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Examining the perceptions of school violence through the views of middle school students, parents, teachers and community members

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ABSTRACT

Examining the Perceptions of School Violence Through the Views of Middle School
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by

Teresa Bellflower

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Ed.D in Teacher Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine how middle school students, parents, teachers, and community members perceived acts of violence. It focused indirectly on how a small community was impacted following a hostage situation. The theoretical framework for this study draws from the theories of violence as described by Aisenberg and Ell, Canady, Gottfredson and Hirschi, and Miller. In this qualitative study the research questions focused on perceptions of school violence acts and potential influences' on the participants in this study. The participants consisted of 6 middle school students, 4 middle school parents, 4 school officials, and 4 community members. The results of the interviews were analyzed using a color-coded system to find patterns within each group. These patterns were then compared to determine similarities and differences. Four common themes emerged from the interviews: (a) the main causes of school violence were bullying, substance abuse, low socioeconomic level, and a bad home environment, (b) peer pressure and lack of communication were perceived to lead to school violence, (c) the most frequent occurring acts of school violence were fighting, arguing, teasing, and hitting (d) the most serious acts of school violence were holding people against their will, fighting, and bullying. Findings confirmed that a difference emerged within three of the groups pertaining to who was to be held responsible for the safety of students. As a result of random acts of violence, two beneficial changes occur. First, the adult community is forced to collaborate and communicate about a topic never experienced before. Second, the students learn to rely on each other for support. Social change implications include changes in county policies and practices by establishing new measures related to school safety that protects school children.

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DEDICATION

I could not imagine ever doing this work without the support of my family. I dedicate this work to my husband Bruce and my son, Cody. They suffered through the course of this work and sacrificed greatly in order for me to complete this study. Also, I dedicate this to the memory of my aunt and uncle, Pauline and W.L Tipton. They were always great supporters of furthering your education. I know they would be proud of my accomplishments.

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CHAPTER1: INTRODUCTION

Background

School violence acts such as bullying, sexual harassment, weapon use, teacher violence, gang violence, verbal harassment, and fights have been researched for over a century. The Columbine High School shootings in Columbine, Colorado certainly highlighted extreme levels of school violence (Snow, 2009). Research reported that school violence is rare (Astor, R., Benbenishty, R., Kids Health, Meyer, H., Marachi, R., & Rosemond, M., 2005). This rarity does not seem to be the case from the public's perspective when school violence is often on the front page of the newspaper, and broadcasted on multiple television news channels. For example, a Columbine survivor, Johnson, in CNN News (2007), said that life has been an emotional roller coaster for her since being injured in the Columbine shooting. She is quoted as saying, "that for one year, I didn't want to be in public. I didn't want anybody knowing my name. I was afraid-from the posttraumatic stress- that somebody was going to finish me off" (Carter, 2007, p.1). Johnson is just one of many who have experienced trauma after an act of school violence.

The question of what is causing the violence is difficult to answer. Many psychologists, clinical psychiatrists, and researchers have compiled extensive lists on the causes of school violence (Brunstein, et al., 2007). According to Last (2001), there is no one common denominator or factor that can explain why school violence occurs. Some of the factors that may lead to school violence are the following: home life, parenting practices, lack of supervision, lack of discipline, violence on television, music, gangs, and drugs (Last, 2001).

Children whose home life has been exposed to domestic violence can suffer many problems such as demonstrating poor academic performance and problem-solving skills. They may also exhibit behavioral problems like aggression, phobias, insomnia, low self-esteem, and depression (Behrman, R.E., Carter, L.S., & Weithorn, L.A., 1999). Parenting practices can play a role in creating violent behaviors when parents neglect their children's developmental and emotional needs by being unavailable and inattentive (Fauber, R.L., Forehand, R., Thomas, A.M., & Wierson, M., 1990). Some parents believed that music could lead to violence. According to Violence in Media Entertainment (2005) 47% of mothers with children in public schools believed that violent messages in rap music contribute a great deal to school violence.

Schools should be a safe place for teaching and learning, free from crime and violence, although this was not the case for a rural county middle school in Georgia that experienced a hostage situation. The date Thursday September 7, 2007 will be remembered due to an act of violence in one small community. That morning began as a normal school day that ended with one child arrested and others in panic. A seventh grader held six students hostage in a classroom with a steak knife for over an hour. Even though the incident ended without any injuries or casualties, the individuals who were involved in the hostage situation have been affected by this horrible experience. Parents and staff members are trying to deal with their emotions, and it was a blow to such a small community.

This act of violence disrupted the educational process within the county in multiple ways. First, after the situation was defused, every student in attendance at the

middle school that day was either picked up by parents or sent home on the bus. This information was passed by word of mouth among teachers at this school in an effort not to upset any of the younger students. Over six pages of students at the nearby Primary/Elementary School on Thursday, September 7, 2007 were signed out on the student sign-out sheet in the office by their parents, leaving early as a result of the incident. On the following day the doors to the schools in this county were closed because the superintendent of this county in 2007 stated that everyone needed some time to overcome the crisis. Even though school has returned to normal, the students and staff members affected by this violent event may never feel safe inside their school again (Banks, 200). If an act of violence such as this hostage situation can cause so much disruption to one school system, even though no one was seriously hurt, it has to be devastating when a violent act takes the lives of children (Foxman, 2007).

School violence is an epidemic that has slowly seeped into U.S. society and has generated a new wave of concerns about safety issues due to the sheer size of a school system. In 2005 nearly 55 million children were enrolled in schools nationwide, and an additional 6.7 million people were teachers or other professional administrative and support staff employed at these schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). In addition, it has been reported that teachers may be three times more likely to be victims of violent crimes at school than are the students (Kondrasuk, J., Greene, T., Waggoner, J., Edwards, K., & Nayak-Rhodes, A., 2005). This study was conducted to help understand how students, school officials, parents, and community members perceived acts of violence. For this study, the act of violence was based on a true-life experience that occurred at a rural county middle school, which involved a hostage

situation. However, the interviewed participants in the study were indirectly affected by this act of violence.

Problem Statement

School violence represents a problem in U.S. society. Rogers (2004) noted that the problem of school violence is one of the most pressing educational issues in the United States. Scherz (2005) added that school violence and the threat of school violence are among the most significant risks to public education. In 1999-2000, 71% of public schools in the United States experienced at least one violent incident (Miller, & Chandler, 2005). According to The Constitutional Rights Foundation (2007), "Every year, 3 million young people in the United States fall victim to crimes at school" (p.1).

Studies suggested that middle school students experienced the highest level of school violence. There are several possible reasons associated with this high rate. According to Constitutional Rights Foundation (2007) one reason could be that early adolescence is a difficult age and young teenagers are often hyperactive and have not learned acceptable social behavior. Also, this is the first time many middle school students have come into contact with young people from different backgrounds and distant neighborhoods (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2007, p.2). This study focused on middle-school students, parents, community members, and staff members in an effort to better understand how violence can affect educational lives in a small community.

Nature of the Study

This research was a qualitative case study that examined the perceptions of school violence from the viewpoint of teachers, parents, students, and community members. In this study, the researcher examined the educational disruption that can be caused by

violent acts, investigated how school violent acts are perceived, and explored the perceptions of the main causes of school violence. Data were collected from interviews that were conducted on school grounds or at the participants' homes. Research questions that led this study are the following:

Research Questions

1.   What are the overall perceptions of the school community including students, teachers, parents and community members in regards to school violence?

2.   To what extent does school violence impact student success and teacher effectiveness?

3.   What do students, teachers, parents, and community members perceive to be the primary contributing factor to school violence?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to explore the impact of school violence on middle-school children, faculty, parents, and community members in a local county school system. This study focused on the perceptions and attitudes of participants whom have been indirectly involved with school violence.

