem of diverse roles in the field of school social work depending on the state and the school district. Berg (2017) noted difficulty with building trust with students, and lack of support from staff. The literature provided evidence of direct and indirect services school social workers can provide.

However, there is a gap in the literature concerning the field of school social work and the challenges with advocating services for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. Continued research is imperative to better understand how school social workers with diverse roles and responsibilities (Phillippo et al., 2017; School Social Work Association of America, 2022) can advocate for students who are experiencing trauma. With the prevalence of trauma and the effects of trauma negatively influencing behaviors and academic success in a school setting, the need for school social workers to advocate is essential (Avery et al., 2021; Frankland, 2021; McKelvey et al., 2018). In

conducting this research, I sought to address the gaps in the literature by examining challenges school social workers face when advocating services for childhood trauma caused by abandonment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative research study was to better understand what challenges school social workers face when advocating services for school-age youth experiencing trauma due to neglect from being abandoned. Considering the risk factors of increased behavioral concerns, depression, suicide, and poor school retention caused by childhood trauma related to neglect (Haselgruber et al., 2020; Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; Liel et al., 2020; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018), there was a need for increased understanding of the challenges school social workers face when advocating services based on the individual needs of school-aged youth. I used Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986) ecological systems theory to examine how the different systems surrounding school-age youth affect their well-being and the services they receive.

School social workers advocate services within the different ecological systems to fit the needs of the child experiencing trauma caused by neglect (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). In the microsystem, students are affected by neglect due to lack of food, shelter, medical care, abandonment, and emotional attachment (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Coffino et al., 2020; Cohen & Thakur, 2021; Freisthler et al., 2017; Kobulsky et al., 2020; Stirling, 2020). School social workers help in this system by counseling students, engaging parents in conversation, and providing referrals based on

the need (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Trauma related to home life can interfere with social skills and peer relationships (McKelvey et al., 2018). This interrelationship between home and school is part of the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In the mesosystem, social workers in schools help by teaching social skills to improve peer relationships (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Greco et al. (2017) noted that in the exosystem, the lack of professional development on the topic affects how staff respond to children experiencing trauma. School social workers can provide indirect services such as training (School Social Work Association of America, 2022) to help staff understand trauma. In the macrosystem, school policies on trauma-informed care affect initial services available to school-age youth (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). Indirect services provided by social workers such as workshops can help support the need for policies that address trauma and diversity (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). In the chronosystem, direct services of counseling and indirect service of collaboration with community agencies can be used by school social workers to help children deal with trauma (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). In this generic qualitative study, I explored how the field of school social work can improve services to school-age youth with traumatic backgrounds.

Research Question

What are the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment?

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this research is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986) ecological system theory. The theory focuses on the interaction between an individual and their environment and how that interaction affects human development. Bronfenbrenner identified microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem as the systems that influence a person's social and emotional development. School social workers advocate for services and resources by linking ecological systems that surround the student (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). This research focused on the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for students experiencing trauma from neglect caused by abandonment. Trauma can occur from different systems in a child's life such as neglect in the home, violence in the community, and disparities in society (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Peer reviewed literature indicates that neglect is highly common and can cause extreme life problems (Carmel & Widom, 2020). Neglect can occur in the microsystem which a child interacts in daily (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Carmel & Widom, 2020). Exposure to neglect can adversely affect school performance (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Neglect can also result in child protective investigation and involvement (Carmel & Widom, 2020). Mental health concerns, trauma, and substance abuse are effects of neglect that can lead to a need for interventions and services to address these problems (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et

al., 2018). The concepts that build the research were childhood trauma, neglect, abandonment, the field of school social work, and trauma-informed interventions and programs such as trauma-informed schools and multitiered systems of support. Childhood trauma, neglect, and abandonment have general effects on the development of a child (Barto et al., 2018; Carmel & Widom, 2020). A goal of the field of school social work is to help students develop skills to increase student success (National Association of Social Workers, 2018). Trauma-informed interventions involve understanding the adverse effects of trauma on human behaviors and mental health and building coping strategies to handle adverse experiences (Knight, 2019). The ecological systems theory can help with understanding how systems impact an individual's exposure to trauma and lead to challenges within the school setting in advocating services for students exposed to childhood trauma. More detailed information on the concepts that build the research is discussed in Chapter 2.

The conceptual framework addressed the research question of the challenges to advocating services because school social workers work directly and indirectly in the different ecological systems (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). In the microsystem and mesosystem, school social workers can directly counsel students and families (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Indirect services of professional development and collaboration are conducted by school social workers within the exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Data for the study were collected through semistructured interviews. The interview questions elicited information concerning the systems that impact the

student and the school social worker's ability to advocate services for students experiencing trauma due to abandonment. Chapter 2 provides detailed information on the five ecological systems and the concepts that form the framework of the study.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative research with a generic qualitative approach was used to understand what challenges school social workers face when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because it provides an interpretive analysis on the social phenomenon (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Generic inquiry looks at the experiences of the participants with the social problem by exploring what can be learned (Patton, 2015). Generic inquiry allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions to improve ways school social workers can advocate services based on the needs of the student experiencing trauma from abandonment. Semistructured interviews were conducted to gather data on the school social workers' interpretation of the challenges they face with advocating services for these students. Data were coded to identify themes until saturation was achieved (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the researcher, I used reflexivity, consistent documentation of procedures, and transcripts checks to ensure validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data from the inquiries were used to determine the exact challenges and address next steps to help school social workers improve services for students experiencing childhood trauma especially from abandonment.

Definitions

Throughout this study, I use the following terms:

Abandonment: Neglect occurring because of the parent's unwillingness to retain custody and permanent or indefinite desertion (Rebbe, 2018, p. 306).

Adverse child experiences (ACE): Traumatic events experienced within the systems that the child participates in directly and indirectly (Zeng et al., 2019, p. 2).

Advocacy: An indirect service provided by a school social worker that involves linking services between home, school, and community (School Social Work Association of America, 2022).

Child protective services (CPS): A government function that is responsible for investigating reports of child maltreatment (Brown et al., 2020, p. 162; Wilson et al., 2020, p. 1).

Chronosystem: A transition or event that occurs over time in a child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 724).

Cumulative childhood trauma: The experience of multiple types of childhood traumas (Bosch et al., 2020, p. 56; Haselgruber et al., 2020; p. 2).

Exosystem: The environmental setting that indirectly influences the development of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

Individual education plan (IEP): A plan that provides specific and individualized services to a child with educational and behavioral problems due to a disability (Gelbar et al., 2018, p. 3808).

Macrosystem: The child's culture, beliefs, and ethnicity as well as broader political systems, laws, economics, society, and culture within institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

Mesosystem: An interrelationship between two or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

Microsystem: The first system that surrounds the developing child and which contains the immediate setting with activities and roles that the individual is engaged in (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514).

Multitiered system of support: A tiered level of response to the needs of children and adolescents in a school setting (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018, p. 251). Support intensifies with each tier and the need of the child and adolescent (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018, p. 251).

Neglect: The failure of a caregiver or guardian to provide food, clothes, shelter, education, and medical treatment (Carmel & Widom, 2020, p. 1).

Trauma-informed practices: Practices and interventions that acknowledge the adverse effects of trauma on human behaviors and building coping strategies (Knight, 2019, p. 82).

Trauma-informed schools: School districts that have implemented a trauma-informed culture to include all staff district-wide (Morton & Berardi, 2018, pp. 489-490; Tabone et al., 2020). The culture of the school allows children and adolescents experiencing trauma to feel comfortable and supported (Morton & Berardi, 2018, pp. 489-490; Tabone et al., 2020).

Assumptions

The participants of the study were LMSWs who worked in a school setting. It was assumed that the school social workers have worked with multiple students with traumatic experiences caused by neglect. I also assumed that the participants would verbalize their challenges with advocating services for students who were having school difficulties due to exposure to childhood trauma. Another assumption concerning participants was that the school social workers would understand based on informed consent that their participation was voluntary, and the data gathered would be used to advance the field of school social work.

The conceptualization of this research was based on the ecological systems theory. The assumption of the theory is that the well-being of a child is influenced by the five systems, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It is assumed that the different environments and interactions within the systems can cause exposure to childhood trauma (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges school social workers have with advocating services for students with traumatic backgrounds caused by abandonment. It was assumed that school social workers faced challenges within the different ecological systems when advocating for appropriate services. Semistructured interviews were used in the study to collect firsthand experiences from LMSWs. The school social workers participating in the study were able to identify effects of trauma on students and the challenges faced within the five systems

when advocating services based on the need of students experiencing traumatic experiences from exposure to neglect caused by abandonment.

Scope and Delimitations

Literature on childhood trauma caused by neglect and other forms of maltreatment and the effects of trauma on children at school and in their daily lives was well documented (Creswell-Baez et al., 2019; Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018; Zeng et al., 2019). This study specifically focused on the social work discipline and the challenges school social workers faced with advocating services for students experiencing childhood trauma caused by abandonment. The study aligned aspects of the research problem by identifying the prevalence and effects of trauma, interventions that have been used in schools to combat the effects of trauma in schools, and the role of school social workers to provide services for students exposed to trauma. However, there was a gap in the literature on firsthand knowledge from school social workers on the challenges within the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem when advocating services for students with traumatic backgrounds due to abandonment. Therefore, this generic qualitative approach helps to further research in the social work discipline on these challenges and to improve services for students exposed to childhood trauma.

The boundary of the study included the population of LMSWs working in a school setting with a title of school social worker. This population was used to gather firsthand knowledge on the challenges faced with advocating services. The goal was to recruit school social workers with at least 1 year of experience in a public-school setting

as a primary or secondary level school social worker. National Association of Social Workers (2018) recommends school social workers have a master's degree as an entry level qualification for school social work. An LMSW can provide social and emotional services in a school setting but differs from a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) with a therapeutic background (National Association of Social Workers, 2018). Excluded from the study will be LCSWs. The rationale of excluding LCSWs was because the role of a LCSW is to mainly provide therapy independently although advocacy is a component of the role (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). The purpose of the study was to explore challenges school social workers faced with advocating services for childhood traumatic backgrounds caused by abandonment. Advocacy is a main role of a LMSW (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). However, if there is a problem with recruiting LMSWs then LCSWs in the position of school social worker would be recruited. The theory that has been excluded from this study is trauma theory. Trauma theory examines the effect of trauma on self-development (Saakvitne et al., 1998). According to the theory, trauma affects perception, cognition, and affective processing (Saakvitne et al., 1998). This theory is useful because it helps to identify the effects of trauma on an individual and the changes an individual makes when living with traumatic experiences (Saakvitne et al., 1998). However, trauma theory was excluded from this study because the study focuses not specifically on the effects of trauma, but challenges within systems that cause problems with advocating services related to childhood trauma.

There is potential transferability from the data collected in the study.

Transferability is how data is applicable to different surroundings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My study examines the challenges school social workers faced when advocating for students with traumatic backgrounds caused by abandonment. Therefore, there was potential for the data from the study to transfer to other school districts with school social workers that work with students with traumatic backgrounds not only due to neglect, but other child maltreatments. The data could be used to improve initial services school social workers provide to students experiencing trauma. Semistructured interviews were used to collect data from the participants. The questions used in the semistructured interviews can be generalized to all school social workers working in a primary and secondary school setting. The questions focused on the different systems and firsthand knowledge of the traumatic experiences of students and challenges in advocating services.

Limitations

Generic qualitative approach was chosen for the study because the researcher could engage in the natural surroundings of the participants (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). The sustained interaction with participants is a strength of the qualitative design because the research gathers firsthand knowledge of the problem as it relates to the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). However, engaging with participants on a personal level is also a weakness of qualitative approach because of ethical issues and biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Other limitations to this qualitative study were transferability, dependability, and research bias. Transferability in qualitative research relates to how the

findings of a study is applicable to different contexts and populations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability is consistency in the data collection method (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Research bias focuses on how the researcher influences the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Two limitations of transferability in this study are geographical region and targeted population. The population for the study was selected from the Midlands region of South Carolina. This geographical area was chosen for the study because counties within the Midlands region have high crime rates (SC Law Enforcement Division, 2018). As indicated in the literature, high crime rates can lead to neglect and childhood trauma (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019). However, focusing on this region in South Carolina may limit transferability of the data collected in the study to other geographical areas. The sample population for the study was LMSWs in the role of school social worker. The data from the study focused on the experiences of the school social workers. Therefore, the findings of the data on the challenges with advocating for services concerning childhood traumatic experiences due to abandonment may not transfer to LMSWs working outside of a school setting.

The data collection method for this research study was semistructured interviews. Each interview was conducted with the same interview questions for dependability. To increase transferability and dependability of the study the data collection method was consistent and focused on the participants' perspectives and meaning of the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Also, procedures used in the study were documented in detail for further use by other researchers.

Identifying research bias is essential to the validity of the study (Patton, 2015). Bias can occur due to past experiences and interpretations (Patton, 2015). My experience as a school social worker causes researcher bias. As a school social worker, I have worked with marginalized populations living in communities with limited resources. I understand the role of a school social worker and the challenges of having multiple responsibilities. Reflexivity helped to examine how my background and experiences influenced the study (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I was aware of my experiences and how those experiences could influence codes and themes from the data collection.

Significance

The research fills a gap in understanding by focusing on the challenges school social workers faced when advocating services for youth experiencing childhood trauma caused by abandonment. Qualitative research allowed school social workers to provide their account of challenges with the social problem. The study brings awareness to the field of school social work on how to improve services for school-age children with traumatic childhood backgrounds which would help reduce the number of untreated individuals with adverse behaviors related to trauma and improve school related issues concerning school performance and behavior (McKelvey et al., 2018; Pataky et al., 2019). The National Association of Social Workers (2018) requires social workers to continue education to improve evidence-based practices, but the requirement is not specifically trauma-informed. The findings from the study could also help with future continual education requirements by mandating that all school social workers receive

trauma-informed training to understand the effects of trauma on human behavior and how to advocate for need based services within the ecological systems (Knight, 2019).

Trauma is prevalent in childhood and when left untreated can lead to academic failure and life related problems such as substance abuse and incarceration (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018). Improving interventions and resources based on the need of students and families can increase the initial services received and help students to learn coping mechanisms to reduce the negative effects of trauma (Johnson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Pataky et al., 2019; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Research shows that trauma-informed services provided in schools help to improve student outcomes (Pataky et al., 2019; Tabone et al., 2020). A study by Tabone et al. (2020) examined the effectiveness of early intervention for childhood trauma within an elementary school setting and found the classrooms that received trauma-informed services had improved in emotional support among teacher and student and peer interaction and classroom organization compared to classrooms that did not receive the services.

This generic qualitative inquiry is significant to social change because advocacy could improve early identification and evidence-based treatments which could lead to improvements in short- and long-term outcomes for children exposed to trauma (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). The social change from the study benefits schools and society because untreated trauma increases grade retention (McKelvey et al., 2018), juvenile delinquency (Johnson, 2017), and lifelong effects of drug abuse (Levenson, 2017). By improving services for students experiencing trauma, school-age

children could receive services and resources based on their needs which could help to alleviate problems that inhibits success in school and society (Pataky et al., 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018)

Summary

Existing research related to the effects of childhood trauma on school performance and behaviors provides limited information on the challenges faced by school social workers when advocating services related to trauma due to abandonment. The use of the ecological systems theory helped to understand how different individuals and environments directly and indirectly influenced development and functioning and created challenges in how students receive services and resources (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). Data for the study were collected from LMSWs in the position of primary and secondary level school social workers. The data could help to aid the social work discipline by improving knowledge and awareness of challenges and improve methods to increase how students with trauma experiences receive initial services. Chapter 2 provides an alignment of literature with the research question and topic. Within the chapter, statistics on child maltreatment and the history of school interventions to decrease negative effects of trauma is presented. Also, a more detailed view of the gap in the literature and the conceptual framework is discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the challenges LMSWs in a school setting have when advocating services for vulnerable youth exposed to trauma caused by abandonment. Trauma is an emotional response to adverse situations that an individual experiences, witnesses, or perceives (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez et al., 2019; Knight, 2019). Trauma can impact individuals of all ethnic and racial groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and genders (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez et al., 2019; Knight, 2019). However, individuals with lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience multiple trauma due to limited access to resources and residing in high violent crime areas (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). In 2018, 60.8% of U.S. children experienced neglect, 10.7% physical abuse, and 7.0% sexual abuse (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020, p. 21). In 2019, 74.9% of U.S. children were neglected, 17.5% physically abused, and 9.3% sexually abused (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021, p. 22). Also, younger children in the United States have a highest maltreatment rate due to their often residing in homes with parents, guardians, or family members experiencing domestic violence and substance dependency (Tabone et al., 2020, p. 1; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019 p. 21). Researchers have also documented childhood trauma due to maltreatment in other countries such as Canada and South Africa (King et al., 2018; Nothling et al., 2019). The findings from this generic

qualitative study could help improve the initial services received by school-aged children experiencing trauma caused by neglect.

Childhood trauma is caused by adverse childhood experiences within the child's environment and can occur at any stage of childhood (Levenson, 2017; Zeng et al., 2019). Childhood is considered ages younger than 18 years old and represents school-age youth (McKelvey et al., 2018). Bronfenbrenner (1977) noted that ecological systems affect childhood behaviors, experiences, and development. Within the ecological systems, children are influenced by the behaviors and circumstances of their families, the treatment they receive from others in a school setting and neighborhoods, interactions within the different systems, culture, and events (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Hutson, 2018). Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1986) identified the five ecological systems as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Each system surrounds a child and can create positive or negative change to growth, development, and well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). Microsystem is the system that a child interacts with daily (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Newton, 2019). An example of trauma that can occur in a microsystem is neglect (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2020). Mesosystem is the interrelationship of several environments in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Newton, 2019). An example of trauma that can take place in this system is educational neglect. Educational neglect occurs between the two environments home and school (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2020). This type of neglect happens when a child does not attend school regularly which could affect attendance and performance (Carmel

& Widom, 2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2020). Exosystem has an indirect effect on a child's development; examples include the parent's job and the number of hours the parent works away from the home (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Newton, 2019). Macrosystem involves culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Newton, 2019). The culture of the school and child influences the availability of social and emotional services and how the child responds to those services (Frankland, 2021; Morton & Berardi, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). Chronosystem includes environmental events and transitions in life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). An example of trauma that could occur in this system is the death of a loved one and economical shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Crayne, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020).

School social workers are identified in the literature as the school staff who provide services to address trauma in a school setting (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). Understanding mental health disorders and human behavior helps school social workers advocate services to improve school performance, behavior, social relationships, and mental and emotional stability for children and adolescents experiencing trauma (Morton & Berardi, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022; Tabone et al., 2020). Phillippo et al. (2017) noted that the work is not always consistent, and a disproportionate amount of time is used to provide individual services with students displaying extreme behaviors. Also, multiple roles of school social workers in a school setting interferes with availability to provide direct and indirect services (Bent-Goodley, 2018; Harrison et al., 2018).

In this study, I examined challenges school social workers faced when advocating services for youth with traumatic backgrounds due to abandonment. Advocating is part of the role of a school social worker when providing indirect services (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Literature on school social work and trauma provides information on the effects of childhood trauma in schools, how students are identified for services, the continual difficulties with identification, and the interventions and programs provided in schools for students (Berg, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022; Tabone et al., 2020). However, this study focused on identifying challenges school social workers faced when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma due to abandonment.

This chapter includes information regarding the scope of literature and search strategy to locate peer-reviewed articles and sources relevant to this study. I explain the conceptual framework and the underlying theory in detail. A review of current knowledge related to childhood trauma, neglect, abandonment, trauma-informed schools, and multitiered systems of support is provided to align with the underlying theory. Social work and the field of school social work are discussed to understand the services and essential role of school social workers in a school setting. The chapter ends with a summary of key points and conclusions from the literature review.

Literature Search Strategy

I used Walden University Library to identify full-text articles in databases including APA PsycInfo, SocINDEX, Social Work Abstracts, Education Source, Academic Search Complete, and ERIC. I also searched the search engine Google

Scholar. Social work and psychology subjects were used in the search. In addition to journal articles, I reviewed books and dissertations and theses. I used the internet to access information on the National Association of Social Work and School Social Work Association of America. The key terms and phrases I used in my search included *school social work and trauma, trauma-informed schools, childhood trauma, social work and trauma, treatments for trauma, multitiered services, professional practice model, challenges of school social workers with identifying trauma, social workers in schools advocating, social workers in schools advocating trauma and neglect, social workers in schools advocating trauma, social workers in schools and barriers with neglect, physical neglect, emotional neglect, educational neglect, neglect, school social work challenges and childhood neglect, school social work challenges and physical neglect abandonment, school social work challenges and abandonment, childhood abandonment, school social workers and child neglect, and school social workers and childhood abandonment.*

During the search, I found an abundance of literature on trauma, but few articles on school social work and trauma. In searching for school social work and trauma, I found articles on trauma-informed schools and multitiered systems of support. Within the context of the articles, school social workers were characterized as mental health providers in a school setting (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). The next step was to search the abstract of peer-reviewed articles with keywords *social work, trauma, and schools*. This search yielded additional information on trauma and the field of social work that was relevant to the study. The search on the term *neglect* and the different forms of neglect provided peer-reviewed information on

the maltreatment of children. The search on social workers in schools and barriers with neglect did not produce any information in the Walden Library. The searches that had terms concerning childhood abandonment or abandonment did not produce any articles.