Definition of Terms

Attitude: A rather constant feeling that is directed toward the use of violence. These feelings generally have an evaluative or a good-bad dimension (Green & Kreuter, 1999).

Crisis: A sudden, generally unanticipated, event that profoundly and negatively affects a significant segment of the school population and often involves serious injury or death (Duke, 2002).

Social Environment: Family, friends, peers at work or in the classroom (Bandura, 1977).

Perception: An impression or comprehension of an object interpreted in the light of experience, whether direct or vicarious (Green & Kreuter, 1999).

Violence: The threat of or use of physical force with the intention of causing physical injury, damage, or intimidation (Elliot, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998).

School Violence: "Any conditions or acts that create a climate in which individual students and teachers feel fear or intimidation in addition to being victims of assault, theft, or vandalism" (Batsche & Knoff, 1994, p.165).

Belief: The conviction that a phenomenon or object is true or real. Faith, trust, and truth are words used to express or imply belief (Green & Kreuter, 1999).

Assumptions

Before conducting this study, the researcher had several assumptions. One assumption was that there will be enough parents, teachers, students, and community members interested in participating in this study so that a generalization can be made about the school in this study. Another assumption was that a generalization cannot be made about all schools, particularly suburban and city schools, since this school represented a rural population. The next assumption is that the researcher's school will develop a more effective safety plan to ensure the safety of all teachers and students as a result of this study. The last assumption was that the researcher may know some of the

students and parents involved in this study. It is possible that the last assumption could prevent complete objectivity on behalf of the researcher, although every effort will be made to remain objective.

Delimitations

This case study was conducted from August 2008 through September 2008 at a local middle school and the surrounding community in the southeastern region of the United States. Data collections for this research were interviews, and document analysis that consisted of newspaper articles, and television news reports. The researcher does not teach at the school where the interviews took place; however, it is a small community and the students knew that the researcher is also a teacher. The researcher being employed in this county did not affect the outcome of the study.

Limitations

One limitation to this study was that the researcher is a local teacher in the same county as the participants for the study. The researcher brings certain experiences and values regarding education to the research field that some of the participants may not possess. This could lead to bias that may sway the researcher to influence the participants in a certain direction during the interview process that are not based on their experiences, but on the experiences and understanding of the researcher. This required the researcher to control her bias, opinions, and ideas so they are not part of the data collection process or the interpretation of the data. Another limitation could be the emotional state of the students who were indirectly involved in a school violence act. This may cause some of the students to be unable to complete the interview process which could alter some of the

data. The researcher utilized the school counselor as a resource for any students who become emotional and need counseling during and after the interview.

Significance of the Study

This research was significant for several reasons. First, as there has been a great deal of media and public attention about school safety, it is important to understand the affects of school violence and the types of responses taking place within schools. Teachers and students, who have been impacted by both school violence and responses to it, could provide powerful description of what is happening within the walls of the school. Furthermore, if the overall school climate has been adversely affected, these responses could have a significant implication for teachers' work environment and student learning. Secondly, research of this nature is intended as an opening dialogue with and amongst staff, students, and community members in an effort to understand perceptions of how school violence has altered lives and in what ways it has affected the educational setting at this rural middle school. In addition, this study will enhance the body of knowledge about school violence in order to enlighten other educators who have never experienced a violent act in their school.

Implications for Social Change

While adding to the literature on school violence, this study was of particular interest to educators and parents who seek to understand how violent acts in a school system affected middle school children (Banks, 2000). As of now, school violence is a hot topic in this small county due to the recent hostage situation at the middle school. The middle school principal in 2007 said that the people in this community had not experienced any major type of school violence before this event took place. Even though

the researcher's school was not directly involved, it did send a shock wave throughout the school, which was experienced by the researcher. Teachers were wondering how this could happen in such a small community where everyone knows everyone. From an educator's perspective, some schools are more focused on test scores which stems from accountability being placed on educators for students to achieve rather than be concerned about their well being and safety (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1971-1984).

Administrators and school officials are engaged in trying to keep their schools out of the needs improvement area instead of worrying about violent acts that could happen. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2008) a needs improvement school is a school that has been identified as needing to improve in specific areas. Until educators come together and work as a team, school violence will remain an issue that is not given much priority (Bryan, 2005). It is possible for teacher leaders to create an awareness of how school violence affects the lives of students (Bryan, 2005).

The problem of school violence, especially at the middle school level, is an important social issue that needed to be addressed at all levels of society such as the larger culture, communities, schools, and homes. This is supported by the Constitutional Rights Foundation (2007) that reported the following:

> "Middle school students are more than twice as likely as high school students to be affected by school violence. Seven percent of eighth graders stay home at least once a month to avoid a bully. Twenty-two percent of urban 11-and 12-year-olds know at least one person their age in a gang. The typical victim of an attack or robbery at school is a male in the seventh grade who is assaulted by a boy his own age." (p.1)

This demonstrated how important it is for educators, parents and society in general to become more knowledgeable about the social and psychological issues facing children who have experienced school violence in today's society. These children will need support to overcome feelings of fright and anxiety. Not only has school violence become a problem in schools but it has also become a problem in society (The World Health Organization 2004). In general, society and government bears much of the economic burden of the results of violence whether it occurs from court fees, medical fees, or counseling (The World Health Organization 2004). The World Health Organization (2004) informed that several studies in the U.S. showed that from 56% to 80% of the cost of acts of violence are either directly paid by public financing or are not paid at all- in which case they are absorbed by the government and society.

The present study helped to promote social change by the sharing of research results with school personnel. Information shared consisted of how lives could be changed due to school violence. As educators become more knowledgeable about school violence and the possible factors that promote violent acts taking place, this school system may keep violence to a minimum or perhaps maintain a school free from violence altogether. Additionally, this knowledge must be transferred to parents and the entire community for change to be maximized. Everyone needs to work together in a cooperative manner. The changes that transpire could have a positive effect on everyone within the school community, particularly students, because they will be able to learn in an environment where violence is minimized. This goal should be of top priority. There is a need among educators' to study school violence reactions in order to build conceptual models for future studies, as well as identify strategies and protocols for reaction which

will mandate what procedures to follow in the event of an emergency. This case study described and interpreted a school response to acts of violence. In addition, this study could possibly lead to changes in the county policies and practices which may contribute to lower numbers of school violent acts and a decrease in discipline. However, the changes that could happen as a result of this study will need to be based on the findings of data collection not personal opinions.

Summary

The research problem for this qualitative study was school violence. The purpose of this case study was to research the impact of school violence on middle-school children, faculty, parents, and community members in a local county school system. This study focused on the perceptions of participants who were indirectly involved with school violence. Also, this case study described and interpreted a school response to an act of violence. The research was important because it could have promoted social change, which may lead to a positive effect on everyone within the school community, particularly the students. By minimizing school violence and creating a safer learning environment, students may be more successful emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. The results of this study could lead to changes in the county policies and practices, which could contribute to lower numbers of school violent acts and a decrease in discipline.

Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature regarding school violence which focused on the different definitions of school violence, a historical perspective of school violence, types of school violence, youth violence, and the perceptions of the students, teachers, community members, and parents. Chapter 3 of the study articulates the

research methodology. The design of the study explained the sample and population, data instruments used, and the specific data collection and analysis procedures utilized.