The key terms I searched in Google Scholar were *childhood trauma and school social workers, challenges of school social workers identifying childhood trauma, social workers in schools, social workers in schools advocating, social workers in schools advocating trauma and neglect, social workers in schools advocating trauma, the challenges of school social workers identifying childhood trauma in a traditional school setting, social workers in schools and barriers with neglect, neglect, physical neglect and abandonment, child neglect and abandonment, and school social work and child neglect and abandonment*. The searches provided information on trauma and the effects of trauma on school-age youths. The key term search on the challenges of school social workers identifying childhood trauma in a traditional school setting yielded a thesis by Berg (2017) that focused on identification and practice with trauma. The research question in that study was how social workers identify and work with children experiencing trauma. The data from the study helped to increase understanding of how students experiencing childhood trauma are identified. As indicated in Chapter 1, Berg noted that students are identified because of disruptive behaviors, emotional outbursts, and relationship problems. Each key term search helped with uncovering the research on the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma due to abandonment.

Conceptual Framework

Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986) ecological system theory provides an understanding of the connection between human development and environment. Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a broader approach to contemporary developmental psychology by exploring the effects of environment on development. Researchers of contemporary developmental psychology had examined developmental growth, but did not include environmental influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner argued that contemporary developmental psychology focused mainly on the short-term growth and development of an individual in an experimental setting with strangers instead of their natural interactions within different settings. Bronfenbrenner wanted to explore and understand how the different environments that an individual interacts with influence healthy and unhealthy development. Bronfenbrenner noted that the environmental settings that a child is associated with are embedded and affect the progress of the individual throughout life. These environmental settings are identified as systems.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) developed five environmental systems that not only encompassed interactions in the immediate environment, but also the larger social systems. The five systems within the ecological system theory are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each system influences the growth of the child directly and indirectly. The current research benefited from the ecological systems theory because school social workers engage directly and indirectly with individuals and agencies that influence the growth and development of children and

adolescents (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). By using the ecological systems theory, I was better able to understand how different systems can impact the child, their environments, and available services.

Microsystem

Microsystem is the first system that surrounds the developing child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The system contains the immediate setting with activities and roles that the individual is constantly engaged in (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner (1977) identified the immediate setting as home, school, and neighborhood. A child receives initial guidance, nourishment, and education from their family (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Unhealthy development occurs when there is conflict, violence, and a lack of nourishment within a child's family unit (Zeng et al., 2019). The pain of abuse and neglect causes an impairment in healthy development, functioning, and attachment (Barto et al., 2018).

Neighborhoods and schools where children reside influence engagement in activities, social skills, and ability to learn (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Socioeconomic status can affect living conditions, increase adverse circumstances, and disproportionate involvement with the police (Johnson, 2017). Schools are in the environmental setting that children are involved in regularly (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Tabone et al. (2020) noted that schools are the likely organization that will provide the initial services for children experiencing trauma. Some children start school as early as age four and experience trouble in school due to trauma exposure (Tabone et al., 2020). Traumatic experiences can be displayed through disruptive behaviors that hinders school performance and lead

to suspension or expulsion from school (Frankland, 2021; Tabone et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2019). Trauma-informed schools create a culture of trauma awareness and caring for the well-being of all students which helps to provide initial interventions (Frankland, 2021; Morton & Berardi, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). Schools that support social and emotional growth can help alleviate the effects of childhood trauma (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). However, not all schools have staff members trained on the impact of childhood trauma (Zeng et al., 2019). Within those schools, teachers and staff may not be familiar with adverse childhood experiences and the effects of trauma (Zeng et al., 2019). Lack of awareness by teachers and staff could lead to increased disciplinary actions for behaviors that are a result of childhood trauma and decrease access to early interventions (Zeng et al., 2019).

Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes mesosystem as an interrelationship between two or more microsystems. The child continues to develop and be influenced by this interrelationship (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These influences can impact the child's perceptions, decision making, and behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Two environmental settings that may interact and influence the child are family and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Zeng et al. (2019) noted that the well-being of the family predicts how well a child will engage and perform when starting school. Mental health concerns, substance abuse, domestic violence, and other adverse events in the family can lead to academic challenges and an increased need for individualized educational plans (IEP) (McKelvey et al., 2018; Zeng et al., 2019). The interrelationship between family and schools can

involve collaboration between parent, teacher, and school staff (Avendano et al., 2020; Lusse et al., 2019; Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). Lusse et al. (2019) and Sanders-Smith et al. (2020) noted that collaboration with parents and schools is essential. There are numerous short-and long-term benefits to parental involvement in schools (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). Sanders-Smith et al. identified those benefits as better grades and attitudes toward school and increased graduation rates. Positive collaboration between parent and school staff models an appreciation for education and different values (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). Parents are also encouraged to participate in their child's IEP (Avendano et al., 2020). Avendano et al. (2020) noted that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) encourages parental involvement in schools and mandates schools to collaborate with families. However, the problem that occurs between the two systems happen when school systems enforce school culture and rules on families without taking into consideration diverse family units, language barriers, and limited family resources due to poverty (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). Parental engagement can be increasingly difficult with poverty stricken urban settings because of barriers (Lusse et al., 2019; Sanders-Smith et al., 2020), however, strategies that fit the needs of the family can improve the partnership between parents and schools (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020; School Social Work Association of America, 2022).

Exosystem

Exosystem is the environmental setting that indirectly influences the development of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The child is still the center of the system but does not have a direct involvement or participation in the other environmental settings

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner (1977) identified systems that a child is not directly involved in as local level institutions such as the workforce, governmental agencies, transportation facilities, parental social networks, and mass media. The child is indirectly affected by these systems because the systems directly impact other individuals that have an influence on the child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The effect of exosystem on the child's life can be temporary or long-term (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

There is relevant information in the peer-reviewed literature concerning the effects of socioeconomic status on the well-being of children (Loft & Waldfogel, 2021; Yu & Sun, 2019). Socioeconomic status of parents affects a child's emotional development, school involvement with activities, and school performance (Loft & Waldfogel, 2021). Unemployment can be detrimental because the family experiences lower income and higher financial hardship (Yu & Sun, 2019). According to Yu and Sun (2019), short-term or long-term unemployment can cause long-term problems of lower earnings and social and emotional distress even after a parent regains employment.

Macrosystem

Macrosystem includes ethnicity, political systems, laws, economics, society, and culture within institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). All the systems within the ecological system theory are embedded in the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). A study by Sanders-Smith et al. (2020) focused on how an individual's home culture and the school culture influence the level of success in school and family engagement. Culture encompasses beliefs, language, knowledge, and behaviors (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). A child's culture can conflict with a school's culture because school cultures in the United

States are centered around middle class and majoritarian values concerning communication styles and consistent parental involvement (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). Families with lower socioeconomic backgrounds may not be familiar with or understand the middle class and majoritarian culture of schools (Lusse et al., 2019; Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). This disconnect can affect a child's development because families are not able to fully engage with the school system, adhere to the rules of the school system, and ask for needed services (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Another culture influence on the well-being of a child is the school culture on trauma (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Zeng et al., 2019). Every school district does not have a trauma-informed culture or set-aside time for professional development on trauma for teachers and staff (Zeng et al., 2019). Therefore, teachers and staff may not appropriately respond and address behaviors that could be related to childhood trauma (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Zeng et al., 2019). This could lead to an increase in classroom exclusions and school suspension (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Zeng et al., 2019).

Chronosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1986) defines chronosystem as normative and nonnormative transitions that occur over time (p. 724). Normative changes that individuals experience could include school entry and entering the workforce (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Examples of nonnormative transitions are death and divorce (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Both normative and nonnormative transitions influence a child's academic success and social and emotional growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Chronosystem also includes environmental events and the lifelong impact (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). An

environmental event details a natural event or disaster that not only affects the child but society (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

An environmental event that is currently impacting society is the COVID-19 pandemic (Phelps & Sperry, 2020). The pandemic has been described as an invisible enemy that has impacted normal way of living (Phelps & Sperry, 2020). Children and families have been affected by the pandemic (Crayne, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). Families face job loss and financial instability while children endure school closure or school accommodations to ensure safety (Crayne, 2020; Phelps & Sperry 2020). Phelps and Sperry (2020) noted that the mental health of children is a major concern during the pandemic. Children's academic growth as well as their access to social and emotional services provided in schools are hindered due to changes being made concerning the operation of schools during the pandemic (Phelps & Sperry, 2020).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Childhood trauma and neglect are key variables to understanding the challenges school social workers face in advocating services for children experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. Childhood trauma is due to adverse experiences such as physical and sexual abuse, neglect, death, and natural disasters (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Neglect occurs when there is abandonment and a lack of food, shelter, education, medical attention, and security provided to a child by a parent or guardian (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Knight, 2019; Stirling, 2020). Some general effects of childhood trauma and neglect are decreased school

progress, school attendance, and social and emotional relationships (Barto et al., 2018; McKelvey et al., 2018). Childhood trauma and neglect were discussed as key variables to show the prevalence of these problems on the development of a child. Abandonment was another key variable in my research because it is identified specifically in the research question. Abandonment is neglect (Camel & Widom, 2020) and like many forms of neglect can lead to involvement with child protective services (CPS) and ultimately affect growth and development (Rebbe, 2018; Wilson et al., 2020). Other research that is consistent with the scope of the study are trauma-informed schools, multitiered support systems, and school social work specialty. Trauma-informed schools and multitiered support systems are interventions used in school districts to provide early services to children that have been exposed to trauma. The strengths of trauma-informed schools and multitiered systems of support are universal services and early implementation of services (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). A weakness is that not all teachers and staff within schools understand or implement these early interventions and services and not all school districts are trauma-informed schools (Zeng et al., 2019). Social workers that work in the field of school social work are one of the mental health providers that provide trauma-informed services and strategies within the school setting (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022).

Childhood Trauma

The literature identifies exposure to childhood trauma as adverse child experiences (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer,

2018; Zeng et al., 2019). Zeng et al. (2019) defines adverse child experiences (ACEs) as traumatic events that occur in a child's family or environment. The adverse experiences can be caused by abuse, neglect, disparities, and violence (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019). Abuse can be physical, emotional, or sexual behaviors and gestures that are afflicted upon a vulnerable person (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019). Neglect occurs when individuals are denied proper care, food, emotional support, education, medical attention, and shelter by individuals in charge of their well-being (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Knight, 2019; Stirling, 2020). Disparity is a lack of resources such as health care, food, housing, and jobs caused by poverty and oppression (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019). Trauma from violence can be due to living in a high crime neighborhood or a war zone area, domestic violence, gang relations, and other crimes (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019). Other experiences that can cause trauma are bullying, death, and natural disasters (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Hutson, 2018; Knight, 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Hutson (2018) identifies bullying as an imbalance of power and victimization that can lead to mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety, behavior problems, and academic failure. Death and natural disasters can cause trauma because of the loss that is experienced by an individual from the events (Couch et al., 2019; Creswell-Baez, 2019; Knight, 2019; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Understanding the causes of trauma can lead to awareness on how childhood trauma can lead to problems in areas of academic achievement, cognitive development and psychosocial functioning, behavior, and

psychological functioning (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018).

Exposure to trauma in infancy, toddlerhood, and childhood can interfere with academic success (McKelvey et al., 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). A child's academic success or failure can be based on school engagement, attendance, and grade promotion or retention (McKelvey et al., 2018). The effects of trauma exposure can manifest while children are present in a school setting and lead to problems with school performance, behavior, social relationships, and mental and emotional stability (Frankland, 2021; Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Academic success can decrease due to truancy, grade retention, and school dropout (McKelvey et al., 2018; Wert et al., 2018). McKelvey et al. (2018) conducted a study on the exposure of adverse childhood experiences in infancy and toddlerhood and the negative associations with academic outcomes prior to adolescence. The results of the study showed exposure to ACEs in infancy and toddlerhood was associated with an IEP in any grade since first grade, at least one grade retention, and that children with multiple exposure to ACEs had the least successful school outcomes (McKelvey et al., 2018, p. 174).

Cognitive development and psychosocial functioning are hindered by childhood traumatic experiences because the brain is exposed to the trauma and adapts to the negative stimuli (Avery et al., 2021; Barto et al., 2018; Frankland, 2021; Morton & Berardi, 2018). Cognitive development is the development of knowledge, abstract reasoning, skills, and problem solving (Morton & Berardi, 2018). Morton and Berardi

(2018) noted that the prefrontal cortex, cerebellar vermis, and hippocampus are regions of the brain associated with cognitive functioning. These regions can be impaired by trauma and cause a decrease in short-term and long-term memory, abstract reasoning, skills, and problem solving (Morton & Berardi, 2018). According to Morton and Berardi exposure to trauma can cause overstimulation of the central nervous system when norepinephrine and cortisol are continually released than normally needed. Norepinephrine and cortisol are natural stress hormones that the body releases when an individual encounters a threatening or emotional situation that needs an immediate response or action to survive (Morton & Berardi, 2018). However, overstimulation of these hormones caused by trauma can be harmful to the well-being of a child because the normal functioning of the release of norepinephrine and cortisol is to return to regular level once the threat has ended (Avery et al., 2021; Morton & Berardi, 2018). Cognitive functioning can be impaired from overstimulation of these natural stress hormones and affect student academic performance and social interaction (Avery et al., 2021; Morton & Berardi, 2018). High level production of norepinephrine and cortisol leads to a decrease in concentration on academic tasks (Morton & Berardi, 2018). A student experiencing high levels of these hormones has problems regulating emotions and constantly in survival mode with escalated anger and fear (Morton & Berardi, 2018). Social interaction and building relationships decrease because of the struggle to recognize the difference between threatening and non-threatening behaviors, attachments, and interactions (Morton & Berardi, 2018). This struggle to identify safe relationships decreases trust and security with teachers, peers, and within the environment (Morton & Berardi, 2018).

Behavioral related problems in childhood and into adulthood can also be caused by childhood trauma (Johnson, 2017; Ju et al., 2020; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; O'Connor et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Physical abuse and neglect can lead children to mistrust others and misinterpret social cues (McKelvey et al., 2018). This can hinder the development of relationships and cause cognitive distortions, poor coping strategies, and emotional reactivity (McKelvey et al., 2018). Another behavior influenced by childhood trauma is juvenile delinquency (Crosby et al., 2017; Folk et al., 2021). Delinquent behaviors are associated with adverse childhood experiences (Folk et al., 2021; Oshri et al., 2017). Juvenile delinquency can have long-term effects leading to continual involvement with behavioral counseling, the criminal justice system, and even imprisonment (Folk et al., 2021). Delinquency can negatively affect school performance and academic success because of school absences due to court appointed placements and recidivism (Crosby et al., 2017). Several negative long-term effects of poor school performance caused by juvenile delinquency are unemployment and poverty (Crosby et al., 2017). Childhood neglect can lead to behavioral concerns of substance abuse and abusive behaviors in childhood and adulthood (Oshri et al., 2017). Negative behavioral outcomes were associated with ACEs in the study by McKelvey et al. (2018) on adverse childhood experiences in infancy and toddlerhood. Data from the study was collected when the sample population was ages 1, 2, and 3 and then at age 11 for later developmental outcomes (McKelvey et al., 2018, p. 170). Individuals exposed to ACEs during early development had internalized behavior

problems of lack of interest and enjoyment and externalized behavior problems of cruelty, bullying, and meanness (McKelvey et al., 2018).

Childhood trauma affects psychological functioning and healthy mental and emotional development (Cohen et al., 2021; Ju et al., 2020; O' Connor et al., 2018). Childhood traumatic experiences can lead to mental health concerns of depression, anxiety, and suicide (Johnson, 2017; Ju et al., 2020; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; O'Connor et al. 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Mental health concerns caused by childhood trauma can impact daily living and have long-term effects into adulthood (Johnson, 2017; Ju et al., 2020; O'Connor et al. 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Daily living can be affected by depression due to dysfunctional attitudes of negative thoughts concerning self and life (Cohen et al., 2021; Ju et al., 2020; O'Connor et al. 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Research conducted by Ju et al. (2020) focused on the effects of childhood trauma on the onset of depression with participants from inpatient and outpatient services in the Zhumadian Psychiatric Hospital located in China. The age range of the participants was from 18 to 55 years old (Ju et al., 2020, p. 403). The results showed that participants with a diagnosis of major depressive disorder had higher childhood trauma, dysfunctional attitudes, and depression scores and that childhood trauma can increase the risk of major depressive disorder (Ju et al., 2020).

Neglect

The definition of neglect is when the basic needs or rights of a child are not adequately met leading to harm in the development, health, or safety of the child (Camel & Widom,

2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Kobulsky et al., 2020; Pritchard et al., 2019). Neglect is a major global health and social problem (Kobulsky et al., 2020). To protect and advocate for the needs and rights of children worldwide, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was established (Kobulsky et al. (2020, p. 2). The CRC has 52 Articles that establish international laws to protect children under the age of 18 (Kobulsky et al., 2020, p. 2). Articles 19 and 39 of the CRC focus mainly on child neglect and protective measures to promote safety and recovery of children (Kobulsky et al., 2020, p. 2). In the United States, neglect is the most common type of child maltreatment (Camel & Widom, 2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2019). Child protective services (CPS) in the U.S. was established to respond to and investigate reports of child maltreatment (Brown et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). Stirling (2019) noted that of every four calls to CPS in the United States, three of those calls dealt with a child experiencing neglect in their environment (p. 271). The United States child welfare system is designed to ensure child safety and provide temporary care until permanent arrangements of either reunification with the biological family, adoption with another family, or guardianship with a family are found (Brown et al., 2020; South Carolina Department of Social Services, 2022).

Research indicates that neglect can be the most difficult maltreatment to identify because of the heterogeneous nature and cause higher risk factors (Camel & Widom, 2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Kobulsky et al., 2020; Stirling, 2019). Neglect is a heterogeneous phenomenon because there are many forms of neglect that can occur in ecological systems that might not be identified in the general definition (Camel &

Widom, 2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2019). Camel and Widom (2020) and Kobulsky et al. (2020) noted that children exposed to neglect have higher risk of problems in childhood and adulthood to include trauma, low level of academic skills development and economic well-being, higher mental health concerns and physical health problems, delinquency, criminal involvement, and violence. Liu et al. (2017) noted that neglect increases risk of depression and is associated with the reduction of brain volume in the areas that affect memory. Poor psychological adjustment and hostility and aggression are harmful effects of neglect across cultures on a child's well-being and growth (Kobulsky et al., 2020). However, the overall effects of neglect on a child despite culture or geographical location can be damaging and lifelong (Camel & Widom, 2020; Kobulsky et al., 2020). The long-term effects of educational neglect are poor employment and poverty (Camel & Widom, 2020; Wert et al., 2018). A few long-term effects of emotional neglect are poor treatment outcomes for mental health concerns and poor development of relationships with others (Camel & Widom, 2020; Ju et al., 2020). Long-term effects of physical and supervisory neglect are criminal offences, recidivism, and psychological and medical concerns (Coffino et al., 2020; Freisthler et al., 2017; Kobulsky et al., 2020).

Commonly known forms of neglect found in the literature are physical, medical, supervisory, educational, emotional, and abandonment (Cohen & Thakur, 2021; Freisthler et al., 2017; Kobulsky et al., 2020; Stirling, 2019; Wert et al., 2018). Physical neglect occurs when the basic physical needs of a child are not met (Freisthler et al., 2017; Kobulsky et al., 2020). Medical neglect is the denial of needed medical care by an

adult or guardian in charge of the child (Stirling, 2019). Supervisory neglect occurs when there is inadequate supervision of a child (Gregoire-Labrecque et al., 2020; Newton, 2019; Sokol et al., 2021). Educational neglect is where a parent or guardian denies a school-age child access to education and fails to have a child attend school regularly (Wert et al., 2018). Emotional neglect occurs when a child is deprived of their emotional needs by a parent or guardian (Cohen & Thakur, 2021). Abandonment happens when a parent willingly terminates parental rights (Rebbe, 2018). Each type of neglect has an impact on a child's health, growth and development and will be discussed in detail to understand the general risk factors of neglect. Later in the literature review the discussion on neglect will narrow to abandonment and the effects of abandonment on a child.