Chapter 4 provided communication of the findings from this qualitative study in relationship to the three research questions. Chapter 5 discussed the immediate and long-range implications of this study. Recommendations were discussed regarding further research on the topic of school violence.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This study examined the perception of a school violence act and the effects that it has on students, parents, teachers, and community members. The strategy used for searching the literature was to explore sources pertaining to school violence such as the following: computer databases such as ERIC, library, books, Walden University databases such as Dissertations and Theses at Walden University, Academic Search Premier, Education: A Sage full-text collection, and PsycInfo. In the review of literature a statistical perspective on school violence was provided as a guide to demonstrate the growth and decline of school violence throughout the years. Also, youth violence was a focus due to the fact that this study involved middle school children. In addition, theories and types of violence are introduced to enable readers to understand why violence occurred. Other areas that are focused on in the review of literature are the following: *defining school violence, violence on school property, effects of violence on school behavior and learning, and how racial and ethnic conflicts affect violence in schools.*

Defining School Violence

The definition of school violence has evolved over the years. School violence is defined in different ways and affected different people. According to Hampton et al., (1996), violence is not isolated to a particular community or part of the population; rather, it is multidimensional and pervasive. School violence has been associated with the destruction of school property, aggressive physical contact and assault with weapons (Rintoul, 1999). Capozzoli and McVey (2000), defined school violence as any act of intimidation, threats, harassment, robbery, vandalism, physical assaults with or without a

weapon, or murder that happens at school or on buses going to and from school. Capozzoli and McVey categorized school violence into three categories based on the starting point of the conflict and the location where it occurred.

> Type 1: Violence that originated at school and occurs at school. A situation at school develops to cause a student to feel that he or she is a victim of unfair treatment. The student then seeks to exact vengeance upon or obtain retribution from the antagonist and/or make an example of them.
> Type 2: Violence originated in the school but occurs outside the school. A situation develops in the school but the perpetrator does not choose to exact retribution or vengeance at school but chooses another location.
> Type 3: Violence originated outside the school and occurs in the school such as a bomb threat or a former student returning to kill his girlfriend. (p. 22)

School violence has been considered an inner-city phenomenon due to the perception of gang violence and drugs; however, it is now understood that these have spread across rural and suburban America. MacDonald (1996) provided definitions of school violence from educators and students perspectives. "From an educator's perspective, school violence encompasses those behaviors that seriously disrupt a classroom or school" (p.83) and for students, "school violence is anything that makes us afraid to come to and stay at school" (p.83).

Statistics of School Violence

School violence is not a new phenomenon; it has appeared throughout history. School violence is also a problem other countries have struggled with over the years (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and technology, 2007). Prior to the 1950s, school violence was of little concern to school officials. A 1949 survey of high school principals found no difficulty with either student violence or destruction of property (Warner et al., 1999). However, a survey conducted in 1956 by the National Education Association (NEA) found that violence was becoming more of a concern

within the schools (Warner et al., 1999). According to Ebaugh (2007), in 1958 the deadliest act of school violence occurred when a fourth- grader set fire at a Chicago Catholic School that killed 95 people.

It was not until the 1970s that the "rates of violence in the schools began to skyrocket" (Warner et al., 1999, p.53). The early 1970s witnessed the first comprehensive study of school crime which was conducted by the National Institute of Education (1991). A conclusion from this study was that adolescents were at a greater risk of becoming victims of violence while at school than when away from school. A study in the late 1980's found that 91,000 of the nation's teachers, or almost 4%, were attacked physically in that year by students (Gaustad, 1991). In addition, research conducted during this time period revealed that 34% of a nationwide sample of eighth and tenth graders reported that they were robbed, threatened, or attacked while at school or on a school bus (Greenbaum, 1989).

During 1990 and 2000, school violence was on the rise. It was reported that 20% of all public schools experienced one or more serious violent crimes such as rape and aggravated assault, while 71% reported violent incidents (DeVoe et al., 2004). In 1999, students between the ages of 12 and 18 were victims of approximately 2.5 million total crimes at school, with about 186,000 of those crimes being serious and violent in nature. Of these violent crimes, 47 school related deaths were reported between July 1, 1998 and June 30, 1999, including 38 homicides, 33 of which involved school-aged children (Kaufman et al., 2001a). According to Cornell (2007) between the years of 1992 and 2002, a total of 261 school-age youth died in homicides at school. A 1999 study found that approximately 8% of students in grades 9 through 12 were threatened or injured with

a weapon, 14% reported having a fight, and close to 7% of students in grades 6 through 12 reported being bullied (Kaufman et al., 2001a). It is believed that if the rates of youth crime continue to increase as they have in the past 10 years, juvenile arrests for violent crime will double by the year 2010 (U.S. Department of Justice, 1993).

<div align="center">Youth Violence</div>

The rate of youth violence is debated among researchers. Denenberg et al. (1998) concluded that in recent years there has been an "eruption of violent crimes committed in schools throughout the country" (p.31). Others believe that statistics may be misleading. Bluestin (2001) reported that the incidence of youth crimes has been relatively flat over the decades, and the number of violent incidents is actually down. A comparison of 1999 statistics found 200,000 fewer school-related crimes and 67,000 fewer serious violent crimes from the year prior (Bluestein, 2001). According to Tucker (2002), youth crime is at "its lowest ebb in a generation… but as a result of news coverage… adults believe juvenile crime is increasing" (p.B2). Even though the overall rate of violence has declined in recent years; the rates of violence committed by youths have increased over the last 10 years (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1995).

From 1983 to 1993, arrests of youth charged with serious violent offenses have risen by 70% (Shalala, 1994). In those same years, the number of young people who committed homicides tripled (Shalala, 1994). In 1991, juveniles were responsible for about 1 in 5 violent crimes (FBI, 1993; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992). During the peak year of 1993, there were about 3,840 juvenile arrested for murder, while the number dropped by about one third to 1,360 in 2002 (Snyder, 2002). In 1997, 1,700 teens under the age of 18, were implicated in 1,400 murders (Snyder, 2002). Arrest of juveniles

accounted for 12% of all violent crimes in 2002 (Snyder, 2002). Violence is ranked among the five leading causes of death for children and young adults aged 0 to 24 and the second leading cause of death for African American males aged 15 to 19 (Shalala, 1994).

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that the United States had the highest rates of childhood homicide, suicide, and firearms-related deaths of any of the world's 26 richest nations (Havemann, 1997). A 1991 study found that the United States had homicide rates among youth that were eight times higher than the rates of other industrialized countries (Hampton et al., 1996). When comparing youth suicide, the United States yielded twice that of other industrialized nations for children less than 14 years of age (Havemann, 1997). Dinkes et al. (2006) informed that national crime statistics show that safety in U.S. schools has improved overall, whereas other serious measures of criminal activity such as student homicides have actually worsened.

Moreover, an important difference not yet made by researchers within the area of youth violence has to do with whether or not violence is initiated by or is a response to stimuli. All of the national surveys conducted by government agencies and private industry regarding statistics of school violence shows evidence of perpetrators committing aggressive crimes; few studies have make the distinction of whether violence is retaliatory for other forms of harassment (Licktblan, 2001). Retaliatory violence has captured new headlines in recent years such as Columbine, Little Rock, and Jonesboro (KidsHealth, 2007). According to Canady (2005), students who are committing these crimes are seeking revenge for real and perceived abuse they have endured throughout years of schooling. Some researchers have combined a list of characteristics associated with youth violence (Salzinger, 2006, & Seaton, 2007). This list may begin with

characteristics such as anger, jealousy, greed, depression, and low self-esteem and lead to risky behaviors such as revenge, bullying, and substance abuse, ending ultimately with weapon carrying and violence (Kam, Ng-Mak, Rosari, Salzinger, 2006, & Seaton, 2007).

<center>School Violence and Racial and Ethnic Conflicts</center>

Historically, schools have welcomed newcomers in U.S. society and continue to do so (Cornell, 2007). However, previous research about intergroup relations in school is now 15 or 20 years old and it focused mostly on improving relations between whites and blacks (Schofield, 1995). Racial and ethnic relations are more complicated. According to Schofield (1995), there are factors affecting the outcomes of intergroup contacts which can include the following: ethnocentrism which is the belief that one's own group is superior, competition for resources and attention, and the relative power and status of the groups involved. Many patterns of racial and ethnic group relations in our schools are based on the ways that members of a given group have been included or excluded within American Society. According to McLemore and Romo (1998), the ability to understand present day group relations requires one learning from the events of the past which include: slavery, the discrimination faced by Southern European immigrants, the conquests of the Natives and Mexican Americans, the relocations of Japanese citizens during World War II, and the experiences of Cuban and Vietnamese refugees and other recent immigrants.

The Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center (1997) reported that the number of active hate groups motivated by race, religion and ethnicity has risen by 20 % to a total of 474. These groups continue to grow in number and membership and can be found in almost every state in the nation. There are at least 163 web sites representing

81 hate groups that emit their venomous hate demagoguery through the Internet (Intelligence, 1997). The Intelligence Project (1997) informed that there are hundreds of acts of violence motivated by hate that happen in communities and schools throughout the 50 states.

In studying the intersection of school violence with racial and ethnic conflicts, Romo (2000) observed several factors that have contributed to social conflicts among students of different backgrounds. Some factors observed were changes triggered by the civil rights movement, the diversity of U.S. immigrants and increasing awareness of ethnic identity. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1999), U.S. schools have become more diverse. This idea of diversity became a reality on Monday May 17, 1954 as a result of a decision made in the case of Brown versus Board of Education (Williams, 1987). The Supreme Court concluded unanimously that separate but equal has no place in education (Williams, 1987). Even though, this was suppose to open doors to diversifying schools it ended up being a long, difficult and tragic road to travel for nine black students in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Eventually after all the court battles, violent acts which included fighting, verbal harassment, and the involvement of the military Little Rock school system was forced into integration (Williams, 1987). However, only nine black students were enrolled at the high school. These students became known as the Little Rock Nine (Williams, 1987). The Little Rock Nine endured harassments while attending the high school such as the following: name calling, objects thrown at them, they were tripped, shoved, threatened with bodily injuries, and kicked (Williams, 1987). The Little Rock Nine had made it into the school but at a costly price. The battle between the races continued and in 1958 the

Little Rock public schools were closed. This resulted in the following: nearly half of the city's white students enrolled in private schools, one third of the students attended schools outside the city, 643 white students did not attend any school that year, and most of the black high school students including the Little Rock Nine, did not attend school (Williams, 1987).

In August of 1959, the public high schools were reopened in Little Rock, Arkansas as a result of a Supreme Court decision (Williams, 1987). The board of directors of the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce issued a formal resolution stating the following:

> The [Brown] decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, however as much as we dislike it, is the declared law and is binding upon us. We think that the decision was erroneous and that it was a reversal of established law upon an unprecedented basis of psychology and sociology… [However] we must in honesty recognize that, because the Supreme Court is the Court of the last resort in the country, what it has said must stand until there is a correcting constitutional amendment or until the Court corrects its own error. (Williams, 1987, p.119)

The crisis at Little Rock, caused the state and federal government to have conflicts which caused far-reaching repercussions throughout the country and the civil rights movement (Williams, 1987). Not only did the Little Rock incident cause violence in and around schools in the early 1900, but the U.S. Department of Education (1999) informs that hate motivated crimes, whether in the form of harassment, intimidation, grafftic, or ethnic conflicts have been apparent on school grounds.

Romo (2000) maintained for generations that tensions existed among different racial and ethnic groups, regardless of the presence of these groups in the United States. Varney and Cushner (1990) stated that misunderstandings about cultural traditions have been a common source of racial or ethnic conflict in the classroom. Furthermore, these

authors stated that a lack of awareness of the different practices of other cultural groups led to fighting among racial and ethnic groups in many schools. Also, McLemore and Romo (1998) noted that there were conflicts within ethnic groups. These authors noted that Hispanic students may be prejudiced against recent immigrants of their own ethnic group. Also, there may be tensions between U.S. born blacks as well as recent black immigrants and tensions between Asian newcomers and Asian citizens.

When the U.S. Department of Education (1999) surveyed teachers about racial tensions, a high percentage of teachers reported that they observed occasional racial tensions between students of different ethnic or racial groups. Romo (2000) said that between 30 and 35% of students are the victims of racial or ethnic violence every school year. Based on Romo's observations, group conflicts affected academic achievement as well as social relationships in the classroom and school. Ogbu (1990) suggested that when minority group students think of making good grades and doing schoolwork as acting white they fail to achieve to the best of their ability. Stephan (1985) showed that anxiety about dealing with members of other racial or ethnic groups is prevalent among students and can direct behavior in ways that detract from academic achievement. Romo stressed that in order for teachers to focus on academics, they must make efforts to prevent racial and ethnic clashes.

<center>Theories of Violence</center>

There are a number of theories that have evolved to explain violence, and the research is ongoing. Some researchers like Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) felt that the potential for violent behavior is inherent in the chemical makeup of the human body. Miller (1996) stated that violence is an inborn trait, which leads people toward aggressive

and violent behavior. Other researchers perceived that violent behavior is learned from family members, neighborhood environment, and peer groups (Loeber, F., Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). According to the Constitutional Rights Foundation (2007), 43% of students believed that violence is learned from parents. Finally, there are researchers like Weis and Farrington (1989) argued that violent behavior is the result of negative social forces such as poverty and a lack of economic opportunity. However, researchers like Fromm (1973), said that violence was not a part of human nature, nor was it common to all people. Fromm added that the general population preferred to believe that violence is completely instinctive because such thoughts negated the need to consider how social problems have contributed to an increase in violence.

Antisocial behavior which involves recurring violations of socially prescribed patterns of behavior such as aggression, hostility, defiance, and destructiveness (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). Several gunmen in history have been diagnosed as having antisocial behavior such as Seung-Hui, Harris, and Klebold (Canady, 2005). One such gunman (Cho Seung-Hui) killed a student and an adult advisor in a dormitory at Virginia Polytechnic Institiute (Canady, 2005). He then express-mailed a multimedia suicide message to a major television network, armed himself with a second weapon and hundreds of rounds of ammunition, and crossed the Institute's campus to kill an additional 30 students and faculty and wound 15 others in classrooms before taking his own life (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2007). Prior to this violent act, Seung-Hui was detained by campus police because of some disturbing writings and was evaluated by a county psychiatric where he was assessed as mentally ill but not an immanent threat.

Shortly after his release, Cho, like Harris and Klebold, began to make elaborate plans for his attack (Canady, 2005).

In 1993, Kazdin said there were between 4 and 6 million children in school that had been identified as antisocial, and the numbers were increasing. According to Walker et al. (1995), antisocial children and youth are at serious risk for negative outcomes such as: school dropout, vocational maladjustment, drug and alcohol abuse, relationship problems, and higher hospitalization, and mortality rates. In addition, Walker (1995) suggested that the severity of antisocial behavior patterns is also associated with an increased risk for police contacts and arrests.

A factor that has been linked to violence is stress. According to the Clarke, Hyman, & Zelikoff (1988), stress is the way that some people react physically and emotionally to various events that happens to and around them. Stress affects people differently and a variety of things can cause people to be stressed (Clarke et al., 1988). Clarke et al. (1988) suggested that when people are experiencing stress they are often more likely to be aggressive, angry, and irritable; these feelings contribute to violent behaviors in the community. Some common factors which may cause stress relate to employment, unemployment, relationships, studying, and chronic illnesses. There are different types of stress and each has it own symptoms. Denenberg, Denenberg, and Braverman (1998) stated, "Violence is a human response to stress. Even normal people can react violently when stress becomes unbearable" (p.31). The form of stress that Denenberg et al. referred to is chronic stress, which is the stress that comes from living in a society, plagued by never-ending troubles. It is the chronic stress that can lead to violence or to suicide along with a stroke or a heart attack. It is easy to identify with some

forms of aggressive behaviors; however, it is knowing when to control the anger so as not to do psychological or bodily harm (Aisenberg, & Ell, 2005).