Physical neglect occurs when the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter are not being met (Coffino et al., 2020; Freisthler et al., 2017; Kobulsky et al., 2020). Environmental factors of filthy living conditions and unsafe home environments are also considered physical neglect (Coffino et al., 2020). Freisthler et al. (2017) studied physical neglect and the use of drugs by parents. Drug abuse and dependency increases unhealthy parenting and unsafe home environments which can lead to physical neglect (Freisthler et al., 2017). The use of drugs by parents can increase impairments in cognitive functioning making it difficult to adequately provide for the physical needs of their children (Freisthler et al., 2017). The sample population were individuals from cities in California with known police data on drug incidents (Freisthler et al., 2017, p. 247). The results of the study showed that parents who lived in drug crime environments and were drug dependent had higher rates of physical neglect (Freisthler et al., 2017).

Coffino et al. (2020) studied physical neglect concerning denial of food and the association with eating disorders. Food neglect occurs when parents or guardians neglect to provide adequate food even when resources and finances are not an issue (Freisthler et al., 2017). The researchers of the study wanted to show that food neglect influences the mental, physical, and behavior of individuals (Coffino et al., 2020). The specific eating disorders (EDs) examined in the study were anorexia nervosa (AN), bulimia nervosa (BN), and binge-eating disorder (BED) (Coffino et al., 2020). Coffino et al. noted that eating disorders are associated with psychiatric and medical problems and suicide attempts. In the study, participants were ages 18 and older with a history of childhood food neglect (Coffino et al., 2020). The data showed an association between childhood food neglect and eating disorders and concluded that individuals with a history of childhood food neglect have an increased risk for lifetime anorexia nervosa and binge-eating disorder and psychiatric and medical problems because of the eating disorders (Coffino et al., 2020).

Research by Stirling (2019) focused on medical neglect and the interventions within the ecological systems. Medical neglect is where the guardian of a child does not ensure medical care to prevent health concerns (Stirling, 2019). Stirling found that family factors of learning disabilities, lack of social and extended family support, and language barriers can hinder medical care. Availability of resources in the community can prevent or increase medical neglect (Stirling, 2019). The interrelationship between parents and medical care staff can also affect medical intervention (Stirling, 2019). Societal factors

such as health insurance can help with medical interventions (Stirling, 2019). Medical neglect can lead to severe health conditions when left untreated (Stirling, 2019).

Supervisory neglect is inadequate adult supervision which leads to the needs of a child not being met (Gregoire-Labrecque et al., 2020; Newton, 2019, Oshri et al., 2017) or failure to remove a child from a situation that is beyond the child's level of understanding that places the child in harm (Lloyd & Kepple, 2017; Sokol et al., 2021). According to the study by Gregoire-Labrecque et al. (2020) supervisory neglect is most frequently reported in the United States and Canada because of parental and caregiver substance abuse and unfit caregiver that places the youth in harm by supporting child delinquency and dangerous and harmful behaviors. Inadequate supervision can have immediate and detrimental consequences such as injury or death (Lloyd & Kepple, 2017; Sokol et al., 2021). Lack of adequate supervision can lead to adolescent substance abuse and dependency (Lloyd & Kepple, 2017). Sokol et al. (2021) studied supervisory neglect cases from a database of records through a Midwestern child welfare system. The purpose of Sokol et al. study was to increase prevention of supervisory neglect. The study showed that 71% of the child welfare investigations were supervisory neglect caused by domestic violence and caregiver and guardian's substance problem (Sokol et al., 2021, p. 3). The study found that prevention methods related to substance abuse and domestic relationship could help with preventing supervisory neglect (Sokol et al., 2021).

Educational neglect affects the growth and development of children (Wert et al., 2018). The neglect occurs when a parent or caregiver neglects the educational needs of a minor child by not registering a child for school, encouraging a child to drop out of

school, and not supporting consistent attendance (Wert et al., 2018). Providing educational opportunities improves a child's chances of developing skills and language fluency and understanding different subject matters (Wert et al., 2018). However, when education is neglected, a child's academic progress is hindered which leads to lower grades and grade retention (Wert et al., 2018).

Emotional childhood neglect can negatively affect mental health and healthy development (Cohen & Thakur, 2021; Ju et al., 2020; O' Connor et al., 2018). Emotional neglect occurs when a child does not receive emotional support concerning positive and safe attachments with a parent or caregiver and when negative comments are used regularly to address the child (Cohen & Thakur, 2021; Ju et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2018). An example of emotional neglect could be the use of consistent derogatory names and remarks that make a child feel unimportant and ashamed (Cohen & Thakur, 2021). Cohn and Thakur (2021) noted that emotional neglect is least likely to be reported to CPS because of the challenges with identifying signs of the neglect and ruling out other factors that could possibly be affecting the child. Emotional childhood neglect can cause internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Cohen & Thakur, 2021). Internalizing symptoms of depression and lower self-esteem occurs because the child cognitively internalizes the degrading remarks and behaviors of their parents or caregivers (Cohen & Thakur, 2021). Externalizing symptoms are withdrawal, social impairment, and possible aggression (Cohen & Thakur, 2021).

Abandonment

Abandonment is another type of neglect (Camel et al., 2020; Rebbe, 2018). The definition of abandonment by law is the desertion of a child and a parent's refusal to retain custody (Rebbe, 2018). Abandonment can occur due to parental incarceration and unsafe living conditions that result in the removal of the child from their home by CPS (Camel et al., 2020; Rebbe, 2018; Wilson et al., 2020; Xia & Lam, 2020). As mentioned earlier in the literature review, CPS investigates reports of neglect (Brown et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). CPS ensures the well-being, safety, and permanency of children by determining whether abuse or neglect occurred and working with families to promote the safety of children (Brown et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020).

Harm and death of a child can result from abandonment (South Carolina Department of Social Services, 2021). Safe-haven laws were established in the United States to prevent dangerous and fatal abandonments of infants (South Carolina Department of Social Services, 2021). Information from the South Carolina Department of Social Services (2021) discussed the Safe Haven for Abandoned Babies Act known as Daniel's Law. Under Daniel's Law an unharmed infant up to 60 days old can be left with staff at safe havens such as hospitals, law enforcement agencies, fire stations, and churches (South Carolina Department of Social Services, 2021). CPS will take legal custody of the infant and place the child in a foster home until adoption can occur (South Carolina Department of Social Services, 2021).

Parental incarceration and involvement with CPS because of unsafe living conditions affects emotional health and psychosocial development of a child (Wilson et

al., 2020; Xia & Lam, 2020). Wilson et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review of qualitative evidence related to the experiences of children with CPS involvement because of maltreatment. The lived experiences of the children indicated distress when being removed from their home to foster care and anger and frustration at not returning home, and sense of loss in missing their parents and home (Wilson et al., 2020). However, some children experienced a sense of gaining security and well-being after being removed from their parents and placed in, out of home care (Wilson et al., 2020). A study by Xia and Lam (2020) explored Chinese children's experiences with abandonment after the incarceration of their parents. Xia and Lam noted that not all children with incarcerated parents in China were considered abandoned due to having living family members. Therefore, increased homelessness can occur among these children who are not considered abandoned, if extended family members do not accept them into their homes (Xia & Lam, 2020). The lived experiences of the children in the study were feelings of abandonment, burden to extended family members, and lucky when support was provided by a charitable agency (Xia & Lam, 2020).

Trauma-Informed Schools

Schools are part of the immediate environmental settings surrounding school-age youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Tabone et al. (2020) noted that schools provide a setting for early trauma-informed interventions to help relieve stress and decrease disruptions in schools because some children with traumatic backgrounds start school as early as 4 or 5 years old and can receive initial mental health support from school social workers (also see School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Trauma-informed schools are a

response to the prevalence of trauma and the effect on academic success and social development (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). Early trauma interventions in schools can have important implications for decreasing later onset of behavioral and health concerns (Tabone et al., 2020). The purpose of the research by Tabone et al. was to examine the effectiveness of trauma-informed schools as an early intervention to childhood trauma by studying classrooms within Trauma-Informed Elementary Schools (TIES). TIES program provides trauma-informed services to primary level children (Tabone et al., 2020). The study by Tabone et al. extended an evaluation of the 2015-2019 pilot TIES program in West Virginia of 11 schools grades preschool, kindergarten, and first. Tabone et al. noted that in the extended evaluation of the program, TIES classrooms and non-TIES comparison classrooms were measured using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System at the beginning and end of the school year (pp. 2-3). The results of the study showed that trauma-informed schools as an early intervention to childhood trauma were effective in providing emotional support and classroom behavioral management, and improving instructional learning productivity (Tabone et al., 2020).

Morton & Berardi (2018) noted the development of trauma-informed schools should be a multidisciplinary partnership between mental health professionals and educators. This multidisciplinary partnership should consist of implementing strategies relevant to trauma and providing parental support and professional development for school staff (Morton & Berardi, 2018). Implementing trauma-informed schools changes traditional practices (Morton & Berardi, 2018) of identifying students experiencing

trauma through disciplinary referrals and emotional outburst (Berg, 2017) and decreases the likelihood of children being under identified for interventions (Morton & Berardi, 2018). In trauma-informed schools, the traditional culture and practices evolve to include understanding and acceptance of all students despite circumstances and backgrounds (Morton & Berardi, 2018). Within this evolved school culture, educators and staff are trained to recognize behaviors, nonverbal and verbal communication, and emotions that could be caused by trauma and learn to communicate with students in a compassionate manner (Morton & Berardi, 2018) which could promote positive relationships and comfortable learning environments (Frankland, 2021). Compassionate communication and responses between staff and students increase the acceptance of conversations about trauma and builds relationships (Frankland, 2021; Morton & Berardi, 2018). According to Morton & Berardi, trauma-informed practices within the evolved culture are consistent to support the needs of the student and help to improve academics and social and emotional growth throughout the student's educational experience.

Challenges

Morton & Berardi (2018) noted that challenges occur when trauma-informed schools are implemented. One challenge is the willingness of educators to support a trauma-informed culture and practice (Berg, 2017; Morton & Berardi, 2018). This challenge can be attributed to the lack of trauma-informed education teachers receive during their traditional undergraduate and graduate programs (Morton & Berardi, 2018). Also, in a traditional school setting, the role of the educator is to increase classroom performance, test scores, and achievement (Morton & Berardi, 2018). However, the

effects of trauma on a school-age child disrupts a traditional school setting because of disruptive behaviors, absenteeism, psychological and mental health concerns, suicide attempts, and poor academic performance (Frankland, 2021; Ju et al., 2020; Morton & Berardi, 2018; O'Conner et al., 2018). Morton and Berardi indicated that trauma-informed practices can be viewed as a fad by teachers because of continual updates of strategies to implement and the stress of multiple roles of being a teacher and social and emotional provider to students experiencing trauma.

Another challenge to implementing trauma-informed schools with a multidisciplinary partnership between mental health professionals and educators is the competency of mental health professionals (Morton & Berardi, 2018). According to Morton & Berardi (2018), the mental health professional must be competent in their understanding of the nature of trauma, impact of trauma, best practice response, and trauma response as a community-wide endeavor to train other professionals on trauma-informed care. Challenges with the implementation of trauma-informed schools can prevent youths from receiving support services.

Challenges to implementing trauma-informed schools can be improved through education and collaboration with mental health, educational disciplines, and parents (Morton & Berardi, 2018). Collaboration with child protection agencies can help identify students experiencing maltreatment and trauma (Beddoe et al., 2018). Traditional undergraduate and graduate programs for educators can be improved by adding a framework on trauma that provides information on the nature of trauma, impact of trauma, best practice response, and trauma response as a community-wide endeavor

(Morton & Berardi, 2018). This change with traditional programs will allow teachers to have awareness and knowledge of childhood trauma and the impact of trauma on school performance, behavior, and mental health (Morton & Berardi, 2018). Collaboration allows mental health professionals and child protection agencies to work with educators and parents (Beddoe et al. 2018; Morton & Berardi, 2018). During collaboration, mental health and child protection professionals learn to use a variety of interventions (Beddoe et al., 2018; Morton & Berardi, 2018) According to Morton and Berardi (2018) there is an understanding among mental health professionals during collaboration, that parents and teachers trained in trauma-informed practices can also provide strategies outside of a mental health setting to children experiencing trauma. Beddoe et al. (2018) studied New Zealand school social workers and their response to child maltreatment and trauma. The school social workers identified a collaboration with child protective agencies as a necessity to understanding and appropriately identifying school-age youth with maltreatment and trauma backgrounds (Beddoe et al., 2018).

Multitiered Systems of Support

Multitiered systems of support (MTSS) provide interventions for all students within the school setting (Ormiston et al., 2021; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Systems of support within schools are part of the microsystem where students are constantly involved (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Students are directly impacted by the systems of support because of access to early interventions (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Reinbergs and Fefer (2018) noted that multitiered systems of support is a school-based service that provide interventions to meet the need

of children and adolescents. The approach blends tiered models of academic, behavioral, and mental health (Ormiston et al., 2021; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). There are three tiers of services in the multitiered systems of support that are delivered to students based on data driven decision making concerning the needs of the students (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). The first tier is universal, the second selective based on individual needs, and the third-tier referrals to specialize agencies (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). As the level of tiers increase so does the intensity of the services (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). The universal services in tier 1 are for all students in the school (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Tier 1 services are designed to fit the needs of each student (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). As the needs of the students increase so does the level of services and the response to the student's needs (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Tier 2 services can involve assessments and individualized services (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Services in the third tier could involve referrals for services outside of the school environment (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Reinbergs and Fefer noted multitiered systems of support are helpful with trauma-informed practices because of interventions available for all students.

Social Work

The purpose of social work is to promote social change and provide services to marginalized populations (Bowen, 2015; National Association of Social Workers, 2018). The history of social work centers on social change concerning social issues of poverty, mental health, public health, social displacement, and child labor (Bowen, 2015; Shaffer, 2006). The profession started with upper class women and men volunteering to help provide services to vulnerable individuals (Shaffer, 2006). These volunteers were known

as friendly visitors (Shaffer, 2006). The volunteers created settlement homes, promoted health reforms, and advocated to end child labor (Bowen, 2015; Shaffer, 2006). Over the years, the profession continued to expand into different fields of social work to provide services in needed areas such as medical, child welfare, justice system, schools, mental health, and veteran affairs (National Association of Social Workers, 2018). The profession is credible and bound by ethics to ensure services are appropriate and professional (National Association of Social Workers, 2018). This study focuses on the field of school social work and the challenges with advocating for services for the vulnerable population of children experiencing trauma due to abandonment.

School Social Work

The role and responsibility of a school social worker varies from state and school districts (Bent-Goodley, 2018; Harrison, 2018). However, the main purpose of school social work is to promote academic, behavioral, emotional, and social achievement and growth for school-age youth in a school setting (National Association of Social Workers, 2018). The school social work practice model and standards focus on evidence-based services, a school environment of learning, and accessible resources (Crutchfield et al., 2020; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the practice model helps with legitimacy and consistency (Crutchfield et al., 2020) because it identifies the level of education and credentials all school social workers need in the role of a school social worker (School Social Work Association of America, 2022). School social workers provide a link between school, home, and community through direct and indirect services (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social

Work Association of America, 2022). Through direct services, school social workers provide counseling and other interventions to improve the well-being of students (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). Indirect services allow school social workers to advocate for services and resources within the environmental systems that influence the child.

The field of school social work is affected by evolving educational policies (National Association of Social Workers, 2018). Educational policies that continued to change and affect the specialty are the No Child Left Behind Act, 2004 amendments to Individuals with Disability Education Act, and Every Student Succeeds Act (National Association of Social Workers, 2018). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) evolved from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (McGuinn, 2016; Ollila & Macy, 2019; Saatcioglu et al., 2021). The NCLB focuses on creating academic standards to include testing and holding schools accountable for the education students receive and improving parental involvement by connecting families and schools (McGuinn, 2016; Ollila & Macy, 2019; Saatcioglu et al., 2021). Every Student Succeeds Act replaced the No Child Left Behind Act in 2015 (McGuinn, 2016; Ollila & Macy, 2019; Saatcioglu et al., 2021). Every Student Succeeds Act continued to focus on the academic well-being of students and accountability on schools (McGuinn, 2016; Ollila & Macy, 2019; Saatcioglu et al., 2021). The 2004 amendments to the Individuals with Disability Education Act introduced response to intervention (RTI) which promoted academic and behavioral growth through interventions and services (Gartland & Stornider, 2020; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). School social work standards identify the services provided by social

workers in school settings (National Association of Social Workers, 2018). The National Association of Social Workers (2018) standards for school social workers are as follows:

1. Ethics and values: Ethics should be adhered to guide decision making and understanding.
2. Qualifications: School social workers should meet the requirements for licensure and professional practice.
3. Assessment: Assessments are conducted on students and individuals within systems that the student participates in.
4. Intervention: School social workers should use and understand evidence-based interventions and strategies relevant to the needs of the individual.
5. Decision-making and practice evaluation: Data and evaluations will be used to ensure relevant services.
6. Record keeping: School social workers maintain accurate records of services provided.
7. Workload management: Organization of workloads will be consistent to fulfill daily responsibilities.
8. Professional development: School social workers will continue education to increase knowledge on various subject areas.
9. Cultural competence: School social workers should be aware and understand different cultures. Services provided to students and families should be sensitive to backgrounds and cultures.

10. Interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration: School social workers will collaborate with staff within the schools and other agencies to ensure students and families receive appropriate services.
11. Advocacy: School social workers advocate for equal education and services for students and families.

Challenges

Current research has identified several known challenges LMSWs in a school setting face when working with childhood trauma and neglect. As discussed in Chapter 1, those challenges were definition, identifying and reporting, building trust, and education (Berg, 2017; Coffino et al., 2020; Cohen & Thakur, 2021; Freisthler et al., 2017; Kobulsky et al., 2020). The challenge with defining neglect is due to neglect being a heterogeneous phenomenon (Camel et al., 2020; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2019). There are forms of neglect that do not fit the general definition which can lead to problems with identifying neglect and underreporting (Camel & Widom, 2020; Cohen & Thakur, 2021; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2019). Building trust is a challenge because neglectful childhood experiences can cause trauma and difficulties in building trusting relationships (Berg, 2017). Traumatic experiences can be difficult to share and relive (Berg, 2017). According to Cossar et al. (2019) poor cognitive and linguistic development can hinder recollection of traumatic events and the words to express what has occurred. Education is a challenge because the lack of education among school social workers and school staff can affect how to recognize and understand the effects of traumatic experiences (Berg, 2017; Morton & Berardi, 2018).

Other identified challenges in the research are trauma-informed schools and multiple roles of school social workers (Bent-Goodley, 2018; Harrison, 2018; Mersky et al., 2019; Pataky et al., 2019). Every school does not implement trauma-informed practices, therefore, teachers and staff may not have the knowledge and understanding on how to handle a child's behaviors and emotions that manifest from trauma (Berg, 2017; Zeng et al., 2019). This creates a challenge because the child is more likely to receive disciplinary actions of suspensions instead of needed services to help with the reason for the behavior (Greco et al., 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018). Multiple roles of school social workers can hinder the amount of time available for direct and indirect services related to trauma (Bent-Goodley, 2018; Berg, 2017; Harrison, 2018; Mersky et al., 2019). This could create problems with school social workers spending a disproportionate amount of individual time on severe cases instead of referring the child and family for mental health or behavioral health services (Phillippo et al., 2017; School of Social Work Association of America, 2022). The goal of my research is to expand on the current challenges that have been identified and explore in detail the gap in the literature on the challenges LMSWs in a school setting face when advocating services for child neglect caused by abandonment.

Summary and Conclusions

This generic qualitative research focused on the challenges school social workers faced when advocating services for children experiencing trauma due to abandonment. The literature indicates that exposure to childhood trauma and neglect is devastating to the well-being of an individual and can lead to depression, suicide, and juvenile

delinquency (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). Childhood traumatic experiences can also interfere with a child's success in school such as problems with attendance, grade retention, social and emotional learning, and discipline (Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). The literature also provides information on interventions in schools that support growth and development for youths with traumatic backgrounds (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Common strategies in the literature that have been used to work with childhood trauma in schools are trauma-informed schools and multitiered support systems (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). Even with those common strategies, school-age children continue to miss early interventions and services that could assist with the effects of trauma (Zeng et al., 2019). However, what has not been learned from the current literature, are the challenges school social workers deal with when advocating services within the ecological systems for youths experiencing childhood trauma caused by abandonment. School social workers provide support services in schools, homes, and communities that are immediate and based on the need of the individual experiencing trauma. This research fills the gap in the current literature by exploring firsthand experiences of school social workers on the challenges they face with advocating services.

Specific information is provided in Chapter 3 on the research design, role of the researcher, and methodology. The research design for this study is generic qualitative approach. The design helps to fill the gap in the literature because I explore what can be

learned about the challenges school social workers face when advocating for services for youths with traumatic backgrounds caused by abandonment. The target population of school social workers and the inclusion criteria for this study is discussed in Chapter 3 as well as sampling procedures. Recruitment procedures and the development of the data collection instrument are discussed in Chapter 3. The data collection method is semistructured interviews with open-ended questions that focus on the role of a school social worker, childhood trauma and neglect, ecological systems, and challenges to advocating for services. Also, the data analysis plan for the study, internal and external validity, and ethical procedures are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of the research. The data analysis plan helps to understand how themes are coded from the data to interpret the findings on the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for neglect-based childhood trauma.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative generic study was to better understand the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for students experiencing trauma due to abandonment. I explored the firsthand experiences of LMSWs when working with individuals with a background of childhood trauma in a school setting. Current research provides information on the role of school social workers in assisting youth with trauma experiences. Trauma can be debilitating to school performance and behaviors (McKelvey et al., 2018). The goal of this research was to identify the challenges faced by school social workers so that leaders of the social work discipline can develop strategies to help school social workers to advocate services based on the needs of the child and improve the initial onset of services.