In addition, developmental psychology is another area that has been used to explain why violence may occur. A theory that has evolved from developmental theorists suggested that early trauma, infant-child attachment, intrauterine growth, and other influences play a major part in brain development. It is thought that abuse is an ingredient that could lead a child to act violently. According to Buchanan (1996), 30-40% of children who suffer abuse or neglect goes on to abuse or neglect their own children. Buchanan (1996) stated that these same victims are most likely to grow up and perpetrate domestic violence to commit violent crimes and to suffer mental health.

Another element that is considered to play a major role toward violence is poverty. Researchers have debated the definition of poverty because they can not agree on what it means to be labeled poverty stricken (Causes and Effects of Poverty, 2000). According to the Causes and Effects of Poverty (2000), a definition of relative poverty which is preferred by sociologists is the following, "the poor are those who lack what is needed by most Americans to live decently because they earn less than half of the nation's median income" (p.1). By this standard around 20 % of U.S. citizens live in poverty, and this has been the case for at least the past 40 years (Causes and Effects of Poverty, 2000).

According to the American Psychological Association (1993), violence is most prevalent among the poor, regardless of race. Health U.S. (1998) said that in 1996, one out of every five children in the United States (14.5 million) lived in poverty. In 2003, the U.S. poverty rate for all individuals was 12.5%, children under 18 poverty rate was

17.6%, and children under 6 poverty rate was 20.3%, up more than 2% in 2 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). It is believed that poor people are segregated from the mainstream of American society and many see little opportunity to obtain the basic necessities of life (American Psychological Association, 1993). In fact, Lang (1998) suggested that children who see themselves as being poor feel that they are left out of the mainstream which could lead to feelings of shame and such shame can lead to violence. Researchers from different fields have repeatedly established that poverty and its contextual life circumstances are major determinants of violence (American Psychological Association, 1993).

Violence on School Property

Incidences of school violence are disturbing; however, a review of data showed that school crime and violent incidents have remained stable. Following the rash of school shootings in 1997, President Clinton commissioned the Department of Education and Justice to collaborate on a report of school safety. This joint effort was initiated after such events as the following:

1. Feb.19, 1997: 16 year old Evan Ramsey opened fire with a shotgun in a common area at a Bethel, Alaska, high school, killing the principal and a student and wounding two others.

2. March 30, 1997: Mohammad Ahmad al Naziri, 48, armed with an assault rifle, opened fire on hundreds of students at two schools in Sanaa, Yemen. Six children and two others died.

3.   Oct. 1, 1997: 16 year old outcast Luke Woodham of Pearl, Miss., was sentenced to life in prison for killing his mother, then going to Pearl High School and shooting nine students. Two students died, including the suspect's ex-girlfriend.

4.   Dec. 1, 1997: Three students were killed and five others wounded as they took part in a prayer circle in a hallway at Health High School in West Paducah, Ky. Michael Carneal, 14, described as emotionally immature, pleaded guilty but mentally ill and was sentenced to life. One of the wounded girls was paralyzed (Indianapolis Star, 2003).

The first Annual Report on School Safety (1998) presented a statistical description of the nature and scope of crime and violence on school property. The report integrated information from numerous national surveys and reports. There were a number of conclusions drawn from the data collected as a result of this study. The first conclusion revealed that most school crime is theft; while these crimes are not considered violent in nature, they do account for 62% of crime against students in 1996. Another conclusion stated that students are not more likely to be victimized than in previous years. In fact, the overall school crime rate between 1993 and 1996 declined slightly. In addition, in the past 20 years there has not been a significant change in the number of twelfth graders (5%) reporting that they were intentionally injured at school either with or without a weapon.

Another conclusion from this report informs that homicide in schools is a rare event. In fact, less than 1% of children who were murdered in 1992 and 1993 combined were killed at school. However, the number of multiple homicide events in school and victims in these events has increased. Another conclusion suggests that only ten percent

of public schools reported one or more serious violent crimes to the police during the 1996-97 school year. From the percentage reported, the most common types were physical attacks and fights without weapons. Also, it was reported that students in the upper grades and in larger schools are more susceptible to crime at school. In addition, from 1992 to 96 an average of four out of every 1000 teachers were the victims of serious violent crimes.

In view of the data from this study, other conclusions were revealed about violence on school property. One conclusion showed that the percentage of students bringing weapons to school has steadily declined across race, ethnicity, age, and gender. Another conclusion for the 1996-97 school year, revealed that approximately 6100 students were reported as being expelled for bringing firearms to school which was a decline from previous years. Also, despite an overall decline in the rate of student victimization at school, more students report feeling unsafe at school or traveling to and from school. Even though students express feelings of being unsafe most reports emphasize the overall security of students while at school (Linder, J.2006; National School Safety Center, 2006). In addition, the presence of street gangs and drugs is related to increased school crime and victimization of students. The inference to be drawn from these statistics is that violence in school is no different than it has been over the last two decades, except for the incidents of mass murder.

Types of Violence

Children face many different types of violence in society; however, the two major types of violence that children encounter at school are fighting and bullying. For families it has always been the belief that schools were a safe place for children to learn (Bluestein, 2001). Times have changed and so have the safety of children in school

systems (Capozzoli, & McVey, 2000). The United States Department of Education (1999) suggested that 12% of 12 through 18 years old students reported experiencing any form of victimization at school. In a 2001 survey of high school students it was reported that 17.4% had carried a weapon to school during the 30 days prior to the survey. In addition, The United States Department of Education (2002) reported that 57% of expulsions for bringing firearms to school involved high school students, 33% involved junior/middle school students, and 100% involved elementary school students.

Another type of violence that is observed most often within the school setting is fighting. There are many different reasons why a fight starts, but usually it is because of a disagreement (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1989). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1989), most fights that students encountered were with acquaintances such as the following: family members, friends, and romantic dates. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (1989) estimated 18 physical fighting incidents occurred per 100 students per month. However, the incidence of physical fighting was four times higher for males students (28 incidents per 100 students) than for female students (7 incidents per 100). The incidence was highest for black male students (47 incidents per 100), followed by Hispanic male students (35 incidents per 100) and White male students (22 incidents per 100). In a nationwide, 1999 National Report, 15% of high school students had participated in a physical fight in 1998.

According to Lines (2006), there are stages that happen when students fight. The first stage can start with behaviors such as pushing, shoving, tripping, tackling, name-calling, or teasing; these are some of the actions that could cause the friction between two or more students. The next stage can occur quickly; it takes place when a crowd gathers

and a rush of children move from one place to another. The result of all three stages is that the fight stops and the teacher arrives or the teacher arrives and the fight stops. In the end comes the consequence, in which the fighters receive some form of discipline and an on-going record is kept of their confrontation. Being knowledgeable about the stages of fighting could be valuable information for educators because it may help reduce fighting in the schools. This would be beneficial since research has shown that physical attacks or fights without a weapon are the most common incidents, occurring in 64% of all public schools (Baum, DeVoe, Noonan, Peter, & Snyder, 2006).