In Chapter 3, I provide detail information on the research design and rationale. The role of the researcher is defined and discussed. This research was qualitative. I conducted virtual, semistructured interviews using Google Meet video conference platform or by phone. In this chapter, I discuss the procedures for recruiting participants, development of the instrument, and processes for collecting and analyzing data. The role of the researcher, limitations of the study, and ethical concerns are also identified. The chapter ends with a discussion of the steps within the study to ensure validity and reliability.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research question guides the study and aligns with the purpose, literature review, and methodology: What are the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment? The phenomenon of the study is to recognize the challenges school social workers face in advocating services based on the need of the child who is experiencing trauma due to abandonment. The central concept focused on in the study is the effect of childhood trauma in schools. Research on childhood trauma indicates that children can be influenced by their environments and these influences can have a negative effect on school performance, mental health, and development (Haselgruber et al., 2020; Johnson, 2017; Levenson, 2017; McKelvey et al., 2018; Tabone et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2018). School social workers work with children from different backgrounds and environments (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022). This interaction with students provides an opportunity for school social workers to engage with the different systems that affect a child's mental, emotional, and social health (National Association of Social Workers, 2018; School Social Work Association of America, 2022).

The research tradition for the study was generic qualitative inquiry; the conceptual framework consisted of ecological system theory. Generic inquiry is not based on a specific epistemology (Patton, 2015). The inquiry focuses on the useful application that can be learned from the study (Patton, 2015). By using a generic approach, I was able to ask open-ended questions during the semistructured interviews to address the

research question (see Patton, 2015). The conceptual framework of ecological systems theory provided a means of examining the different systems that children directly and indirectly participate in. Bronfenbrenner (1977) noted that the environmental systems that children are exposed to influence how they interact with others emotionally and behaviorally. The school social workers who interact with these children witness the effect of the environmental systems on the lives of the students. The systems can create challenges in regard to how students receive services from school social workers because immediate environments influence growth and habits, culture influence values and beliefs, and economics affects resources (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

There were several strengths to using generic qualitative inquiry for this study. One strength of the generic qualitative approach is that the researcher expects to understand the sample population's knowledge on the problem (Patton, 2015). A researcher can conduct in-depth interviews with the approach without framing the inquiry with a specific framework (Patton, 2015). The interpretive framing of generic qualitative inquiry can vary (Patton, 2015). I used this approach to understand the challenges with advocating services for students exposed to trauma due to abandonment. School social workers were interviewed to collect firsthand knowledge on the challenges.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research provides an opportunity for the researcher to interact with participants in their natural environment (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The role of the researcher is central because the researcher is considered the primary instrument in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One component of the role of the researcher is positionality

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Positionality looks at the identity of the researcher in relation to context and setting of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The participants for the study were school social workers from the Midlands region of South Carolina. I recruited the sample from available school districts in the Midlands region and using public information on school social workers in that region. The initial goal for recruitment was to recruit solely from school districts. However, recruitment through school districts was a challenge because some districts did not have a research accountability board requirement and a few districts were not interested in participating. I requested permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to expand recruitment by using public information. I discuss participant recruitment in greater detail in the Methodology section of this chapter.

As the researcher, I have knowledge of the role of school social workers. I am a LMSW and have worked in the capacity of a school social worker for over 10 years. I have worked with school-age children and adolescents with traumatic backgrounds and have some firsthand experiences of obstacles that affect the way school social workers advocate services for this vulnerable population. This professional experience has allowed me to attend professional developments and engage with other school social workers. Because of my experiences and background as a school social worker, I can relate to the participants. My experiences and background also have cultivated a desire to see improvements in the field of social work in how children experiencing trauma receive services within the ecological systems.

I used reflexivity and consistency to manage my familiarity to the field of school social work. There were no personal or supervisory conflicts within the recruitment process or with the participants. The recruitment process was consistent throughout the study, which involved (a) contacting research sites and completing all requirements set by the research accountability board, (b) using public information when a research site did not have a research accountability board, and (c) sending a recruitment letter to prospective participants (see Appendix A). Any potential participant was informed through the recruitment letter and informed consent that participation was voluntary and could end at any time. To help with positionality and personal biases, I used reflective journaling. As Ravitch and Carl (2016) observed, reflective journaling helps a researcher to engage in continual reflexivity with regard to their role in the research process and potential influence on data collection and interpretation of the data. A reflective journal is ongoing throughout a study. Ravitch and Carl noted that journaling can be used to map out ideas, emotions, and questions for a study. I used a reflective journal during the interview process so that I could be aware of my observations and feelings regarding the information the participants gave.

Another ethical consideration was the participants' involvement in the study. The participants in the study were LMSWs in the position of a school social worker. Their position at the research sites could have created a concern regarding information shared during the research. The nature of the concern could be related to effectiveness of their services or how the school culture influences advocacy of services. To minimize this concern, I provided an informed consent form to the participants prior to the start of the

research. The form conveyed to participants that their participation was voluntary, and that the data collected from the research would be used to understand the challenges that school social workers face when advocating services. In the form, I also noted that study findings would potentially enhance the social work field by providing knowledge that could be used to improve how students exposed to childhood trauma receive needed services. All identifiers during data collection were confidential. Also, research sites received a letter requesting permission to conduct the research (see Appendix B) and the informed consent form. The research site was made aware of the purpose of the research and the use of the data collected.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Primary and secondary school social workers were the identified population for this study. The targeted sample size for participation in this study is 10 school social workers. The rationale for selecting a sample size of 10 is because a qualitative sample size can range from two to 30 (Creswell, 2018). However, the literature on qualitative research indicates there is no specific rule concerning the sample size for qualitative research (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Instead, the researcher should determine the sample size based on the purpose of the research and what can be learned (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample size can be adjusted depending on when data saturation is achieved (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Saturation occurs when the data collected from the participants no longer provides new insight or themes to the problem (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the sample size may increase beyond 10 to ensure data

saturation or decrease depending on recruitment and saturation of the data (Patton, 2015). In-depth data collection methods can help researchers to collect detailed data from each participant of the study to support data saturation (Patton, 2015). Two qualitative studies that also supported the sample size determination for this study were Berg (2017) and Beddo et al. (2018). Berg used a sample size of six social workers in a school setting to identify children with trauma experiences. Beddoe et al. conducted 20 semistructured interviews with New Zealand school-based social workers to explore the social workers' perspectives on response to maltreatment.

I used purposeful sampling to select participants. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to determine the participants based on representation needed for the study to answer the research question (Babbie, 2017). For this study, participating school social workers needed firsthand knowledge on the challenges with advocating services for childhood trauma caused by abandonment. The school social workers selected for the study were from the Midlands region of South Carolina. The criteria for participation were that the sample population must be a LMSW with at least 1 year of experience working in a primary or secondary school setting.

Recruitment of the sample population started after the Walden University IRB gave approval and permission to collect data (see Creswell, 2018). The IRB approval number for this study was 06-23-21-0174520. The approval number information was found on the informed consent form. The two steps used to recruit the sample population were (a) apply to the research accountability board at the research site and (b) use public information on school social workers in the Midlands region. The initial goal was to

recruit through a research site (school district); however, recruitment was difficult, I made the decision to also use public information to recruit participants. Recruitment was difficult because some research sites were not interested in the research and others did not have a research accountability board.

The process to recruiting through a research site was I emailed a detailed letter (see Appendix B) to the research site asking permission to conduct the research. In the letter, I explained the study, recruitment of participants, data collection method, and the use of the data. Then, an application was completed and emailed to the research accountability board. Once I received approval from the school district on the research request, I reached out through email and phone contact to the lead school social worker of that district to explain the study and ask that a recruitment letter (see Appendix A) be emailed to all school social workers in the district. The informed consent form was emailed to participants that volunteered. The recruitment letter and informed consent form explained the purpose of the study, participation criteria, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and how the use of the data would help improve services for students with traumatic childhood backgrounds. If the research site did not have a research accountability board, then recruitment occurred using public information. When using public information to recruit, a recruitment letter was emailed individually to potential participants. The informed consent was emailed to those interested in participating. The first 10 individuals, when using a research site or public information, who consented to participation and fit the criteria were scheduled for an interview. A spreadsheet was developed to list these participants, and codes were assigned to each participant to

conceal their identity for confidentiality purposes. Any additional participants interested in the study would be placed on a separate spreadsheet for a waiting list.

Instrumentation

Semistructured interviews were used to collect data and to answer the research question. Semistructured interviews are considered an in-depth interview method (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During semistructured interviews, the researcher interacts with the interviewee through conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During data collection, the researcher schedules a time with participants to conduct the interview and the questions for the semistructured interview are prepared in advance by the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview questions focus on the research problem. Therefore, for this study the 15 interview questions focused on challenges faced by school social workers when advocating services for students with childhood trauma due to abandonment and how the different environmental systems affect the services students receive. Follow-up probes and questions were used during the interviews to gather additional information to help with understanding the participants' firsthand knowledge on their challenges with the problem. For content validity, the interview protocol (see Appendix C) listed the 15 interview questions in the order the questions were asked to each interviewee during the scheduled interview. Follow-up probes were listed for each question on the protocol for consistency as well as an observation note. The observation note was for my reflections during the interview.

For this study, the semistructured interviews with participants were virtual using Google Meet video conference platform or by phone. The use of a virtual platform or

phone was due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially the goal was for the use of a virtual platform to conduct interviews, however, it became more convenient for participants to participate by phone because of easy access and less technology issues. Both the virtual platform and phone interviews were a benefit to accessing participants because of the pandemic. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that was declared a pandemic in 2020 (Crayne, 2020; Maranto et al., 2020; Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). To address the devastation of the disease, authorities ordered school closures, which affected the functions of schools (Maranto et al., 2020; Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). Schools were immediately closed at the start of the pandemic and have since reopened with safety regulations and protocols. (Maranto et al., 2020; Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). The virtual interview platform allowed the researcher to see the participants in real time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Phone interviews allowed participants the advantage of participating at their convenience without worry of location (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The data collection instrument for the study was researcher produced. LMSWs working in the capacity of a school social worker were the sample population for the study. I developed the interview questions for the semistructured interviews using information relevant to the field of school social work, effects of childhood trauma on school performance and behavior, and the different ecological systems. The interview protocol was consistent for each interview to ensure validity (Creswell, 2018). The virtual and phone interviews were audio recorded with a digital recording device. Participants were made aware of the recording process through the informed consent form (Creswell,

2018). Recording the interviews helped with analysis and recall of information discussed during the interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Researcher Developed Instrumentation

The data collection method for this study was semistructured interviews. There were 15 researcher-developed questions listed on the interview protocol (see Appendix C). As the researcher, I wanted to understand the challenges school social workers faced when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma due to abandonment. Therefore, data on the firsthand knowledge of the challenges school social workers faced needed to be collected. The reason for developing interview questions was to ensure the questions focused specifically on the problem, purpose, research question, and variables and concepts of the literature review of the study. Interview questions were developed to include the role of school social workers, childhood trauma, neglect, abandonment, trauma-informed schools, multitiered support systems, and the five ecological systems.

The developed data collection instrument was sufficient and had content validity. There were sufficient interview questions to address the challenges school social workers faced, key variables and concepts of the study, and the ecological systems. The developed interview protocol included open ended questions. The wording of the questions was concise so participants could understand and give detailed answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Content validity measured consistency in the interview questions and determined if the questions aligned with the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2018). Content validity was determined through the interview protocol (see Appendix C). As the researcher, to ensure content validity I took notes during the development of the interview instrument.

The interview questions were worded to answer the research question and purpose of the study. The questions were typed and ordered in the sequence I used when asking the questions. Follow-up probes were developed and listed with each question and read as worded on the protocol when I needed additional information to understand the responses of the interviewee (Creswell, 2018). During the interviews, the research questions were asked in the same sequence and wording for content validity (Creswell, 2018).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Procedures for recruiting participants were through school districts in the Midlands region of South Carolina. Public information on school social workers was used for recruitment when challenges occurred with recruitment with school districts. There are at least eight counties in the Midlands region of South Carolina. Targeted school districts in the Midlands region were contacted through a letter (see Appendix B) explaining the purpose of the research, the sample population, data collection method and procedures, and how the data would be used. I followed the guidelines and procedures of the research accountability board of the research site to complete an application and I provided the necessary documentation to conduct research with the site. One school district approved my application. After receiving approval from the school district to conduct the study, the sample population was recruited through an email platform. I reached out to the lead school social worker for the school district through email and phone contact to explain the study. I asked the lead school social worker to send an email with the recruitment letter (see Appendix A) to all school social workers in the district. Interested participants emailed their consent using the information on the recruitment

letter. The informed consent form was emailed to volunteers that had consented to participate. The recruitment letter and informed consent form addressed the purpose of the study and the use of the data collected. The informed consent also explained the virtual and phone platform, duration of the interview, and scheduling a time to conduct the virtual or phone interviews. The use of public information for recruitment was utilized when a school district did not have a research accountability board and to help with increasing recruitment of volunteers. Recruitment letters were emailed to the sample population using public information and informed consent forms were emailed to those interested in participating. Participants' consent to participate was received through email from the information on the recruitment letter. Each participant with the research site and through public information was informed of voluntary participation. The first 10 school social workers that responded to the invitation and fitted the criteria of at least 1 year of experience in a primary or secondary school setting as a LMSW were selected. Any additional interested participants would be placed on a waiting list. Separate spreadsheets were used to list the first 10 participants for the study and the additional participants for the waiting list.

Expected duration of the interviews was at most 60 to 90 minutes, which was indicated in the informed consent and recruitment letter. My goal was to limit interruptions to the daily schedules of the school social workers. Therefore, the interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the school social workers. The interviews could occur in the daytime or evening. The convenience of having options with appointment times was an advantage of using technology and phones for

interviewing (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Another advantage of virtual or phone interviewing was the interviews occurred in the comfort of an office or home without the need for traveling (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Six interview questions were provided on the informed consent form for the participants to review before the scheduled interview time. As the researcher for this study, I collected the data. Before the start of the interview, I went over the informed consent form and reminded participants of the purpose of the interview and that their participation was voluntary and could end at any time they choose. I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix C) during the interviews and asked each question in order and as worded for content validity. Follow-up probes were listed on the interview protocol to gather additional information on answers participants may give that were not clear or needed explaining (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews ended with thanking the participants, debriefing what occurred during the interview, and discussing follow-up interviews or emailing for member checking the findings. Member checking is where the researcher checks in with the participants and reviews their individual data from the semistructured interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The check-in process helps with validity of the data collection because the researcher can determine if the transcribed data from each interview is accurate (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I explained to the participants in detail the purpose and meaning of member checking. Follow-up procedures for member checking included contacting the participants by email or phone. Member checking would be either by email or at most a 30-minute phone interview scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee.

Debriefing procedures were used to address any concerns and questions the participants had based on the interview (Babbie, 2017). During the debriefing, I discussed with the interviewees what occurred during the interview. The debriefing allowed the interviewees to ask questions and address any problems (Babbie, 2017). As the interviewer, I listened and answered any questions or concerns. Any questions or concerns were addressed before the interview concluded.

The recruitment goal was 10 participants or until data saturation was achieved. However, the plan if recruitment resulted in too few participants was to ask the lead school social worker of the research site to resend the recruitment letter and for the researcher to resend the recruitment letter through email to the sample population using the public information. The sample population was also extended for a plan to include LCSWs in the position of school social workers with at least 1 year of experience if recruitment problems occurred. Purposeful sampling was used in the study to select participants. However, if recruitment problems occurred, I would also use snowball sampling to ask interviewed participants to recommend additional participants that meet the criteria for the study (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis occurs throughout the study to answer the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The analysis is systematic to provide insight on the data collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and on the challenges faced by school social workers when advocating services for students with childhood traumatic backgrounds related to abandonment. Procedure for the data analysis should be detailed and written to ensure

validity and reliability (Creswell, 2018). The qualitative analysis plan for this study is content analysis. With content analysis, the researcher looks for recurring words and patterns (Patton, 2015). Patterns found in the data are repetitive and descriptive (Patton, 2015). The researcher can use the patterns found in the data to create themes (Patton, 2015). Themes are categorical to interpret the meaning of patterns (Patton, 2015) and create the findings of the qualitative research (Creswell, 2018). The data analysis plan for this study started with reviewing the audio recordings of the interviews. I reviewed the audio recordings three times or more as necessary and transcribed the information verbatim. Each transcript was coded to provide meaning to the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the researcher, I conducted the coding of the data. I created a spreadsheet for each participant's transcript. The spreadsheets were labelled using the coding identifier given to participants during the recruiting process for confidentiality. The coding process organized the data by identifying patterns, categories, and themes (Creswell, 2018). Each pattern and theme from the coding were typed on the spreadsheet related to the individual transcripts. Themes were determined until data saturation which means no new additional information was found within the data (Creswell, 2018).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Internal Validity

Qualitative validity focuses on procedures that show accuracy in the study and the findings (Creswell, 2018). It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure validity in the study (Creswell, 2018). Validity is a strength of qualitative research which determines whether the study aligns, and the findings are accurate to the purpose of the study

(Creswell, 2018). To ensure validity, which is also termed credibility, I utilized the strategies of member checking, reflexivity, and peer debriefing. Member checking is done by the participants of the study (Creswell, 2018). For this study, a follow-up phone interview or email for member checking was needed with the participants to review themes that were identified in the findings. The participants determined from the review of the themes if the information was accurate (Creswell, 2018). Reflexivity is used to discuss any biases that the researcher brings to the study (Creswell, 2018). These biases can interfere with how the researcher interacts with participants, ask questions during the interview process, and analyze and interpret the data (Creswell, 2018). When using the reflexivity strategy, the researcher is honest and open concerning any biases (Creswell, 2018). I used a reflexive journal to note my thoughts throughout the study. Peer debriefing is where the researcher finds a person to perform the role of peer debriefer (Creswell, 2018). The role of the peer debriefer is to review the study and ask the researcher questions regarding the information in the study (Creswell, 2018). The peer reviewer for this study interpreted the findings which increased validity because the interpretation provided another viewpoint of the study (Creswell, 2018).

External Validity

Transferability is the term used in qualitative research for external validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A qualitative study has external validity when the research is bound contextually which means the context of the study can be transferred to broader research without diminishing the context and findings of the original study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To increase external validity in qualitative research, the researcher can use

thick description (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thick description is detailed descriptions of the setting of the study, research design, findings, and other contextual factors (Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used thick descriptions to provide detailed information on my study to increase the validity.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative approach is like reliability which focuses on the consistency of the study (Creswell, 2018). Dependability of a study allows others to be able to follow the procedures of the study without confusion and difficulty (Creswell, 2018). To ensure consistency and stability in a qualitative study the researcher needs to document procedures for data collection, analysis, and coding (Creswell, 2018).

Strategies I used to help with dependability were transcript check and writing memos.

Transcripts should be verbatim from the recordings (Creswell, 2018). The strategy of transcript checking allows the researcher to check for possible mistakes made during the transcription (Creswell, 2018). Writing memos is used with the coding of the data (Creswell, 2018). Memos help with consistent defining of codes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability

Qualitative research is subjective (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability in a qualitative study occurs when the researcher addresses possible biases and is relatively neutral during the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Reflexivity was used in my study to examine biases that affect interpretation of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The goal of reflexivity is for the researcher to be transparent regarding their experiences, culture, and prejudice that could influence the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The use of journaling with my study helped with identifying thoughts that conflict with neutrality (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Self-reflection notes were documented in my reflexive journal.

Coder Reliability

I independently coded the transcripts from the recorded interviews. Procedures for coding the data were documented in detail (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The procedures started with transcribing the interviews verbatim. Then I reviewed the audio recordings and transcripts for any mistakes. I looked for repetitive words and phrases for each interview question within the individual participant's interview transcript. The repetitive words and phrases were highlighted. Notes were taken during the coding process to identify themes. Codes were reviewed for stability and themes developed until data saturation was achieved (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Ethical Procedures

Treatment of participants and ethical procedures must be considered when conducting research (Creswell, 2018). The IRB is designed to protect human rights during data collection, analysis, and findings of the study (Creswell, 2018). The researcher is also responsible for assessing and identifying any risk to the participants (Creswell, 2018). To ensure the safety of the sample population, a request to conduct the study was submitted to the Walden University IRB before the recruitment of participants and data collection (Creswell, 2018). The IRB request to conduct research form required me to input information about my study such as purpose of the study, sample population, recruitment, and documents that would be used during the research. Those documents

included a recruitment letter (see Appendix A), letter to the research site (see Appendix B), and the interview protocol (see Appendix C). Once approval was obtained from the IRB, I started communicating with research sites, recruiting participants, and collecting data (Creswell, 2018). Walden University IRB's approval number for my study was 06-23-21-0174520. The approval number was on the informed consent form.