Another type of violence that is seen in the school system is bullying. Bullying is defined as threats or intimidation, verbal cursing, teasing, and physical attacks (Delville, Holden, & Newman, 2005). It is a common experience for many children and adolescents. In fact, school bullying is perhaps the most severely underrated problem within an educational system (Arnette, Quiroz, & Stephans, 2006). Research indicated that 15 to 20 % of all students are victimized by bullies at some point in their school experience (Shore, 2005). Nationwide, almost one in three children is involved in bullying either as a bully or as a victim (Shore, 2005). Plus, studies have demonstrated that students who were bullied are more likely to be involved in physical fights (Kazembe, Muula, Rudatsikira, & Siziya, 2007).

According to Slonje and Smith (2008), there are several types of bullying such as the following:

> Physical- hitting, tripping, shoving
> Verbal- name-calling, taunts, teasing
> Psychological- excluding, rumor, gossip, bossing, threatening
> Sexual orientation- ostracism based on gender preference
> Sexual harassment- taunts, touching, coercion, offensive sexual comments
> Cyberbullying- harassment through Internet, e-mail, cell phone.

Bullying has been characterized as a specific form of repetitive violence (Jacobs, 2008).

The exact reasons that students engage in bullying behaviors are unclear; the literature on

bullying suggests that several factors influence bullying behavior, including the desire to

be accepted, family dynamics such as parental involvement, and students' views of

themselves (Goossens, Olthol, 2008). When comparing the races against each other, there

were some differences that developed. It appears that boys were more likely than girls to

report being victims of bullying (Bellmore, Graham, & Mize, 2006; Carlyle, & Steinman,

2007) whereas, the girls were more likely than boys to report suicidal thoughts and plans

(Jang, Koo, Park, & Schepp, 2006).

Research showed that school bullying has both immediate and long-term

detrimental effects. Researchers suggested that victimization due to bullying is correlated

with student absenteeism, poorer academic achievement, social isolation, and

internalizing problems such as depression, anxiety, suicidality, low self-esteem, and

poorer psychosocial adjustment (Olweus, D., 1993; Klomek, A., Marrocco, F., Kleinman,

M., Schonfeld, I., Gould, M., 2007; Poteat, V., Espelage, D., 2007; Kim, Y., Koh, Y.,

Leventhal, B., 2005; Ling, H., Fisher, A., Lombard, C., 2006). According to Troop-

Gordon and Ladd (2005), there is a link between peer victimization and self-esteem,

whereby individuals who have been ridiculed by peers internalize negative messages

about themselves and are more vulnerable to developing anxiety and depression. Also,

recent studies discovered that posttraumatic stress has been linked to prolonged bullying

(Eisenberg, Radel, 2005; Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005).

A longitudinal study conducted by Shore (2005) suggested that many of the negative effects associated with childhood bullying are low self-esteem, depression, and social isolation; effects that can last into adulthood. According to a survey conducted by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2001), as many as half of all children are bullied at some time during their school year and at least 10% are bullied on regular basis. Bullying behaviors can be either physical or verbal. AACAP (2001) argued that boys tend to use physical intimidation or threats irregardless of the gender of their victims, whereas girls are more often verbal usually with another girl as the target. Children who are bullied can suffer from social and emotional maldevelopment and it can affect their school performance.

As a result, some victims of bullying have even attempted suicide rather than continue to endure such harassment and punishment (AACAP, 2001). On the other hand, it has been noted that bullies thrive on controlling or dominating others. AACAP (2001) reported that bullies have often been the victims of physical abuse or have been bullied themselves during their lifetime. Negative interactions among students can have an affect on the atmosphere of violence in schools. Olweus (1994) shared the following about a student being bullied or victimized.

> A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time; to negative actions when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another. Negative actions can be carried out by physical contact, by words, or in other ways, such as making faces or obscene gestures, and intentional exclusion from a group. (p. 1173)

In addition, Due et al., (2005) stated that on average, those who are bullied more extensively suffer from numerous and severe symptoms.

Affects of Violence on School Behaviors and Learning

Students

Children react to violence they experience or witness in different ways and are affected by violence in diverse ways. Due to the fact that media covers many acts of violence in schools, many children have either became aware or will become aware of the violent acts taking place around them (Crime Library, 2007). How a child responds to an act of violence will vary depending on a child's age, personality, and maturity level (Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, 2007). According to the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program (2007) some children, particularly those under the age of nine, may be unable to grasp the reality of the tragedy or comprehend that violence could affect their own lives. Others may be frightened that something could happen to them while some children may attempt to protect themselves through denial, sarcasm, or apathy. However, regardless of the way a child responds, he or she will be looking for answers, guidance, and support.

Consequently, children who were directly involved in an incident may suffer from severe anxiety or trauma and will probably need professional help (Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, 2007). Nonetheless, all children affected by violence could experience some of the following possible effects: (a) disrupted sleep patterns-frequent night mares and/or insomnia, (b) changes in eating habits- loss of appetite or overeating, (c) decline in school performance, (d) lack of concentration, (e) irritability or prolonged depression, (f) refusal to go to school, (g) headaches, stomach aches, and backaches, (h) excessive worry, (i) increased arguing, (j) irrability, withdrawal, and cling behavior. (Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, 2007).

School violence acts can have many different kinds of effects on children, one being a child's ability to learn. Previous research has linked school violence with

increased disruptive student behavior, poor attendance rates, and academic failure, as well as stressful school environment (DeVoe et al., 2005; Gorman, Nakamoto, Schwartz, Toblin, 2005; Goleman, 2006). Craig (1992) suggested that when children's energies are drained because they are defending themselves against outside dangers or warding off their own fears, they have difficulty learning in school. Not only can violence affect learning, but it can also have an effect on children's social skills. According to Terr (1983), children who have been victimized by or who have seen others victimized by violence may have trouble learning to get along with others. The anger that is often instilled in affected children is likely to be incorporated into their personality structures. Carrying an extra load of anger makes it difficult for these children to control their behavior and increases their risk for resorting to violent action. Children learn social skills by identifying with adults in their lives. Children cannot learn passive ways of interacting with others when their only models, including those in the media, use physical force to solve problems (Garbarino et al, 1992).

Furthermore, children who are traumatized by an act of violence tend to cope in different ways. To control their fears, children who live with violence may repress feelings (Gilligan, 1991). This defensive maneuver takes its toll in their immediate lives and can lead to further pathological development (Gilligan, 1991). It can interfere with their ability to relate to others in meaningful ways and to feel empathy. Children who can not empathize with others' feelings are less likely to curb their own aggression (Gilligan, 1991). Also, when children experience a trauma, a common reaction is to regress to an earlier stage when things were easier (Terr, 1983). In addition, children who are traumatized by violence may have difficulty seeing themselves in future roles that are

meaningful (Terr, 1983). Furthermore, children who fall into this category can have distorted memories, and their cognitive functions can be compromised (Terr, 1983). Children need to feel that they can direct some part of their existence, but children who live with violence learn that they have little say in what happens to them (Terr, 1983).

In addition, research showed that chronic exposure to violence also negatively affects a child's ability to learn (Prothrow-Stith & Quaday, 1995). According to Prothrow-Stith and Quaday learning itself is an essential tool for violence prevention. Children who achieve in school and develop reading, critical-thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills are better able to cope with stressful and perhaps dangerous situations (Massey, 2000). Academic achievement enhances the development of positive self-esteem and self-efficacy, both of which are necessary for experiencing emotional well-being and achieving success. The relationship between violence and learning is particularly significant because cognitive skills are crucial in terms of academic success, self-esteem, coping skills, and overall resilience. Massey (2000) suggested that interventions should begin early to help children develop higher-order thinking skills, empathy, impulse control, anger management, peaceful conflict resolution skills, and assertive communication techniques.