School social workers employed at a primary or secondary school in the Midlands region of South Carolina was the sample population for the study. A letter to research sites (school districts) were emailed asking for permission to conduct the study with the sample population. The letter included the purpose of the study, data collection method, and the use of the findings from the study (Creswell, 2018). As the researcher, I followed the requirements for the school districts' research accountability board to complete the application for research and to provide necessary documents. The application for the research accountability board contained questions about the purpose of the study, sample population, duration of the study, use of the data, and social change. Approval from the research sites was needed before the lead school social worker and colleagues were contacted. One research site approved for the research to be conducted. Participants were recruited by email. I reached out to the lead school social worker in the school district by email and phone to explain the purpose of the research and the need for participants. The goal was to have the lead school social worker send the invitation letter by email to the sample population. The invitation email included the recruitment letter explaining the purpose of the research, criteria for participation, benefits of participation, risk to participants, voluntary participation and withdrawal, confidentiality, and the data

collection method and duration (Creswell, 2018). Informed consent forms were distributed by email to interested participants before the start of data collection (Creswell, 2018). Public information on school social workers in the Midlands region was also used to recruit participants. Public information was used when targeted research sites did not have a research accountability board and to help with recruitment challenges. A recruitment letter was emailed to potential participants and the informed consent form emailed to those that volunteered.

The purpose of the research was to understand the challenges school social workers faced when advocating services for youth experiencing childhood trauma due to abandonment. To participate in the study, the sample population had to be a LMSW with at least 1 year of experience working as a school social worker. A benefit of their participation was providing data that could lead to change in the school social work discipline. Another benefit was helping to change ways students with traumatic backgrounds received initial services. One possible low risk to participating in the research was the school social workers divulging firsthand experiences concerning challenges within their school district that caused problems with advocating services for students with traumatic backgrounds. This possible information could cause uncertainty regarding repercussions on their employment. I ensured the participants that all data collected was confidential and no names or identifiers were used (Creswell, 2018). Participation in the research was voluntary which means the participants could refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences from the researcher (Creswell, 2018). The data collection method was virtual interviews

through Google Meet video conference platform or phone interviews. During the virtual interviews, the participants were asked to have the camera and microphone on. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted over 60 minutes. Interview questions were semistructured and developed before the interviews were conducted. Participants had access to six interview questions provided on the informed consent form before the interview. Participants were informed of follow-up interviews or email for member checking the themes identified in the findings. The school social workers asked questions after the interviews concerning the research.

Data collected during the interviews were kept in a secure location. The audio recordings of the interviews were downloaded and saved to my personal laptop. I am the only one with access to my computer and password and the laptop stays at my place of residence. The findings and the identification of participants and schools were coded, and I was the only one with knowledge of the identity of the participants and their responses. Peer review and member checking were used to increase validity of the study (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the peer reviewer had access to the data. However, the peer reviewer did not have access to the names of participants and schools. This information remained confidential, and no names of individuals or schools were implicated in the study. There were no ethical issues of power differentials during the study. Consistency with procedures for recruitment, voluntary participation, data collection, and the interview protocol was used to manage ethical issues. The study will be published, and the findings used to enhance the social work discipline on improving ways school social workers support services related to childhood trauma caused by abandonment. The data from the

research will be kept 5 years after the completion of the dissertation and then destroyed through shredding of transcripts and deletion of recordings. I followed these procedures to recruit participants for the study.

1. I reviewed the website of research sites and contacted research sites by phone or email.
2. If the research site had a research accountability board, I completed the research application and provided necessary documentation including a letter.
3. Once approval was obtained from the research site, an email and phone contact were made to the lead school social worker of that school district.
4. An invitation email was sent by the lead school social worker to all school social workers in the school district. The invitation included the recruitment letter.
5. If public information was used to recruit, then a recruitment letter was emailed individually.
6. Informed consent forms were emailed to interested participants.
7. I logged and documented potential participants on a spreadsheet.
8. I responded to potential participants via email or phone contact.
9. The collection of informed consent was through email.
10. Virtual or phone interviews were scheduled with participants.
11. Debrief participants and discuss a need for a follow-up phone interview or email for member checking.
12. Transcribe the data from the recorded interviews.

13. Conduct follow up phone interviews or send email for member checking.
14. Debrief and thank participants for cooperation and participation.

Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the research design, methodology, data collection, and data analysis. This is a generic qualitative study. The sample population needed for the study was LMSWs working as school social workers in a primary and secondary school setting. Semistructured interviews were used to collect data. The data was analyzed by identifying codes and themes until data saturation was achieved. I ensured validity and reliability of the study by using strategies such as member checking, peer review, reflexivity, and detailed descriptions. This chapter leads into the actual collection of data and results of the study that are found in more detail in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research was to examine the firsthand experiences of, and challenges faced by, LMSWs when advocating services for children experiencing abandonment. The research question for the study was, what are the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment? The findings from the study may help advance the field of school social work by highlighting initial services in the different ecological systems for children experiencing abandonment. The findings could also reveal a need for mandated trauma-informed training for school social workers to improve advocating in the different ecological systems.

In Chapter 4, I provide detailed information on the data collected for the study. In the chapter, I describe conditions that influenced participants during the study and provide relevant demographics of participants. I discuss the data collection method of semistructured interviews. Details on data analysis and evidence of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are also provided. I then present the study results.

Setting

I received approval to start data collection from Walden University's IRB during Summer 2021. The Walden University's approval number for the study was 06-23-21-0174520. The sample population for the study was LMSWs in the role of school social worker in the Midlands region of South Carolina. Therefore, recruitment of the sample

population was through school districts and use of public information on school social workers.

When I was seeking approval for data collection from the IRB, the COVID-19 pandemic was still impacting society and the functions of schools (Maranto et al., 2020; Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). Many U.S. school districts were on modified schedules with limited in-person access to schools for students and staff (Maranto et al., 2020; Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). When I started recruitment of participants during the 2021-2022 school year, school districts were just starting back in traditional settings with students and staff returning to school full-time for in-person learning.

Recruitment of the sample population was difficult. A few research sites denied my request to conduct research, and several school social workers indicated that time was a factor because of busy schedules related to being back to work full time and students being at school full time. It took over 6 months to recruit enough participants to reach data saturation. The interpretation of the results of the study was not affected by recruitment challenges because of consistent procedures with recruitment, voluntary participation, data collection, and data analysis.

Demographics

The sample population for this research was LMSWs in the position of school social worker in the Midlands region of South Carolina. LCSWs could be recruited if there were problems with recruiting LMSWs. Recruitment was through one research site (a school district) and use of public information on school social workers in the region. I

completed a research application to receive the site's approval to start recruiting and collecting data. After obtaining approval from the research site, I reached out to the lead school social worker of that school district. The lead school social worker sent out the invitation twice to all the school social workers in the district.

Because of challenges with recruiting participants at the research site, I requested permission to send individual invitations to all the school social workers in that school district. I obtained permission from the site and sent individual invitations twice to the school social workers at that research site. As recruitment issues continued with the research site, I reached out to my chair and the IRB and gained approval to use public information on school social workers in the Midlands region of South Carolina to help with recruiting participants. I continued to contact other research sites, however, public information on school social workers in the region was used when a targeted research site did not have a research accountability board. I emailed individual research invitations to school social workers by using public information.

From both methods (research site and use of public information), I recruited 10 participants for the study. An additional two volunteers expressed interest but did not follow through or provide an explanation. The participants were all LMSWs. Nine participants had over 10 or more years of experience as a school social worker, and one participant had a little over 5 years of experience as a school social worker. Two participants served as a school social worker in an alternative school setting with students with behavioral problems, six served as school social workers in both a primary and

secondary school setting, one in a middle school setting only, and one in a high school setting only. There were nine women and one man who participated in the study.

Data Collection

Data collection was through semistructured interviews. I conducted the interviews using the virtual Google Meet video conference platform and by phone because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the requirements for social distancing at that time (Maranto et al., 2020; Marshall & Bradley-Doresy, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). Originally, as indicated in Chapter 3, the interviews were set to be at most 60 to 90 minutes. There were 10 participants for the study, therefore, 10 semistructured interviews were conducted. Seven of the interviews lasted at most 55 minutes, two lasted 40 minutes, and one, 60 minutes. Two interviews were conducted virtually through Google Meet, and eight interviews were by phone. The research recruitment letter and informed consent indicated that volunteers would be able to schedule interviews at their convenience. Most participants preferred phone interviews because they were more convenient to the participants' schedule and location (see Patton, 2015). The two virtual interviews were observed to take place in the participants' office.

There were no variations in data collection method of the semistructured interviews. There were 15 interview questions on the interview protocol (see Appendix C). I used the interview protocol for all 10 semistructured interviews. The 15 questions were asked in order and verbatim as indicated on the interview protocol. Before conducting the interviews, the informed consent form was reviewed, and each participant was reminded that their participation was voluntary and could end at any time without

penalty. The interviews were audio recorded with a digital recording device. Participants were made aware of the digital recording.

The unusual circumstances encountered in the data collection were related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools (Maranto et al., 2020; Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). When recruitment for my research started, school districts in the Midlands region of South Carolina were starting the 2021-2022 school year with a traditional setting of all day in-person learning and instruction for students and staff. Before the 2021-2022 school year, school districts in the Midlands region of South Carolina because of the COVID-19 pandemic provided modified schedules with a limited number of staff and students in the building for in-person instructional learning and most students at home for virtual instructional learning. Therefore, when the 2021-2022 school year started, it was the first time in nearly a year and half that all faculty, staff, and students were in-person in the building together. The initial goal, as indicated in Chapter 3, was to recruit the sample population from research sites. During the recruitment process several research sites denied approval for research to be conducted. However, with the one research site that did approve, the recruitment of the school social workers was still challenging due to busy workloads and schedules. Therefore, public information was also used to recruit participants. As the researcher, I kept a reflexive journal to record my feelings on recruitment challenges and the data collection method. Data collection was challenging and took over 6 months to attain 10 participants. However, I continued to reach out to research sites and the sample population using public information until data saturation was achieved.

Data Analysis

There were 15 questions on the interview protocol for data collection. Ten participants volunteered and consented to the research. A minimum of 10 participants or until data saturation was initially identified for the study in Chapter 3. Data saturation was achieved with six interviews; however, I continued accepting volunteers. As the researcher, I assigned a code for each participant at the start of the study to protect their identity and any other identifying characteristics. I followed the interview protocol consisting of 15 questions for each participant. The data were audio recorded using a digital device. I listened to the 10 interview recordings multiple times for accuracy. Once the interviews were typed, I read over the transcripts and started looking for codes in the answers for each question.

The 10 LMSWs in the research all indicated that they worked with children experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. All had over 5 to 10 years of experience as school social workers. Some of the participants had previous experience with foster care, group homes, and unaccompanied youth. These experiences allowed the participants to have access to school-age youth experiencing abandonment and allowed for firsthand knowledge on challenges when advocating for this population. The purpose of the research was to identify challenges school social workers faced when advocating services for school-age youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. So, to identify codes in the data I looked at each interview question and how the participant answered the questions in relation to the five ecological systems, microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Coding is part of the data analysis that gives meaning to words in the data that was collected through the semistructured interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I put repeated codes in categories to organize the data and help answer the research question (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Themes were developed from the codes and categories which helped to give a more detailed meaning and understanding of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). There were no discrepant cases in the data collection or data analysis. The findings support current literature on general challenges in the field of school social work. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, general challenges in the field of school social work are building trustful relationships with youth and families experiencing trauma (Berg, 2017) and education within schools and community (Morton & Berardi, 2018). The codes found in my research that related to previous answers in the literature were relationships, communication, and training and education. These codes were put in the category of collaboration and the theme building a community of learning and knowledge.

Participants in my study indicated that building relationships and communication were a necessity for students and families to trust and feel comfortable interacting with school social workers and school staff. Participant PQ indicated during the interview, “It comes to building relationships with our families and parents. Building relationships with our teachers in the school setting.” Participant PY also talked about building relationships with the student:

I think the first thing that is most beneficial in a child who has abandonment is establishing relationships. Trust is first and foremost. If a child trust you, they will

allow you into their information. Into their life. Into their heart and into their mind. Relationships are the beginning of a very therapeutic journey. So, I would say the first thing is establish relationships.

Participant PZ also discussed building trusting relationships with students as a necessity and could cause challenges to the services provided when those relationships were not developed:

Student relationships. Having relationships. I've always felt like students don't care what you know until they know you care. Building a trusting relationship with that student at least until they understand why you are involved or why you are making the decisions that you make. I think that trust is a massive challenge being able to build trust with a student.

Participants identified that a solution to the challenge of building relationships in the different systems is consistency. Participant PR stated the following about consistency to build trusting relationships with students:

Why I don't leave the job that I am in is because I feel like turnover is too real in these kids' lives. Personally, school is a safe place so every time they leave and come back the person they connected with and trusted has left. I feel like they reexperience that neglect and abandonment all over again. So, I really try to make it, push home especially these days being a consistent face that these students see because sometimes in the high school they can have a different counselor every single year. But for the last 12 years, I am a consistent face. Everybody else may change but I am a consistent face.

Participant PS stated:

We work with students in a variety of ways. In the example I always tell people I work with these students from birth to death. I work with them if they have a baby. I work with them if they have to bury a parent or if that student themselves need to be buried.

These responses indicate that cultivating relationships based on trust is essential to the therapeutic relationship but can be a challenge.

Education and training were other challenges that emerged in participant responses. Participant PT expressed in the interview that the lack of education regarding trauma and the needs of students was a challenge in all the ecological systems, “All systems education about the needs of individuals.” Participant PR discussed the challenge with lack of practice on trauma strategies during training and professional development and not having the entire staff involved in the training:

They put us in these professional developments, and you really get good information except it’s too quick and not enough practice involve. I feel like the whole school needs to be in one training together and sometimes we have just the school counselor, just the school social worker, or just the administrators getting the trauma focus training, but it needs to be the people in the school.

Participant PS indicated regarding the challenges of training:

Everyone is not always trained. You will have the administrators, social worker, counselor, and interventionist trained, but everyone else won’t be trained. Not the

teachers or support staff. So, ensuring they are trained and able to support the needs of the child.

These responses indicate a need for education and training for all staff members to help support the needs of students and to increase understanding on trauma. This information on the codes found in the data was important to understanding challenges school social workers face. However, the goal of my research is to expand on the previous information in the literature to understand challenges when school social workers advocate for services for children experiencing trauma caused by abandonment.

As additional data were analyzed, more codes, categories, and themes were identified within the different ecological systems. In the microsystem repetitive codes were scheduling and meeting the needs of the whole child. For the mesosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem the challenges that were identified related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the affects during that time on advocating services for school-age youth dealing with trauma caused by abandonment. The challenges in the exosystem dealt with work hours during the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of understanding among families concerning the effects of a family history of trauma. A code found in the mesosystem was restrictions. In the exosystem the codes were long work hours and the families' lack of understanding of trauma. Identified codes in the macrosystem were availability, services, and resources. Codes in the chronosystem were lack of preparation, connection, and identification, and loss of social skills. Themes identified from the codes within the five ecological systems were set-aside intervention time for school social work and related services (microsystem), restricted school environment and involvement

(mesosystem), awareness concerning the need for family support (exosystem), barriers to services before COVID-19 and during and after the COVID-19 shutdown (macrosystem), and development of skills to provide services in unpredictable circumstances (chronosystem).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research examines credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility is the validity of the study where the procedures and findings show the purpose of the research (Creswell, 2018). Transferability in the research allows for the context of the study to be used in further research (Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability is consistency in the study and confirmability addresses biases that occurs during the study (Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Credibility

In Chapter 3 to ensure credibility of the research, member checking, reflexivity, and peer debriefing would be used. All three methods were used in the research for validity in the procedures and results. Initially member checking was to be by a follow-up virtual or phone interview. However, due to the schedules of the participants it was more convenient to send an email of the transcribed data to the participants. I consulted with my chair and the IRB before emails were used for member checking. The member checking of the data proved accurate with no revisions needed. I used a reflexive journal to record my feelings on recruitment challenges. Challenges with recruiting the sample population dealt with the work schedules and responsibilities of potential participants

while returning to work full time since the COVID-19 shutdowns. Some responses potential volunteers gave during recruitment regarding the reasons their participation was hindered were having to get acclimated to returning to work and not having enough time to set-aside for an interview because of the demands of their job as a school social worker. The reflexive journal was also used to record any researcher's biases during the study. As indicated in Chapter 3, I have served as a school social worker, and I am aware of the different services provided in that capacity. During the data collection process, I followed the interview protocol as designed and asked each question in order and verbatim to increase validity in the study. For peer debriefing I asked a peer who was not involved in the research to review the data. Confidentiality was adhered during peer debriefing. The peer debriefer did not have access to any names or identifiers.

Transferability

To ensure external validity in the study I used thick description. Thick description is detailed information on the setting, research design, and findings (Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Throughout the study I documented detailed procedures that could be followed on recruitment of the sample population, data collection, and interpreting the data. The sample population for the study was LMSWs in the position of school social worker. LCSWs could be recruited if recruitment of LMSWs was a challenge. However, the participants in the study were all LMSWs. Research sites in the Midlands region of South Carolina were contacted by filling out an application for research request and sending a letter. Recruitment through public information on school social workers in that region was used when challenges with research sites occurred. For

the research site, the recruitment letter was sent to the lead school social worker who emailed the letter to all the school social workers in the district. When public information was used, recruitment letters were sent individually to school social workers. Voluntary participants were sent informed consent forms and interviews were scheduled at their convenience. Each participant was assigned a code to protect their name and other identifying information. Data collection was through semistructured interviews either virtually or by phone. I followed the interview protocol and asked each participant the 15 interview questions. Interviews were audio recorded using a digital device. As the researcher, I transcribed the data. Emails of the transcribed data were sent to participants for follow-up member checking.

Dependability

Strategies to help with consistency in the study were transcript check and writing memos. Transcript check focus on transcribing of the data (Creswell, 2018). Data collection for the study was semistructured interviews. Set-aside time for the interviews was 60 to 90 minutes, however, at most the interviews lasted close to 60 minutes. There were 15 questions in the interview protocol. There were 10 LMSWs that participated in the study. Each participant was asked the 15 questions and all participants answered the 15 interview questions. The interviews were audio recorded using a digital device. I transcribed the interviews verbatim from the data collected. The interviews were typed and listed under the codes given to each participant at the start of recruitment. I listened to the interviews multiple times to get an accurate verbatim account.

Writing memos for dependability helped with data coding (Creswell, 2018; Ravitch, 2016). The interviews were transcribed by me, the researcher. Interviews were typed and listened to multiple times for accuracy (Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Once accuracy was determined, I read the transcripts and compared the data. I looked for similarities in the data and was able to identify codes and themes. I underlined similarities on the transcripts and recorded codes and themes found.

Confirmability

Reflexive journal was used to ensure confirmability because qualitative research is subjective and biases can occur (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My background experience is based in school social work. I have served as a school social worker for several years and have worked to advocate for children and families. I used the journal to self-reflect on my role as a school social worker and how I have advocated for services. Also, during data collection I followed the interview protocol to ensure each participant were asked the questions verbatim. The reflexive journal was also used to record my feelings on recruitment challenges. Recruitment of the sample population was difficult and took more time than I initially anticipated. By identifying and writing down my feelings concerning the challenges I was able to address them before starting data collection.

Results

There was only one research question to my qualitative study that guided the research and aligned the purpose, methodology, and literature review. The research question: What are the challenges school social workers face when advocating services

for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment? The interview questions for the data collection were guided by the research question so that the data would provide answers.

Themes found in the data were separated by the five ecological systems to provide answers to the challenges faced by school social workers when advocating services for the targeted population. From the data collection, one theme was identified for each of the five ecological systems and quotes from the participants were used to answer the research question. The themes were set-aside intervention time for school social work and related services; restricted school environment and involvement; awareness concerning the need for family support; barriers to services before COVID-19 and during and after the COVID-19 shutdown; and development of skills to provide services in unpredictable circumstances.

Theme 1: Set-Aside Intervention Time for School Social Work and Related Services (Microsystem)

Microsystem is the immediate system that surrounds the youth such as the home and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The challenge the participants identified in this system during data collection was a higher level of focus on academics compared to support services for behavioral, emotional, and mental health concerns within the school setting. According to the data different support services such as groups, counseling, and check-ins are available for students to access, however, the challenge is designating a time for those services. The participants identified that within the school setting there was a daily schedule that provided time for the different academic subjects for school-age

youth to be successful educationally. However, the school social workers in the study indicated that the whole child was not fully being served because the focus of the school setting was on academics and testing. Participants expressed that there was a need for support services to address disruptive behaviors and emotional and mental health issues. LMSWs identified that since returning to in-person learning during the 2021-2022 school year, students were exhibiting defiance and withdrawal. The following quotes, from the data shows a need for school social work and related services to help with different behaviors and mental health concerns. Participant PU discussed the social and emotional problems observed after students returned to in-person learning from the COVID-19 shutdown:

We are seeing more behaviors. Social and emotional behaviors where kids are just acting out, disruptive, and not listening. Because they were out of school for that year and didn't have structure. They were under their own rules and regulations because parents were working. Now that they are back into structure it's hard for them to conform. So, it's an all-time high with behaviors and social and emotional problems.

Participant PR stated:

To get everybody oriented to a whole new education environment when they lost the last year of their previous environment was difficult. That was kind of difficult for all of us. Students need developmental milestones and those were kind of taking from them when they were forced to go virtual and stop having that interaction that they need and were getting in the school environment. Before we

got out of school it may have been a small pot of students who may have had adverse childhood experiences. But now I feel like everyone has adverse childhood experiences.

Participant PV discussed the current observation of behaviors from students who have now returned to school for in-person learning, but received virtual learning during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic:

The kids want to retreat. Some of them, that virtual option was a safe place for them. Being virtual and not being in a classroom that was comforting for them. So just getting them back into that routine of going to every class every day, sitting in a full classroom, and engaging with others has been a challenge.

Participant PX identified in the interview that the social and emotional concerns displayed by students with abandonment and trauma history as overwhelming in the classroom when the focus is on academics and education:

A lot of teachers and administrators experience students with issues. But a lot of times those students were actually supposed to be in a group home that was self-contained. So, all their issues were supposed to be taken care of in house and now those issues are in the school setting. Teachers are trained to teach and focus on the education. So, a higher level of mental health issues and conditions, the teachers are just not prepared to deal with. And it becomes stressful because those students do require a lot of attention that the teacher is not able to give without burning themselves out.

Participant PT indicated a need for school personnel to be aware that school-age youth are experiencing problems and those problems are affecting performance and attendance in class:

Finding out what's going on with them so that people know that these issues do go on in the schools. Emailing 10 people in a week saying hey, please help me out with this student I need to figure out what's going on. Do you know anything about this student and why they haven't been in class?

Participant PV also reported on a need to provide support services for students who are struggling and asking teachers to focus not only on academics but identify students that need those services:

Kind of seems like as much as I do its so many kids that I'm missing because it's so many kids. Figure out a way to isolate those kids we know are struggling so more can be done for them. Which is something that I'm trying to work with teachers on. Kind of help identify these are the main kids that are struggling, and this is what they are struggling with as far as I know.

These responses from participants show that school-age youth need support because they are struggling with different behaviors and mental health concerns.

The codes on scheduling and meeting the needs of the whole child found in the data for the microsystem lead to the theme of set-aside intervention time for school social work and related services. The observation of concerns and a need for services were addressed in the data by the participants. The challenge according to participants was providing the services when there was a higher level of focus and attention on academics.

Participants stated that there was a need for a designated time built within the school schedule where students experiencing trauma, abandonment, mental health concerns, and behavioral problems can receive those services regularly. Participant PW expressed during data collection the following on providing an intervention time:

As far as the immediate environment here at the school this isn't really something I can make because it depends upon administration. But I wish there was a designated time for intervention for me to meet with children instead of taking them out of class. So, there's a lot of different variables. Instead of me doing morning duty it would be great if I could have morning meeting time when the children are available and not doing their academics. Then that would be designated where I can pull children. I do throughout the day regardless, but it would be great to that particular team of teachers who don't want me to pull their children out of class. Even though it would make perfect sense for us to work together on the social emotional things that's going to directly impact their academic performance.

Participant PX stated the following regarding a need for intervention time:

I would say creating a flexible schedule. I know sometimes there is an issue with students meeting with the social worker, guidance counselor, the mental health professional because the focus is on academics. Advocating for a flexible schedule so if they need to talk or they are having an issue that is not academically based. So, even if it takes an hour or a moment out of class, just having that understanding that academics is important, but we are here to meet the

social emotional needs of our students as well. Or if it means they are coming to school and just need to sit in a separate room to have a moment then they are allowed that. Then it's not frowned upon or you're missing class. Then so their whole being becomes a priority. Making the schedule and making the school environment more nurturing and caring for students. That would be a topic with administrators because again you can't do anything without their permission. But letting them know how having that flexibility built into the school day will help.

Quotes from the data show a need for student support and a challenge within the microsystem of providing those services without interrupting the academic schedule. School social workers in the study provided information on a need to place a higher priority on social emotional services to address the concerns of the whole child not just academically.

Theme 2: Restricted School Environment and Involvement (Mesosystem)

Mesosystem is the interrelationships of the systems closest to the youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The study examines the interrelationship between school and home. The analyzed data identified the challenge to advocacy among school social workers within the mesosystem for the targeted population as restricted interaction between families and the schools because of COVID-19 regulations. The participants discussed how not having in-person interaction with families hindered interrelationships. Also, families not having adequate devices and technology to adjust to the decrease in in-person interaction with school staff was a barrier. Participant PV talked about barriers to interrelationship because of the lack of communication and the COVID-19 pandemic

restricting previous strategies used to connect families. The participant discussed how before the pandemic home visits was a service used to develop interrelationships to connect families with the school:

So, communication, remaining in contact with families. Trying to make sure that the family is working with the school has been very hard because guardians won't answer the phone. Because of COVID we can't really do home visits like we did before. We have a whole lot more stricter guidelines. So not being able to jump in my car and pop up at the house has been a challenge.

Participant PW noted that challenges with communication was an issue, but has intensified because of the pandemic and the different avenues schools must use to connect with families because of COVID-19 regulations:

When a lot of the students I deal with don't often have biological parents, they may have guardians, may have kinship care providers, or they may have adults identified by their biological parents as the contact person or the support person. So, I would interact with those people in the community. Now, the newer challenge here was we had a change in our way in operating in terms of communicating with families. Like just basic communication as well as really important things. Like when we do interim reports and virtual parent conference. When the interim reports are going out and when report cards are going out, all of that is virtual now. A lot of families don't know that they're not going to get a paper report card or how to access technology to get the needed information.

Participant PX stated:

Before COVID guardians were able to come into the schools. You had more interaction. More face-to-face interaction. Now interaction is mainly by phone. Phone calls are good but when you don't have an option to come into the school building then you might have some people who are not good with phones. They might not even have the type of phone you know that is good for video conferencing. So now not having that particular resource which is now pretty much what many people are using. They may not have a phone. May not have a computer. May not have internet. So, their resources are just limited. So now you are required to use something that you don't have. And so now your communication is limited because you don't have what you need. You don't have what you need to communicate pretty much the only way you can communicate because you can't come in the building or just can't show up at a school. And, you know if you are on the phone, or you are sending emails if you know how to send an email or text then communication can get lost because somebody's tone can be taken differently in an email versus a conversation. So, it definitely changed the communication.

Participant PQ talked about the stressors of families experiencing abandonment and trauma and how those stressful experiences can restrict involvement with school:

I think there are many things we have to take into consideration when we are talking about advocating for services. So, I guess in a single parent home where the other parent is no longer involved due to abandonment of some sort and children in foster care and children living in kinship care and with grandparents, I

think there are so many stressors that exist within that household that it really impacts the one single parent, the foster parent, the grandparents. It impacts their ability to just again really partner with the school district.

The analysis of the data indicated that restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted interaction between family and school. There was less opportunity for family members or guardians to come in-person to the school, so they had to adjust to using technology to communicate and interact with school staff. Also, the strategy of home visits that school social workers used before the pandemic to bridge the gap between school and home was also restricted during the pandemic. However, participant PQ had a different observation regarding ways schools had to engage with families during the pandemic. According to participant PQ virtual conferences in that school district helped some families connect more with the schools because it gave an option that worked with their schedule:

I'm hoping that some of the lessons we learned during the pandemic we take with us and continue to move forward. The example of being able to meet with parents virtually and they can attend on their break and go to their car and participate in the meeting versus having to take off from work. There are ways we have learned to work with our families differently and I truly hope we don't go back and go backwards to the box style of ways we communicate and work with families.

The responses from the participants indicate that there were challenges with communication and building relationships between the school and home which hindered

the support available to students and families. However, some families who had access to technology were able to utilize that resource.

Theme 3: Awareness Concerning the Need for Family Support (Exosystem)

Exosystem identifies the systems that indirectly influence the well-being on a youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This research examines the challenges school social workers face with advocating services for youth with trauma experiences caused by abandonment. The codes found in the data for this ecological system were the availability of families due to their work schedule and the level of understanding of families when dealing with trauma. The participants during the data collection discussed how parents dealing with untreated trauma can indirectly influence the well-being of school-age youth because of the lack of awareness on how their history of trauma can impact parenting and affect their willingness to accept services for themselves and their child. Participant PR stated the following regarding challenges to advocating services when there is a lack of understanding of trauma within the family:

You know a lot of times trauma is a cycle. Sometimes the parents haven't dealt with their own trauma, and it keeps transferring over to their students. So, to be able to break the cycle and teach the whole family system and not seeing one person as the problem. Sometimes parents come in and they won't listen or see that they are also part of the problem. Speaking with them and letting them know that everyone plays a part in the problem be it small or great. Teaching them how to learn healthy ways to communicate and healthy ways to eliminate the toxic traits in the family.

Participant PS discussed the challenge with children not receiving services when families are not aware of the effects of trauma and fail to understand that their experiences influence the child, “For those students needing to get those services, what’s going to end up happening is when the parent pushes back, we are going to end up with consequences that will warrant them not being able to get services.”

Participant PU discussed the effects of the history and cycle of trauma:

Those parents that we realize have had adverse childhood experiences as well.

They have trauma from their background. Either they are in denial, or they figured that is the way of life. And this was how I was raised, or they don’t have the actual skills to give their child. Someone can’t give you something they don’t have or possess themselves. So, it’s getting the buy in from the parents seeing where the dynamics can change shift the dysfunction that we are seeing.

Sometimes they don’t want to face the hurt, the trauma, the embarrassment. The feeling that they perceive about what happen to them previously. So sometimes the parents don’t participate, or they are not fully invested into the service because they don’t want to face the shame of the you know the trauma, they have endured themselves.

Participant PX also talked about the cycle of trauma and how the family’s lack of awareness influences the well-being of the child and the access to support services:

So, the consequences are just a continual cycle of malfunctions and so it affects the performance in school because it wasn’t talked about. In a lot of families, they don’t believe in counseling. They don’t believe in sharing, talking about family

issues or family secrets. So now the child is walking around with an issue. And they are blameless because it's not really their fault, but they don't know how to process because they never had that chance. So, you see anger, you see all these different issues. Personal issues, social issues, emotional issues because they didn't receive support.

A lack of understanding and awareness of trauma within families is a challenge school social workers face when advocating services. A remedy participants identified to help families understand the impact of trauma is education. Educating parents, guardians, and family members on the definition of trauma and how it affects the well-being and development of a child can increase awareness. Participant PT discussed educating families on identifying trauma:

Parents are a little tricky because sometimes you find that they say their kid only wants attention. It's attention seeking behaviors and what I have to explain to parents is you very well know your children better than I do. If it is attention seeking behaviors, there is a hole that we are not filling. So, we got to figure out why that behavior is occurring. Educating them even if it is attention seeking. Something is not getting filled in their life and we got to figure out what that problem is. There is a reason for every single behavior and once you fill that need that behavior decrease. Educating them on trauma-informed care.

The other code identified by the data was availability of the families due to their work schedule and how that impacts services. Participant PV discussed the guardian's lack of availability during the modified 2020-2021 school year with most students

receiving virtual instruction because of the COVID-19 pandemic, “Parents and guardians picking up more hours. You know the kids were home. Parents and guardians felt they could work more hours. Parents aren’t home. They are not available. That has created a really big problem.” Participant PV also indicated that availability of families is still an issue during the 2021-2022 school term even with in-person learning. “There is a lot of trying to get the parents to make time. So, a lot of telephone calls. A lot of emailing. Just anything to get that parent more engaged.” Participant PW stated: “Some of the challenges are simply availability, parents not being able to engage with the school social worker or a team of teachers during business hours or facilitating what needs to possibly happen after business hours.”

The work schedule of the family member indirectly influences the well-being of a school-age youth because the family member is not able to engage immediately on behalf of the student regarding their progress at school when it relates to academics and social emotional issues. Participant PQ indicated that a remedy to the challenge of family availability is the use of technology for families with the resources. PQ identified that family members could use technology to access meetings virtually during their lunch break at work, “They can attend on their lunch break and go out to their car and participant in a meeting versus the parent having to take off from work.”

The responses found in the data indicate that a family member’s work schedule and lack of awareness on trauma impacts the initial services a child receives and that it is essential that school social workers and other school staff find ways to communicate with families.

**Theme 4: Barriers to Services Before, During, and After the COVID-19 Shutdown
(Macrosystem)**

Macrosystem is the system that examines how culture and society impacts the development of a youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The data from participants indicate that the challenges to advocating services within this system were policies of organizations and accessing services and resources. Participants discussed that within the macrosystem, the traditional policies and culture of agencies require children and families to come in-person for services. However, some families do not have access to a vehicle or public transportation. Also, participants discussed that a lack of financial resources to pay for services was a challenge. Participant PQ stated transportation and financial hardship as challenges to receiving community services:

There are so many different layers and barriers that families face. Okay the layer of going to therapy but do they have transportation to get there. Can they find a therapist that they can trust, and they want to devote their time too? That accepts their insurance or Medicaid? Maybe they have private insurance but can't afford their deductibles. So, for me there are these constant layers of addressing barriers of getting the child's whole needs meet. At times it feels like that is impossible.

Participant PX also indicated transportation and financial hardship as challenges:

They may need mental health services that we are not able to offer. So, if we have to refer out then they might not have transportation. A lot of agencies would like for the student or the parent to come into the facility. Transportation is a big issue because those agencies don't necessarily provide transportation. In a rural

community a lot of the families don't have or may not have transportation. Also, even though some of them have Medicaid and it may cover some services. They may not have payment for different services. They might not have access to those services.

Not having transportation and financial resources are barriers to families accessing needed counseling and other services. School social workers provide interventions within the schools. However, when additional services are needed, children and families are referred to agencies that provide that specific service. Because of transportation and financial problems, children may not receive the help they need to address their individual needs. This was a challenge school social workers faced within the macrosystem when advocating for services before the COVID-19 pandemic and after the shutdown.

Another challenge identified in the data that hinders access to services for children and families was the policies and culture within the public education system and state agencies. Participant PQ stated a challenge with flexibility within the policies and culture of the public-school system affects access to needed services:

If you try to make policy in a school district, you will never have a policy that address the whole child. In my mind that is not feasible. Can you have a policy that addresses academic needs of the child, the social emotional wellness needs of the child while also helping the family access services and provide transportation and payment? It's just like it's never going to be an all-encompassing thing. The policies and procedures of a school system are built upon everyone working

around us instead of us working around our families. Many times, if a parent can't make it to the school by 3:30 then it's well sorry so sorry can you come tomorrow instead. I think public education itself does not cater or is not set up to fit the needs of students and families who have experienced trauma.

Participant PX discussed challenges with flexibility within the culture of state agencies, "A barrier to services is also the hours of operation. Agencies' operating hours and procedures are just not convenient or flexible enough to meet the needs of the students or the families."

Policies on how school-age youth in foster care or group homes transition from different environments impacts services they receive. Participant PU addressed policies in the following agency:

While in the Department of Social Services they move around. At the school we try to help them learn to identify triggers. Help identify how to regulate those emotions while they are with us in the school setting. As we are trying to make a movement to move forward then those kids are sometimes reunited with family or are placed in another group home or foster care. And, depending on the location they may not stay with us. So, actually trying to figure out and working with Department of Social Services on where this child is going next. So, where they go next that school system can pick up where we left off or if they are even trained to do what we have provided. Sometimes that is a little frustrating or we face challenges because if they are in a group home they may not go out to school. They may have someone come in to provide the educational service. Then

you don't have the licensed social worker or the licensed professional counselor there every day to continue to provide those trauma skills. And, they may have to go out to an outside agency. So that little lack of service when transitioning becomes frustrating. Making sure there is continuity with what we are trying to provide for them.

Participant PU also discussed how policies within agencies impact accessing documents needed to help students that have been abandoned:

We had a few students who were abandoned. They were unaccompanied youth because they were living on their friends' couches. Just hopping from house to house, garage to garage. It was hard work trying to get their records. Trying to get their birth certificates. Trying to get their social security card and regular ID to help these kids get a job. It was just so hard because the parents had abandoned them. Parents on drugs and don't have the birth certificates and schools now don't have birth certificates any more or it has been archived. Trying to get those old records or staff at the facility may say that's a copy we need the original. So, it was really hard for those students.

Participant PW discussed policies within agencies on confidentiality that affects communication between systems and the services school-age youth receive:

I wish communication between the outside agencies was better. I understand they have confidentiality restriction as well and I completely honor and respect that. But sometimes I wish I would know more about what's going on in that environment than having to guess. I don't always like to ask the children. They

are not always in a good spot to share that. I guess I wish as far as these children being seen by agencies that these agencies would come and participate in treatment team meetings at the school to know that the child is struggling academically, behaviorally, or with attendance. So, there is a more holistic approach to everyone working with this child instead of everybody being silent.

The policies and culture of the educational system and state agencies can impact how children receive counseling and other services based on their needs. As indicated in the data, school social workers work to provide resources and interventions, but face challenges when policies and culture of an organization are designed to fit the needs of the organization and not the individual. The challenge with advocating services because of policies in different organizations occurred before the COVID-19 pandemic and during and after the COVID-19 shutdown.

Another challenge indicated in the data within the macrosystem was accessing services and resources. Participant PW discussed the challenge when agencies were closed during the COVID-19 shutdown, “Services were greatly changed. I don’t know if the Department of Social Services was continuing services when children were home learning virtually. I don’t know what the Department of Social Services engagement was like during that time.”

Participant PX stated:

Limitation for access to services because during the pandemic a lot of the agencies were not seeing patients. They were not accepting patients or clients and so they were not available. And if the services were teleservices a lot of the

students and families may not of had internet services. May not of had the technological resources they needed to be able to participate in teleservices.

During the COVID-19 shutdown state agencies were closed, but eventually reopened after the shutdown. Services for mental and behavioral health were again available for families, children, and adolescents. School social workers indicated during the data collection that the challenge now was accessing those appointments in a timely manner. Participant PU discussed the waiting list to receive services after the COVID-19 shutdown:

A lot of those students that are abandon tend to start abusing substances at an early age, so we refer out to services. But right now, what we are realizing is that there is a waiting list. You can't easily get into services because everybody is overwhelmed. But there is an all-time high right now for the need of mental health for students. But you have a waiting list and if you are trying to schedule appointments now you might be pushed out until the first of February or mid-January. But the behaviors and what we are seeing are existing now. And we know that now until February it's going to manifest if we don't put interventions in place. So that is a challenge that we are seeing that other community agencies are bombarded with referrals.

Participant PV stated:

A challenge in the macrosystem is getting appointments. These agencies are overwhelmed. So, getting that immediate appointment that our kids need right now. So many kids who were able to kind of mask things that they were dealing

with before, they kind of revealed themselves during COVID. There are more kids seeking appointments. It's hard to get an appointment now.

These responses from the participants show the challenges school social workers faced with advocating services during and after the COVID-19 shutdown.

Accessing food and other resources was also an issue when schools returned to in-person instructional learning for all students during the 2021-2022 school year because of the decrease in donations and loss of community resources. Participants discussed that donations from churches and faith-based organizations decreased during the 2021-2022 school year because during the previous school year the need for food donations was low. LMSWs indicated that many families at that time qualified for different COVID-19 relief programs and had access to food. The need for food donations has increased during the 2021-2022 school year, but the donations are not available. Participant PT stated the following concerning the decrease in donations:

One challenge that we faced was the churches that were giving us food for individuals. We did not need as many backpacks of food for Fridays and they did not understand that. What we were trying to express was that there was an enormous amount of resources for these individuals right now and they are not utilizing the school resources as much. That was mainly the draw back that we had. There were so many resources out there for food during the onset of the pandemic. People who were trying to give to our program were like why don't you need this food everyone is in COVID. They are not working. Well food stamps went double that type of thing and people were not understanding that

part. And, now that COVID is not as much as it was, they are not wanting to donate because we didn't need it last year. That is the backlash we are seeing. Participants in the study also talked about community resources that provided different necessities that were available for families to access before the pandemic and the loss of those community resources because of funding during the pandemic. Participant PX addressed the problem of a loss of resources because of the pandemic:

People having additional stressors and additional barriers. COVID-19 made the problem I think worst. A lot of resources are nonexistent. You had different agencies and different charitable organizations that were able to help out before. Now, their resources might have been depleted.