According to Prothrow-Stith and Quaday (1995) exposure to violence can have negative psychological and physiological consequences which can affect school performance. There were several findings that were concluded from their research. One finding was that children who have been exposed to violence can have increased anxiety, which may make it difficult to attend to what is going on in school. Another finding was that psychological problems associated with trauma and violence may interfere with the

learning process and can affect memory and the ability to incorporate and transfer skills. The final result was that problems with school performance have been linked to violent behavior; including poor verbal skills, difficulty with attention, and antisocial behavior.

Middle-School Students

Middle-school students are more vulnerable than students of other ages to problem behaviors, including substance abuse, bullying, and violence (Simonsen, 2008). Researchers are debating the causes that might explain the effects of school violence on middle-school students. According to the Constitutional Rights Foundation (2007), studies have suggested two reasons for the higher rates of middle school violence. First, early adolescence is a difficult age and young teenagers are often more physically hyperactive and have not learned acceptable social behavior. Second, many middle school students come into contact for the first time with young people from different backgrounds and distant neighborhoods. However, these are not the only reasons provided for the increase in middle-school violence. Simonsen (2008) contributes the rise of middle-school violence to rapid biological and social changes that middle-school students encounter during these years.

Researchers are not the only people looking for reasons why school violence has increased in middle schools. Some of the other people are educators, police, and national school violence specialists. According to District Administration (2007), between the years of 2003-04 and 2005-06 violence or the threat of violence in suburban and rural middle schools grew 3.4%, despite a 3.9% decline in the overall middle school population. Other statistics provided by District Administration (2007) consist of the following: confiscation of weapons increased 13%, and reports of sexual harassment

were up 28%. The U.S Department of Education (2002) states that 94% of middle schools reported violent incidents in 2006 compared with 87% in 2000. However, one area that has declined by 16 percent was drug offenses. Even though middle school violence has increased in recent years, it is important to remember that the overall rate of violence has declined. This is why the researcher has chosen to focus the study on middle-school students in an effort to provide some insights into why middle-school students are more aggressive than other students.

Teachers

Students are not the only people affected by school violence; many teachers are affected as well. Teachers face more threats of violence and intimidation in school systems now than ever before. According to Devoe et al. (2000), in the 1999-2000 school year 9% of all teachers were threatened with injury by a student from their school, and 4% were physically attacked by a student. Another study conducted by Devoe et al. (2000) reported that 599,000 violent crimes against teachers were committed. On the average in each year from 1996-2000, about 28 out of every 1,000 teachers were victims of serious crimes which included the following: rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault. However, this was a decrease in the rate of crimes against teachers than in previous years. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice reported from 1994 through 1998 that teachers were victims of 1,755,000 nonfatal crimes at school, including 1,087,000 thefts and 668,000 violent crimes such as rape or sexual assault. This translates into 83 crimes per 1,000 teachers per year.

Furthermore, teaching was once considered a safe and honorable occupation for women and men. However, DeVoe, et al. (2000) suggested that some teachers are at a

greater risk for victimization from disrupted students. According to O'Halloran (2000), violence against teachers appears to be on the rise and those assaults on teachers are averaging at least one per day. Also, males are more than twice as likely to be victims of violent crimes, and teachers at middle and junior high schools are at a greater risk than elementary or senior high school teachers. In addition, violence against teachers is higher at urban schools. It is hard to imagine returning to school after suffering an act of violence. This violence has to take a personal toll on teachers and other staff members. One would believe that it could affect their work and may lead them to leave the profession. There are already shortages in the teaching profession, and now with violence in schools, the shortage may become larger. In fact, Futrell (1996) suggests that teachers are leaving the profession for some of the following reasons: more and more teachers report that they are afraid of students in their classrooms, some teachers are cautious to discipline children out of fear for personal safety, and they are tired of the aggravation of trying to teach in environments that are not conducive to learning.

School violence can personally affect teachers in many ways. According to Pik (1987), acts of violence can devastate teachers in the following ways: a multitude of stresses, damaging morale, and self-efficacy. In addition, it can force teachers and administrators to make major changes to the classroom curriculum in order to avoid confrontation and drastically reduce teaching time (Pik, 1987). From the literature review, it was difficult to obtain data that mainly targeted principals. However, it appears that teachers are the ones who deals with violent acts in their classrooms and principals deal more with irate parents.

Parents

Another group of people touched by acts of violence are parents. The parents whose children attend schools where violence does occur are more apt to react with fear for the safety of their children (Foxman, 2007). Some parents' reaction to violence may be home schooling (Foxman, 2007). However, parents who have not personally had children affected by violence have a different opinion. According to Crime Library (2007), a survey conducted after the Columbine shooting demonstrated that parents felt that their children's safety had increased from 27% to 42%. It appears that parents who have not experienced an act of violence at their child's school may not view violence as a big problem.

A personal situation for a parent is the loss of a child through school violence. According to Foxman (2007), parents go through feelings of denial, then rage at the arrogance of whoever dared to kill. Also, parents are affected by the loss of a child in several ways such as the following: lack of sleep, post-traumatic stress, divorce, and depression (Foxman, 2007). Divorce between parents who have lost a child happens because of the stress of coping with the loss, as it places a tremendous strain on the relationship (Foxman, 2007).

Community Members

Furthermore, communities are considered as an extension of the family. If communities are not responsive to the needs of families, there can be repercussions for school violence. A child who starts acting violently will often do so during periods of unstructured and unsupervised time (Pride, 1998). The peak time for violence is between 3 pm and 7 pm. According to a survey by Pride in 1998, a nonprofit drug prevention

program, students who did not carry guns to school were 53% more likely to be involved in community-based after school programs, and 34% were more likely to be involved in school activities like band and sport teams. It appears that communities can play a positive role to make a difference in school violence.

Community openness to diversity and differences can also relate to school violence. According to The State of America's Children Yearbook (1998), prejudices born in the home may be reinforced by a community attitude of hostility towards people who are different based on their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Also, discrimination and harassment often escalate to violence by children against children, which could take place in the school setting. Communities could play a major role in school violence by providing an extra curriculum for children and being a good role model.

<div align="center">Perceptions of School Violence</div>

Perceptions of school violence acts can vary among the school family which consist of students, teachers, principals, parents, and community members. Price and Everett (1997) conducted a series of studies examining the perceptions of students, principals, and teachers surrounding school violence. A national study was performed with almost 600 school principals to assess their perceptions of school violence. The results showed that a relatively small percentage of principals viewed violence related acts such as threatening students (11%), stealing (10%), fighting (5%), and gang activity (3%) as major problems for their school. Principals believed that parental factors such as lack of involvement and supervision played a major role in the use of violence by

students. Also, principals viewed violence provocation as playing a major role in the cause of violence at school.

Teachers and students' perceptions of school violence indicated that both types of respondents believed the lack of parental supervision and involvement, exposure to violence in the media, and students' lack of motivation were major contributors to the use of violence at school (Everett & Price, 1995; Price & Everett, 1997). Both teachers and students viewed gang involvement and peer pressure as major contributors to school violence. Teachers were more likely to view other school factors such as overcrowding or lack of school supervision (13% to 17%) and students academic achievement level (22% to 29%) as contributing to school violence. Students and teachers differed with regards to perceptions of the schools efforts to address school violence. In fact, one in four students believed that steps taken by the school were of little help in addressing violence while 86% of school teachers believed that steps taken were adequate or more than adequate (Everett & Price, 1995; Price & Everett, 1997).

Even though parents may not be able to implement a program in the school itself, they can play an important role by discussing issues with their child and attending school board meetings. In fact, some studies suggest that communities and families may serve as a safety net for helping youth avoid or cope with risk and violence (Aisenberg, E., Ell, K., 2005; Ozer, E., 2005). Sutherland (1991) offered suggestions for parents, which may prove beneficial to all involved. First of all, parents can attend board meetings to discuss the information they are learning from their child as well as volunteer with young children. Research by Hill and Jones (1997) has shown that mothers need to be more aware of the reality of school violence. In their study, both mothers and their children

filled out a questionnaire on community violence. The questionnaire measured the frequency and type of violence that parents felt that their children had observed. It was found that the majority of mothers reported that their children had observed no instances of violence; in reality, approximately 85% of the children reported being a witness to violence. This may indicate that mothers are not very knowledgeable about the violence their children experience each day.