These responses indicate a challenge with accessing different resources that families need for the well-being of the child.

Theme 5: Development of Skills to Provide Services in Unpredictable Circumstances (Chronosystem)

Chronosystem focuses on the transitions and environmental events that influence the well-being of school-age youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). During the time of my research and data collection the world was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected school function, mental health, physical health and wellness, and the economy (Phelps & Sperry, 2020). The challenges identified in the data for the chronosystem dealt with skills of the school social workers. The pandemic was an unprecedented event. The participants in the study discussed how they were not prepared to deal with identifying school-age youth for services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

They also discussed not being prepared to provide services needed during the pandemic. Participant PQ addressed the challenge in the chronosystem when children transitioned back to school for modified instructional learning during the 2020-2021 school year right after the COVID-19 shutdown. A few students were in-person at the school while the rest received virtual instruction at home:

What I identified as our number one biggest barrier was the kids, we needed in school the most were not there. Schools with the highest pupils living in poverty index had fewer face-to-face students than our students at schools with higher average economic status. It was hard because when students are not there the likelihood that you will be informed about concerns or that you are going to become aware of concerns drastically reduces. So, not having our children in the building provided a significant barrier to identification if there was a need.

Participant PQ talked about only providing immediate services during the COVID-19 pandemic to help students and families survive compared to long-term services that were provided before the pandemic:

The primary things and focus we provided during COVID or result of COVID switched. There for 6 months where kids were all home, switched to what do you need to survive. It was a very short-term focus. When school in March 2020 shutdown it was what do they need to survive. Not focusing much on long-term services. What short-term things are needed right now, and I think we stayed in that role for quite a long time. Many times, in school social work its not to

provide a band-aid but to provide services that's going to have some long-term impact. And that could not be the option during the pandemic.

Participant PT provided firsthand experience of the difficulty with finding and identifying children in need because of the upheaval of the pandemic:

I think the number one challenge was finding the students. A lot of kids were transient themselves. A lot of times we were trying to contact Department of Social Services because we knew something was going on and we couldn't find the kids. We were not able to physically see the students. During virtual learning kids did not have their cameras on and you could not see them.

Participant PV talked about not being prepared for the changes during the pandemic:

COVID has just kind of turned our lives upside down. The past years the kids would be at school, and you would go round them up. You knew exactly where they were. During COVID they kind of got lost. So, that created a challenge for us. Finding kids and hunting them down. A school with 1,700 kids, it's easy to lose one. So, that had been a challenge keeping track of them.

Participant PU discussed the challenge of trying to understand the problems school-age youth experienced since the pandemic and how to provide services:

The challenges are getting the students themselves back on course trying to help with co-regulation skills and reframing their mind what was school like prior to COVID. Trying to get them to understand the supports that are in place for them at school. There are people that are here to help or trying to because a lot of things transpire. A lot of these kids haven't come forth with or shared or disclosed what

they endured while we were out. You know some of them out of sight out of mind. They don't want to bring that up. They shy away from what really happened, but we know something under the surface occurred. Just trying to get to the source of and root of the problem. How can we help. That's just been a challenge like what is the problem right now. What is going on with them and everybody? How can we help?

Participant PW stated:

I actually worry that there are children that are experiencing trauma from COVID that I don't even know about. I wonder if as a middle school we could have done something a little differently when we opened our doors particularly to the 7th graders who spent their entire 6th grade year virtually.

Several of the school social workers indicated in the data collection that because school-age youth were difficult to locate during the shutdown that it was a challenge identifying youths experiencing neglect. Participant PT indicated:

We weren't able to see the students to lay our eyes on them. So, a lot less neglect calls were called out because they couldn't come to us. They couldn't just drop in my office to talk and give information.

Participant PU stated:

Last year when COVID first arrived, last year 20-21, we didn't see as much abandonment and trauma because children were not in school. Our homeless population and unaccompanied youth which a lot of our abandon children fall under, numbers were low last year because they weren't in school.

Participant PQ discussed the issues of not being able to identify possible students experiencing abandonment:

Our homeless numbers went way down, and we know that wasn't because there was less homelessness. It's because those kids were not there for us to identify by the natural ways that we become aware of concerns through teacher observation or kids telling a teacher.

Again, the COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected and unprecedented event. The data showed a challenge in skills to provide appropriate services for unpredicted times and lack of skills to identify school-age youth in need.

Trauma-Informed Schools

A few questions on the interview protocol dealt with trauma-informed schools. The LMSWs who participated in the study were asked to explain how trauma-informed schools can help with advocating services for youth experiencing trauma due to abandonment and if their school district was a trauma-informed school district. All participants identified that being a trauma-informed school would have a positive impact on advocating within the different ecological systems. Participant PQ reported:

Trauma-informed practices can simply change the world. It changes just the way we look at children. It changes the perspective in behaviors. It changes the perspective of how we engage with our families. It changes the way we interact with each other from one teacher to the next. From the administrators and how they interact with their teachers. For the macrosystem, agencies might not be flooded with situations that they might not need to be because we can meet the

need within our school systems. If we help our students learn to regulate in first grade, then by the time they are in fifth grade they don't need anger management therapy. Preventing our kids from needing services later on in life can decrease out of school suspension. Then decrease the need of students going into special education. Which decrease the amount of children having truancy and court involvement. So, I think it can have a huge impact. A positive impact on our society.

Participant PU stated:

I think if the schools are trauma-informed, trauma focused then you will have a better sense of understanding how trauma impacts students. I feel they're have more of an understanding, more compassion, and they will be willing to advocate on a large scope for the student. If everyone were well aware, being more cognizant to student's needs, then that would definitely decrease discipline within the school because you would know your approach. How to approach the student. How to re-direct and what tone to use.

Participant PW reported:

I think that to be a trauma-informed school is the only way to completely and comprehensively provide for and care for children. All children whether they have immediate trauma history or trauma and abandonment. So, if you were actually serving that child in a school that truly is focused on trauma-informed instruction and trauma-informed discipline and trauma-informed culture and care that would make everything so much better. Trauma-informed school would also serve the

adults in the building to make the work environment for the adults more healthy and compassionate. Trauma-informed schools would be beneficial to everyone who walks in the building including visitors. Including irate visitors. The front desk staff will be able to recognize that this person may be experiencing a crisis and how to deescalate the situation. How can we validate? How can we help get their needs met so that the real reason that they are here can be address?

Participant PX reported on the importance of trauma-informed schools:

If they are trauma informed, then there should be an increase sensitivity to the issues. So, if they are trauma-informed schools then they are paying attention to what's going on with the whole student in the context of their environment. Being a trauma-informed school help change the attitude to how can we help and once we adopt that attitude toward our students and the families then we will be more sensitive and compassionate.

The participants during data collection indicated that trauma-informed schools would benefit students, families, and school staff because awareness on trauma would increase.

The 10 participants in the research had mixed responses for the interview question on if their school district was trauma informed. Six of the participants indicated that their school districts were trauma informed and four reported their school districts were not trauma informed. The six participants that responded their school districts were trauma informed reported during data collection that certain groups within the schools such as school social workers and school counselors had been trained in trauma-informed practices. However, other staff members had not been trained. It was determined from

additional probes to the participants' responses, that their districts were not truly trauma informed as discussed by Tabone et al. (2020). A trauma-informed school involves all members in the school district being able to understand trauma and how to respond with compassion (Tabone et al., 2020).

Services and Supports

Two questions on the interview protocol dealt with indirect and direct services and multitiered systems of support provided by school social workers. Each participant reported providing direct and indirect services in the form of check-ins with students to determine their wellbeing and progress, talk therapy, groups, home visits, phone conferences with parents, resources for food and school supplies, and referrals to agencies for counseling or substance abuse treatment. The LMSWs in the study were part of the school teams that provided multitiered systems of support. Tier 1 the universal services for all students (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018) were provided by the participants such as school supplies and food if needed. Tier 2 the individualized services (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018) such as groups and talk therapy based on the needs of the students were identified by the participants as services provided. Tier 3 agency referrals (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018) were discussed by the participants as referrals to local mental health agencies, department of social services, and agencies that work with substance abuse treatment. The direct and indirect services and supports as discussed by the participants were diverse and based on the individual needs of the youth.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to analyze the data and report on the results. Five themes were determined from the data on the research question on challenges school social workers face when advocating services for youths experiencing trauma due to abandonment. There was one theme for each of the five ecological systems: set-aside intervention time for school social work and related services (microsystem); restricted school environment and involvement (mesosystem); awareness concerning the need for family support (exosystem); barriers to services before COVID-19 and during and after the COVID-19 shutdown (macrosystem); and development of skills to provide services in unpredictable circumstances (chronosystem). Each theme helped to answer the research question. Quotes from the data were used to understand and interpret the data. Chapter 5 provides a more detailed interpretation of the findings and the implications of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This was a generic qualitative research study on the firsthand experiences and challenges that school social workers faced when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. I sought to better understand those challenges within the five ecological systems of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. I used Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory as the conceptual framework for the study to identify how the different systems might impact the services for youths experiencing abandonment. Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1986) identified the microsystem as the initial system that surrounds the youth; mesosystem as interrelationships between systems; exosystem as the system that indirectly influence the well-being of a youth; macrosystem as the culture and policies within agencies and society; and chronosystem environmental and transitional events.

I sought to collect data on the challenges with advocating services for the targeted population and provide data on how the field of school social work can improve service. Data were collected through semistructured interviews. The sample population was LMSWs in the position of school social workers. Ten school social workers participated in the study. I conducted individual, semistructured interviews with the participants virtually or by phone using a 15-question interview protocol. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. The collected data indicate the challenges and possible steps that school social workers can take to help improve services for students experiencing trauma caused by abandonment.

I organized data findings into five themes, one for each of the five ecological systems. The themes were set-aside intervention time for school social work and related services (microsystem); restricted school environment and involvement (mesosystem); awareness concerning the need for family support (exosystem); barriers to services before COVID-19 and during and after the COVID-19 shutdown (macrosystem); and development of skills to provide services in unpredictable circumstances (chronosystem).

The findings in the microsystem suggested a need for a designated time within the school schedule for support services to help students experiencing mental health, emotional and behavioral problems, and trauma. The data indicated that school-age youth were experiencing these issues, but the school environment was focused mainly on academic success. Setting-aside time for support services in the schedule could improve social emotional concerns that are problematic to school success. For the mesosystem, the findings suggested that the restrictions placed on schools during the COVID-19 pandemic hindered in-person interaction between families and school staff. Also, school social workers were not able to provide home visits to bridge the gap between home and school because of restrictions and safety protocols during the pandemic. The data pertaining to the exosystem showed how a parent or guardian's work schedule and lack of awareness on trauma impacted their support and response to their child's needs when dealing with trauma experiences. The findings for the macrosystem were challenges with policies and culture in the educational system and agencies and access to services and resources before, during, and after the COVID-19 shutdown. Findings within the chronosystem

focused on preparedness and skills of school social workers to provide services and identify students during the pandemic.

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to interpret the findings as they relate to the research question on the challenges faced by school social workers when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. As the researcher, I interpreted the findings to confirm and extend the literature discussed in Chapter 2. The interpretation of the findings through the lens of the ecological systems theory may also extend the current knowledge base. In this chapter, I discuss the limitations of the study, offer recommendations for continual research, and consider the study's implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

Earlier on in the data collection and transcription of the data, I identified codes related to challenges with developing trusting relationships and the need for school personnel to receive training on trauma-informed care. In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed the challenges found in the current peer-reviewed literature related to childhood trauma, neglect, and abandonment. The discussion included defining neglect and abandonment, identifying youth experiencing trauma and abandonment and reporting neglect, building trusting relationships, and receiving education (Berg, 2017; Coffino et al., 2020, Cohen & Thakur, 2021; Freisthler et al., 2017; Kobulsky et al., 2020). My research confirmed several challenges found in the peer-reviewed literature when advocating services regarding building relationships and obtaining training and education. Building a trusting relationship was identified in the current literature as a challenge because children and

adolescents must reexperience the trauma and abandonment when they talk with a school social worker or counselor (Berg, 2017). They also must open themselves up to the school social worker or counselor which can be difficult because of their past experiences with being abandoned by loved ones and individuals they trusted (Berg, 2017; Cossar et al., 2019).

Training and education were challenges found in both my research and peer-reviewed literature. LMSWs in the study indicated that a lack of training and education on trauma-informed services and care prevented advocacy. The participants discussed firsthand experiences of only key staff members, such as school social workers, school counselors, interventionist, and administrators, receiving training on trauma-informed care. However, teachers and other support staff were not included in the trauma-informed professional development opportunities. The participants indicated that not having all staff members trained hindered identification of trauma behaviors and trauma-informed responses to children and adolescents experiencing trauma related to abandonment. The school social workers in the study also indicated that even though training was provided to them on trauma-informed services, the lack of practice on strategies during the professional developments caused hesitancy in the delivery of services.

Regarding the challenge of education, researchers have noted that the lack of education and training effects how school social workers and school staff understand trauma and the identification of youth experiencing trauma (Berg, 2017; Camel & Widom, 2020). Lack of education and training causes problems with reporting and immediate response for services (Berg, 2017; Camel & Widom, 2020; Cohen & Thakur,

2021; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020; Stirling, 2019). In my study, one of the questions on the 15-question interview protocol asked participants to identify firsthand experiences of what occurred when school-age youth did not receive immediate services because of challenges with advocating. Participants reported that when immediate and initial services were not received, children and youth exhibited behavior problems of defiance and withdrawal that caused school disciplinary actions, decreased social interaction, school attendance problems, school dropout, mental health concerns, involvement with the criminal justice system, substance abuse, additional trauma, and problems with developing coping strategies. These concerns identified by the participants during data collection were like the identified risk in Chapters 1 and 2 of the peer-reviewed literature when initial and immediate services were not provided for children experiencing abandonment and trauma. The literature suggests that abandonment and childhood trauma are adverse childhood experiences that cause physical, mental, and emotional problems that could lead to poor school performance, disciplinary and behavioral issues, school dropout, problems with psychosocial functioning, substance abuse, violence, and criminal involvements (McKelvey et al., 2018; Zeng et al., 2019).

The interview protocol contained a few questions on trauma-informed schools for participants to answer. As indicated in Chapter 4 in the data analysis, six of the participants stated their schools and school districts were trauma informed and four reported their schools and districts were not. However, after continual probing on the questions related to trauma-informed schools, it was determined that the six school social workers' schools and districts were not truly trauma-informed schools because everyone

in the district had not been trained to understand and recognize trauma. In the current literature trauma-informed schools are a response to the prevalence of trauma and the need for early interventions to help prevent mental, emotional, and behavioral concerns (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). Trauma-informed schools include the school culture and the involvement of all members in that system to understand and recognize trauma, respond compassionately, and create attachments (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Tabone et al., 2020). The challenges to advocating, when schools and districts are not trauma-informed schools, are discussed in my research and the literature. The identified challenge in the Chapter 2 peer-reviewed literature was lack of support among staff to change the culture of the school and to provide interventions (Morton & Berardi, 2018). This was a challenge because school-age youth would not be identified immediately to receive needed services (Bent-Goodley, 2018; Harrison, 2018; Mersky et al., 2019). The school social workers in my study agreed that children and adolescents were experiencing trauma that affected their well-being physically, mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally. They reported that not being a trauma-informed school district caused problems with how staff responded to and interacted with students. Students' behaviors were not recognized as trauma therefore disciplinary actions were taken and positive relationships with teachers and staff hindered. Also, it was identified in the data that initial services were not received because students struggling with social emotional concerns and trauma were not identified as needing services. Participants reported that it would benefit the schools where they worked if the school districts were trauma informed because all school personnel would be trained on trauma and receive

strategies to use with children and adolescents. It would benefit the children and adolescents because they would have opportunities to develop trusting relationships with adults and grow to feel comfortable talking about experiences.

Findings from the study did not disconfirm what was found in peer-reviewed literature. However, my findings extended knowledge compared to current literature found in Chapters 1 and 2. Results from the data suggested that participants experienced additional challenges with advocacy because of a need for designated time to provide interventions, COVID-19 regulations and protocols that restricted access to schools, and preparation and skills during environmental events. My research extended knowledge in these areas because the goal of the research was to examine firsthand experiences of the challenges school social workers faced when advocating services for children experiencing abandonment by focusing on the ecological systems. During my research, the COVID-19 pandemic was impacting the United States and the world. To prevent the spread of the disease, safety protocols and regulations were developed and executed. The protocols had a huge impact on schools with school closures (Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). School social workers, teachers, school personnel, families, and school-age youths had to adjust to school closures and nontraditional school settings where in-person learning and interaction were not available (Maranto et al., 2020; Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). The data from the study regarding restrictions extend current knowledge in the literature because restrictions focused on interrelationship problems between home and school during the pandemic. School social workers during data collection reported that families lost contact

with schools because of poor access to technology and not being able to adjust to using technology instead of face-to-face interaction. School social workers were not able to use a traditional method like home visits to connect families because of COVID-19 safety regulations which restricted that face-to-face communication.

Data on preparation and skills of school social workers to provide needed services extend knowledge compared to current literature because it relates to how school social workers were prepared to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed that school social workers were not prepared during that time. The participants expressed firsthand challenges of not knowing how to provide services to children and families. They also reported not being able to identify youths who may have been experiencing neglect during the pandemic.

The need for set-aside time to provide support services in the school setting also extends information found in current literature. As in the literature and in my research, the data showed that childhood trauma is a real issue that affects youth differently, but in physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral ways that can be lifelong. LMSWs in my study discussed the challenge of not being able to provide needed services for youths experiencing trauma because the focus in the school setting is on academics. Participants discussed a need for a set-aside time in the school schedule for school social work and related services.

Ecological systems theory was the conceptual framework in my study. I focused on how the five systems of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem influenced how school social workers advocated services for children

experiencing abandonment and trauma. Themes from the data were identified for each system: set-aside intervention time for school social work and related services (microsystem); restricted school environment and involvement (mesosystem); awareness concerning the need for family support (exosystem); barriers to services before COVID-19 and during and after the COVID-19 shutdown (macrosystem); development of skills to provide services in unpredictable circumstances (chronosystem). The microsystem is the immediate environment that influences the youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and from the theme in the data, the challenge with advocacy was found within the school system. Analysis of the data found that school social workers were unable to provide different support services regularly to students because the daily school schedule adhered to academics, and it was difficult to interrupt that schedule to provide needed social emotional supports. Participants agreed that there was a need for support services of counseling and groups because students had childhood adverse experiences before the COVID-19 pandemic and additional mental health and behavior problems since returning to in-person learning after the COVID-19 shutdown. However, providing those services was problematic when academic success was the focus of the school environment. Participants indicated problems with support from teachers when requesting students out of class during instructional time. The need for a designated time in the school schedule for support services that does not interfere with instructional learning was identified by the participants as a solution in the microsystem to the challenge with advocating services to youths experiencing childhood trauma.

Mesosystem is the second system in the ecological systems and focuses on interrelationships between systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For this study, the theme in the data was found in the interrelationship between home and school. The theme was restricted school environment and involvement. At the onset of the pandemic schools were immediately shutdown as a safety precaution. Traditional in-person learning, and face-to-face interrelationships were not available (Maranto et al., 2020; Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020). School social workers and staff had to adjust to providing virtual or phone contact to connect with students and families and students had to adjust to receiving virtual instruction. Participants in the study addressed that contact with families were lost during this time because some families did not have technology to support virtual interaction, and some were not proficient with phone devices to accurately interact with the school. Data from the research showed that even when in-person instructional learning resumed and schools reopened during the 2021-2022 school year, face-to-face interaction was still restricted. The regulations and procedures during the pandemic presented a challenge to school social workers and school staff in getting information to families for services the school-age youths needed.

Exosystem is the system that indirectly influence a child's well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and the theme presented in the data was awareness concerning the need for family support. During the onset of the pandemic, businesses and agencies closed and the media and news outlets reported unemployment. Participants reported on how some families were able to retain employment and how their work schedules interfered with support during virtual instructional learning at home and when schools

reopened. During virtual learning, participants talked about firsthand experiences with trying to provide support, but challenges came when youths did not have their cameras on to show that they were present and family members were not available to help youths be accountable. Another challenge in advocating services in the exosystem was family members not understanding trauma and how to respond to children experiencing trauma. School social workers in the study reported that they observed parents and guardians with untreated traumas. The parents and guardians were unaware of how their history of trauma created a cycle of trauma in the family and affected their parenting and response to their child's needs. Participants discussed the challenge with family members lack of understanding of trauma which led to misinterpretation of the child's behavior and refusal to accept services for trauma.

Macrosystem focus on culture of agencies and policies in society (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and the theme found in the data for this system was barriers to services before COVID-19 and during and after the COVID-19 shutdown. Findings from the data for the macrosystems looked at policies and culture of school districts and state agencies and accessing services and resources during and after the COVID-19 shutdown. Participants discussed, policies for public education created challenges to advocating services because public schools operate at certain hours that may not be convenient for some families. Families may not be available because of their work schedules to come to the school and meet with the school social worker, teacher, administrator, or school staff. This was a challenge to the services youths received because families were not aware of what was needed and therefore could not approve those services. One participant in the

study indicated that a possible solution could be using technology for virtual meetings for families that have the technology and proficiency with using the resource. This participant reported that from experiences during the pandemic the virtual option was more convenient for some families and their work schedules. Participants also indicated that public school policies focus mainly on academics and testing with less attention to the whole needs of students which hinders access to support services.

Policies within state agencies on hours of operation, transportation, confidentiality, and accessing records are challenges school social workers encounter when advocating for services. School social workers in the study reported that a referral to an agency for trauma services was made when the specialty could not be provided at the school. However, challenges occurred with accessing those services because of hours of operation, traditional requirements of in-person services, and lack of transportation. Traditional daytime hours of operation and in-person services are not flexible and feasible to accommodate all individuals, children, and families. Participants reported that transportation for some families was not available and if transportation was not a resource offered through the agency, then families had problems starting or continuing services.

Confidentiality policies was a challenge for the LMSWs to advocate services because communication was limited between agencies and school social workers. Confidentiality policies dictates what information can be shared. The school social workers in the study reported that the policies prevented sharing of information that could possibly help the child. Participants also indicated that most times all parties involved

with the child and family were not aware of each other's role and services. One participant pinpointed that a holistic approach was not being used which placed the needs of the school-aged youth at a disadvantage. Policies to accessing records was also a problem when advocating services for children experiencing abandonment because of the required documents needed to retrieve the records. In the study a participant reported that it was a difficult and time-consuming process to access records for unaccompanied youths. The time-consuming process hindered immediate support and services.

Participants also addressed policies with the transition of school-age youths when in the care of CPS because of neglect, abandonment, or another maltreatment. The LMSWs indicated that these youths may have multiple transitions within a school year. The instability of the situation created challenges with the youths receiving consistent and competent services and building trusting relationships. Participants shared that this lack of consistency hinders progress and development of skills on trauma and adverse experiences.

School social workers in the study talked about the challenge with accessing services during and after the COVID-19 shutdown. The school social workers indicated that the shutdown of state agencies made it hard for children and adolescents and families to access needed services. One service discussed in the data collection was counseling services. In-person services were not available during the shutdown because agencies that provided counseling services were closed and there was no contingency plan. After the shutdown, agencies began providing services by phone or virtually through telehealth. Participants reported that families who did not have access to phones or technology were

at a disadvantage. Once in-person services were available through agencies the new challenge faced by school social workers was receiving a timely appointment for youths. Staff at the agencies were overwhelmed with the number of individuals in need of services. The school social workers in the study indicated that students' need for services was there before the pandemic but seemed to magnify during the pandemic. However, now school-age youths in need of services were faced with a waiting list. So, the new challenge after the COVID-19 shutdown was receiving services in a timely manner.

Other challenges participants reported was a reduction in donations of food from churches and other faith-based community organizations and the loss of some community resources. A reduction in food donations occurred because during the 2020-2021 school year, when the shutdown was easing and schools were reopening with a modified instructional schedule, many families that qualified for different COVID-19 relief programs did not need the donations. The school social workers reported that many families qualified for supplemental food resources through the relief programs. Therefore, in the 2021-2022 school year, the churches and faith-based organizations were not providing donations because the need was not previously there. So, the school social workers during the 2021-2022 school year had to advocate for donations based on the current need of children and families. During data collection the LMSWs also reported that some resources were loss because of the lack of funding during the pandemic. This created a challenge for the school social workers to locate resources specific to the needs of the family.

The chronosystem is the fifth system of the ecological systems theory and looks at the impact of environmental and transitional events (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The theme for the chronosystem was development of skills to provide services in unpredictable circumstances. The environmental event that participants talked about was the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused worldwide alarm because of the unpredictable nature of the virus, the quick spread, detrimental health concerns, and fatality. Schools were impacted by the pandemic and abruptly closed during the 2019-2020 school year. When reopening started during the 2020-2021 school year in the Midlands region of South Carolina, schools were not fully functioning. Instruction was modified to include mostly students receiving instructional learning virtually at home and a limited amount of students in-person at schools a few days a week. For the 2021-2022 school year all students were transitioned full time back in the school building for in-person learning. The findings from the study for the chronosystem indicated that the participants felt confused in their role as school social workers. They reported, not feeling prepared or skilled to provide alternative services during the pandemic. Participants talked about traditional services of home visits and counseling that they used before the pandemic but were unable to use during the pandemic because those traditional services depended on face-to-face interaction which was not an option during school closures. The data suggested that participants were unclear if abandonment was a concern during the shutdown because contact with students and identification of concerns decreased. Additional research may need to be conducted on this subject concerning abandonment during the COVID-19 shutdown.

The challenge school social workers faced in the chronosystem was how to provide competent services during an unprecedented time. After the shutdown and the reopening of schools, the participants still reported having the challenge of being prepared to provide competent services as the spread of COVID-19 continued and students transitioned back to in-person learning. The participants discussed school social work support services were needed because since transitioning back in the schools, students were exhibiting defiance, withdrawal, and social emotional concerns. The school social workers expressed that now that school-age youth were back in school identification by traditional means of teacher observations, self-reports, and peer reports could resume to help identify students experiencing abandonment and trauma. However, according to the participants, the challenge to provide competent services to students was still a concern.

Limitations of the Study

In Chapter 1 the limitations discussed were transferability, dependability, and research bias. Transferability of the findings of the study to other fields of social work was considered an issue because there were limitations on the selected geographic region and sample population for the study. The sample population was LMSWs in the role of school social worker. The sample population was selected from the Midlands region of South Carolina. Data collection method was semistructured interviews using a 15-question interview protocol. The interview protocol was designed by the researcher to ask questions that generated responses from the sample population about different challenges in the ecological systems when advocating services for children experiencing

abandonment. From the analysis of the data, challenges that school social workers experienced were found in the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The challenge in the microsystem was not having a designated time to provide support services. The challenge in the mesosystem was restrictions caused by COVID-19 safety protocols and regulations that hindered traditional face-to-face interaction between students and families and school personnel. The challenge found in the exosystem was families not being aware of the support needed when a youth was experiencing trauma. The challenge in the macrosystem as reported in the data related to policies and accessing services and resources. A challenge in the chronosystem was the level of skill and preparedness of school social workers to deliver services in unprecedented times. With the data analysis focusing on the five systems, this information may possibly be transferred to other fields of social work and geographical regions. However, the limitation of the ecological system theory is that the theory assumes the impact on children and adolescent and the services LMSWs advocate for those youths is because of the systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). However, the challenges could have been caused by other determining factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Even with this limitation in the systems theory, the results found in the study provided knowledge to challenges faced with advocating services by school social workers for children experiencing abandonment and trauma.

Dependability was identified in Chapter 1 as a possible limitation because qualitative research is subjective (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In the study I took steps to increase consistency in the data collection by creating a written interview protocol

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016) with 15 questions. During the data collection for each interview, the interview questions were read in order from the interview protocol. The 15 questions were asked to the interviewee for a response. The interviews were audio recorded with a digital device and as the researcher, I transcribed the data verbatim from the recordings. Steps for data collection were written in detail in the study for other researchers to follow if needed. From the steps taken for data collection, I do not feel dependability is a limitation of the study.

Opportunities for research bias as a limitation was a possibility because of my knowledge and work history as a school social worker. However, a reflexive journal was used throughout the research, so I could write my thoughts about the study and the data collection (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interview protocol was consistently followed for each interview. I noted in the journal during data collection that my concern was mainly on asking the interview questions in the same cadence and pausing before responding when the interviewee stopped talking so that I did not mistakenly disrupt their thought process. I noted in the journal during data analysis that it was important to transcribe and type verbatim the participant's responses. Therefore, I listened to the digital audio recording multiple times for accuracy. I did not note any biases. However, I was disappointed in the recruitment process and noted this in the journal. Recruitment of the sample population was difficult because of the reopening of schools to full time in-person learning during the 2021-2022 school year, which was the start time of my recruitment process. It took over 6 months to recruit 10 participants. So, in the journal I wrote about my recruitment challenges and how I was mindful and considerate of the

participant's time when they volunteered. I conducted self-reflection throughout the study to be aware of my thoughts and behaviors and noted the reflections in the journal.

Transferability was found in the data analysis to be the limitation of the study. However, not as indicated in Chapter 1 on geographic region or transferability to other fields of social work. Transferability with the level of experience of a school social worker could be a concern. The requirement for the sample population was LMSWs in the role of school social worker employed in a school district with at least 1 year of experience in that field. The 10 participants in the study were LMSWs who were seasoned in the field of social work. Nine of the participants had 10 or more years of experience as a school social worker and one a little over 5 years. However, all participants had additional work experience in the field of social work. It is unclear if the amount of experience as a school social worker would change the interpretation of the data. The transferability concern would focus on if less experienced school social workers compared to seasoned school social workers would be more innovative to combat challenges with advocating within the five ecological systems or if the results from the study would be the same despite the experience level.

Recommendations

Interpretation of the data from the study showed different challenges school social workers faced when advocating services for youths experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. The findings showed challenges with not having a scheduled time to provide consistent support services (microsystem); restrictions to traditional face-to-face interaction with families (mesosystem); families being aware of the support the youth

needs (exosystem); policies and accessing services and resources (macrosystem); and school social workers skill level to handle changes in unpredictable events (chronosystem). The interpretation of the data provided insight to the challenges within the five ecological systems. The findings on the challenges of advocating services in the ecological systems are a strength to the study because it answers the research question and provides information on positive social change. One recommendation found in the interpretation of the data was youth not being identified for possibly experiencing abandonment during the COVID-19 closures of school. In the study during data collection, the participants expressed that it was difficult to report the well-being of students and if there were issues of neglect and abandonment because during school closures, identification of school-age children decreased. According to the data, the decrease in identification was caused by the lack of traditional in-person means of identification through self-reports and peer and teacher reports. More research may be needed to look at those problems with identification during the COVID-19 pandemic specifically and how students in need did not receive the appropriate services because school social workers had challenges with providing and advocating services.

Another recommendation deals with the years of experience of a school social worker. In the study the sample population was LMSWs as school social workers with at least 1 year of work experience in that position. However, the LMSWs that participated in the study were seasoned school social workers with years of experience in the field of school social work and other social work fields. Additional research could focus on first year school social workers with no additional years of experience as a licensed social

worker and their challenges within the five ecological systems when advocating for services for youth experiencing childhood trauma caused by abandonment. The research could determine whether newly social workers without years of working with trauma would have similar challenges within the ecological systems as described in the results of the research or different challenges depending on their perspective in handling problems.

Implications

Implications of positive social change was found in the results of the research. As indicated in the research, challenges were found within the five ecological systems when school social workers advocated for services for school-age children experiencing abandonment. Positive social change can be found in the challenges on need for designated time in the school schedule to provide support services, family awareness on the need for support when children are experiencing trauma, and preparation and skill of school social workers when dealing with unprecedented times. The positive social change in these areas could help improve the services children and adolescents receive.

School social workers can advocate within their schools to have an allotted time added to the daily schedule for support services. As indicated by the school social workers during data collection, not having a set-aside time to provide services interfered with instructional time and prohibited students from receiving support services consistently. This positive social change can occur in the microsystem and macrosystem. In the microsystem, a set-aside time for services could allow students in need to receive initial services at school. Also, a designated time could help build relationships because school-aged youths would know that someone is available to help with their concerns or

needs. On a macrosystem level, the importance of including a time for support services in the school schedule could be implemented in all public schools. During data collection, the school social workers discussed how public-school policies were designed to focus on academics, however, students also need services to help with social and emotional problems. If policies were changed in public schools to include both academic and support services in the daily schedule, then school-age youth would receive services that support their whole well-being.

A positive social change on a family level would be improving awareness on trauma so that children receive needed services. Participants during data collection reported that needed services for children experiencing trauma were not received because family members were unaware of how their history of trauma impacted the well-being of the child and their response to their child's trauma. Information on trauma through pamphlets, posters, and virtual platforms within schools could help families feel comfortable with the topic and aware of support staff available in the school. This is a positive social change because if all families who have school-age youth receive information on trauma regularly during a school term it may help increase awareness on the social issue and increase the family's response to needed services.

Positive social change in the field of social work would be mandated trainings on preparedness during challenging events and trauma-informed services. Continuing education through trainings and professional development is a standard of social work (National Association of Social Workers, 2018). The goal of continuing education is to enhance knowledge so that services provided by social workers are effective (National

Association of Social Workers, 2018). A challenge in the chronosystem from the data showed school social workers were not prepared or skilled to handle changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants reported that contact with students and families was lost; identification of students in need decreased; and services were not provided consistently. Traditional face-to-face services were not available because of COVID-19 regulations and safety protocols. The school social workers reported they had difficulties adjusting to the change. A mandated universal training that addresses preparedness during challenging events would provide strategies on nontraditional methods to deliver services and innovative techniques that fit the needs of children and families during an unpredictable time. Mandated trauma-informed trainings are also needed because the trainings could improve the identification of students and initial services that are provided. In the data, some participants discussed that they have attended trauma-informed trainings. However, those trainings were not intensive and there were limited opportunities to practice strategies during the training which created problems when providing the interventions in the school setting. Mandated trauma-informed trainings in the social work discipline would be universal and consistent.

Conclusion

This study focused on the research question on the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma due to abandonment. The sample population for the study was LMSWs in the position of school social worker. Recruitment was through school districts and public information on school social workers in the Midlands region of South Carolina. Data was collected through

semistructured interviews with a 15-question interview protocol. The conceptual framework on the ecological system theory was used to determine the challenges school social workers faced with advocating services for the targeted population. Five themes were determined from the data. Those themes were set-aside intervention time for school social work and related services (microsystem); restricted school environment and involvement (mesosystem); awareness concerning the need for family support (exosystem); barriers to services before COVID-19 and during and after the COVID-19 shutdown (macrosystem); and development of skills to provide services in unpredictable circumstances (chronosystem). The data from the study helped to understand the research question and identified areas for positive social change. A positive social change in the social work discipline would be to provide mandated universal trainings on preparedness during challenging events and trauma-informed services. These trainings could help to improve the initial services school social workers provide, identification of children and adolescents in need, and services that fit the needs of the child experiencing trauma caused by abandonment.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Danielle Mozie, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. I am looking for voluntary participants that fit the following criteria:

- A licensed master social worker (LMSW) and licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) in a position of school social work.
- At least one year experience as a school social worker in a primary or secondary school setting.
- The school social worker is employed with a school district.

The purpose of the research is to better understand firsthand experiences on challenges school social workers face when advocating for students with traumatic backgrounds due to neglect. The focus is on the ecological systems of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The study will help identify ways the field of school social work can improve in advocating for services needed for students experiencing trauma and increase initial onset of services provided.

Data for the study will be collected through an initial semistructured interview and then a follow-up interview. The interviews will be conducted using the virtual platform Google Meet video conference. During the interview, I will ask that your camera and microphone are on and that you are in a private location free of interruptions and noise. Telephone interviews are an option. Virtual and telephone interviews will be audio recorded for validity and reliability of the data. All collected data will be confidential. The initial interview will be at most 60 to 90 minutes. The follow-up interview will last 30 minutes or information on the data will be sent by email. Each interview can be scheduled at your convenience and will not disrupt your work schedule.

If you are interested in volunteering for this study or have questions, please contact me at [telephone number redacted] or [email address redacted]. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Danielle Mozie

Danielle Mozie, Doctoral Candidate, Walden University

Appendix B: Supporting Letter to the School District

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Danielle Mozie. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University, Barbara Solomon School of Social Work. I am writing this letter to request permission to conduct research within your school district with licensed master social workers in the position of school social workers. The qualitative research is on the challenges school social workers face when advocating services for youth experiencing trauma caused by abandonment. The purpose of the research is to better understand firsthand experiences on challenges school social workers face when advocating for students with traumatic backgrounds due to neglect. The focus is on the ecological systems of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The study will help identify ways the field of school social work can improve in advocating for services needed for students experiencing trauma and increase initial onset of services provided.

Participants for the study must be a licensed master school worker, employed with the school district as a school social worker, and have at least one year work experience in a primary or secondary school setting. The goal is to recruit 10 participants for the study. However, additional participants may be needed for data saturation.

If the school district approves the research, then the school social workers will be initially contacted through a recruitment letter sent to the lead school social worker of the district. An informed consent will be given to each potential participant explaining participation is voluntary and the identity of participants and data gathered will be confidential. The data collection method for the study is semistructured interviews. The interviews will be virtual or by phone and scheduled at the convenience of the participants. The data collected will be used to improve services provided to students.

Thank you for your consideration in my research request. If any additional information is needed, please contact me at [email address redacted]. I hope to hear from you soon regarding if I have been approved to conduct the research with school social workers employed with your school district.

Kind Regards,

Danielle Mozie, Doctoral Candidate, Walden University

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:
 Time of Interview:
 Interviewer:
 Interviewee:
 Start Time:
 End Time:

Ice Breaker Questions:

1. What is your most beneficial firsthand experience as a school social worker?
 Follow up probe: Can you explain more?
 Observation notes:
2. With the field of social work being diverse, what led you to school social work?
 Follow up probe: Can you explain more?
 Observation notes:

Interview Questions:

1. As a school social worker how have you generally advocated for services within the different ecological systems?
 Microsystem (immediate environments):

 Mesosystem (interrelationships between environments):

 Exosystem (environments that indirectly influence the student's wellbeing)?

 Macrosystem (culture and society)?

 Chronosystem (transitions and environmental events)?

 Follow up probe: Can you explain more?
 Observation notes:
2. Explain what challenges you have faced when advocating services within the ecological systems for children with childhood trauma due to neglect?

 Microsystem (immediate environments)?

 Mesosystem (interrelationships between environments)?

 Exosystem (environments that indirectly influence the student's wellbeing)?

Macrosystem (culture and society)?

Chronosystem (transitions and environmental events)?

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes:

3. Have you had any firsthand experiences with working with students with childhood abandonment? If so, please explain how you worked with the student. If you have no firsthand experiences, please explain how you would work with the student.

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes:

4. When specifically focusing on childhood abandonment do the challenges with advocating services within the ecological systems present differently? Please explain in what ways. If no, please explain how the challenges are similar when neglect is generalized.

Microsystem (immediate environments):

Mesosystem (interrelationships between environments):

Exosystem (environments that indirectly influence the student's wellbeing):

Macrosystem (culture and society):

Chronosystem (transitions and environmental events):

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes:

5. What direct and indirect services have you used for students experiencing childhood trauma caused by neglect?

Microsystem (immediate environments):

Mesosystem (interrelationships between environments):

Exosystem (environments that indirectly influence the student's wellbeing):

Macrosystem (culture and society):

Chronosystem (transitions and environmental events):

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes:

6. Specifically looking at the chronosystem, what services have you provided to students experiencing childhood trauma caused by neglect during COVID-19?

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes:

7. What challenges have you faced within the chronosystem when specially advocating for services for students experiencing childhood trauma caused by neglect during COVID-19?

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes:

8. Have you experienced different challenges with advocating services for students experiencing childhood trauma caused by neglect during COVID-19 compared to past years? Please explain.

Microsystem (immediate environments):

Mesosystem (interrelationships between environments):

Exosystem (environments that indirectly influence the student's wellbeing):

Macrosystem (culture and society):

Chronosystem (transitions and environmental events):

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes:

9. What actions within the different ecological systems can help to decrease challenges when advocating services for students experiencing childhood trauma due to neglect caused by abandonment?

Microsystem (immediate environments):

Mesosystem (interrelationships between environments):

Exosystem (environments that indirectly influence the student's wellbeing):

Macrosystem (culture and society):

Chronosystem (transitions and environmental events):

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes:

10. What changes can you make to help improve advocating for services for this targeted population?

Microsystem (immediate environments):

Mesosystem (interrelationships between environments):

Exosystem (environments that indirectly influence the student's wellbeing):

Macrosystem (culture and society):

Chronosystem (transitions and environmental events):

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes:

11. How can trauma informed schools help with improving advocating for services within the five ecological systems?

Microsystem (immediate environments):

Mesosystem (interrelationships between environments):

Exosystem (environments that indirectly influence the student's wellbeing):

Macrosystem (culture and society):

Chronosystem (transitions and environmental events):

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes

12. If your school district is not trauma informed, what steps can you take to advocate for the change?

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes

13. What multitiered systems of support have you provided to students experiencing childhood trauma caused by neglect? Abandonment?

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes

14. In what ways have you observed youth not receiving initial services when experiencing childhood trauma caused by neglect? Abandonment?

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes

15. What changes can you make in the microsystem (your school) to improve multitiered systems of support, so students receive immediate services for childhood trauma caused by abandonment?

Follow up probe: Can you explain more?

Observation notes