Violence can take place against everyone in the community such as children, youth, women, men, and the elderly. The Columbine High School tragedy left U.S. schools communities shaken by the knowledge that there may be troubled youth with the will and ability to commit acts of violence (Butterfield, 2001). According to Walker (1995), 89% of respondents in 700 cities and towns surveyed by the National League of Cities in 1994 said that school violence is a problem in their community. In the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1993) researchers identified several major causes for increased violent behavior at school and in the community which consist of the following: poverty, racism, unemployment, substance abuse, easy access to weapons, inadequate or abusive parenting practices and frequent exposure to violence through the media.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

The literature supports the fact that incidents of school violence are no more prevalent in today's schools than they were 20 years ago. In fact, the overall rate of violence has declined in recent years; however, the rates of violence committed by youth have increased over the last 10 years (Office of Juvenile and Delinquency Prevention, 1995). Even though there has been an increase in youth violence it has not affected the

overall rate of school violence. According to the Office of Juvenile and Delinquency Prevention (1995), in the past few years, the severity of violence acts has shifted from fights and harassment to murder. With all the publicity that has been focused on high profile school shootings like Columbine; they have prompted a focus on school violence and the ways in which schools are responding.

An abundance of literature surrounding school violence exists; however, there is not a great deal of information about how students perceive violence. MacDonald (1996) suggested that there is a discrepancy between perceptions and statistics. The literature seems to reveal different opinions of ways to make schools safe. The people making all the decisions are not always in the forefront of everyday acts of violence taking place; these acts are fights, bullying, harassment, and verbal abuse. To make a difference in school violence, it is the researcher's belief that we have to see all people's viewpoints. The many different perceptions need to be studied in order to plan for a safe and learning school environment.

Chapter 3 of the study will articulate the research methodology. The design of the study will be explained including the sample and population, data instruments used, and the specific data collection and analysis procedures utilized. Chapter 4 will provide communication of the findings of this qualitative study in relationship to the three research questions. Chapter 5 will discuss the immediate and long-range implications of this study. Recommendations for further research regarding the effects of school violence will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore the affects of school violence on middle-school children, faculty, parents, and community members in a small community. This study focused on the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of participants that were indirectly affected by an act of school violence along with the problems that can develop. These problems involved but were not limited to the following areas: the learning process of students, the participants' perceptions of attitudes toward school violence, and the participants' perceptions of the main causes of school violence. This study built on the literature regarding responses to school violence in a unique way. Rather than only focusing on the responses the school had taken, this work addressed the perceptions of all members within this small community who indirectly experienced school violence. In this way, everyone involved in the school community had a voice on the issue of the effects of school violence.

This chapter outlined the process and procedures for a qualitative case study. This chapter provided an overview of the research design, demographics of the middle school, the role of the researcher, data collection, and the data analysis methodology. In addition, this chapter focused on ethical protection of the participants, and the criteria for selecting the participants.

Research Design and Justification

The methodology for this case study was selected to provide understanding and explanations of a social phenomenon dealing with school violence in a small rural middle school. Yin (2003) suggested that the distinctive need for case studies evolved out of the

need to understand complex social phenomena. To be precise, a case study method allowed researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. The qualitative case study described in this paper seek to understand perceptions of students, teachers, parents, and community members indirectly involved with an act of violence that occurred in a small rural middle school. Research questions that led this study are the following:

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

1.　　　What are the overall perceptions of the school community including students, teachers, parents and community members in regards to school violence?

2.　　　To what extent does school violence impact student success and teacher effectiveness?

3.　　　What do students, teachers, parents, and community members perceive to be the primary contributing factor to school violence?

For this study, the primary source of data was interviews that center on open-ended questions asked of each participant. Mason (2000) stated that interviews are one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative research methods. The structure of the questions provided for in-depth interviewing. According to Seidman (1989), the goal of this approach is to have the participant reconstruct his or her responses to the situation of school violence. This is important because qualitative interviews enable the researcher to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which the researcher did not participate. Also, finding interviewees with the relevant, first-hand experience is critical in making the results convincing.

Creswell (1998) referred to five research traditions that can be used in a qualitative study identified as the following: biography, phenomenology, grounded study, ethnography, and case study. A case study is the most appropriate tradition for this study since the researcher is interested in the participants' perspective of school violence. A case study examined a single instance or event: acts of school violence fit this catergory. In addition, a case study provided a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting the results (Creswell 1998). Creswell (1998) stated that the researcher might gain a sharpened understanding of why school violence happens, and what might be considered for future research.

<p style="text-align:center">Reliability and Validity</p>

In a research study there are several types of validity that may be sufficient. However, for this study content validity seemed to be the most appropriate. According to Types of Validity (2007), content validity happens when the research provides adequate coverage of the topic being studied. This includes measuring the right thing as well as having an adequate sample. For this study, the formal interview guide developed enabled the researcher to cover the topic of school violence. Also, the sample of participants was taken from a suitable target group. The sample group for this study involved participants who were indirectly impacted by the act of school violence that occurred at the middle school.

When conducting qualitative research, it is important to triangulate the data collection results. According to Merriam (2002) the description for triangulation is using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings. Merriam informed that triangulation can be employed to ensure internal validity

of a study by using data from the interviews to confirm with documents or artifacts relevant to the study. Therefore, triangulation for this study was accomplished by transcribing the interviews and looking for themes and patterns to build a coherent justification of the data which was compared to sources from documents or artifacts. Documents and artifacts used in this case study were newspaper reports provided by the local county news and videos, which were provided, by a local new station. Yin (2003) noted that documents can provide other specific details to corroborate information from other sources. Newspaper articles and videos were used to help understand the scope of school violence. To enhance the validity of the study, the researcher conducted member checking with the adult research participants. The researcher created short interpretations or summaries of the data that are called theoretical memos. These theoretical memos were returned to the adult participants to check my interpretations of the data with the participants' own understanding. The researcher obtained feedback on the initial summaries by taking information back to informants. Creswell (1998) informed that this could be a key verification step in the research.

<p style="text-align:center">Plan of Action</p>

The plan of action included specific guidelines and the rationale for the selection of participants, as well as ethical considerations necessary for guaranteeing respect for all those involved in the research process. A formal interview guide provided assurance that the research questions were answered with accuracy and consistency across participants. A description of the environment and the rationale for the site selection provided contextual information to better understand the lived experiences of the participants. The interview questions reflected the focus of the research and provided opportunities for

participants to describe their perceptions of school violence. Individual interviews reflected the methodological approach that was guided by a qualitative case study.

Population

The school where this study was conducted is in a rural county and includes grades six through eight with a population of 336 students. According to the Georgia Department of Education, 2005-07 the students are divided by race and ethnicity which consist of the following: Asian, blacks, Hispanic, Native American/Alaskan Native, whites, and multiracial. The two prominent races are African American and Caucasian. This information demonstrated that the population of African American students in this rural county school is 59% higher than the state percentage of enrollment for middle schools in the state of Georgia is 38%. On the other hand, the white students in this rural county school represent 39% of the student population and lie below the state percentage of enrollment for middle schools located in the state of Georgia which is 47%.

According to the Department of Education (2007), out of the 336 students enrolled at this particular middle school, 87% of the population is considered economically disadvantaged and 14% are labeled with disabilities. When comparing these percentages to other middle schools in the state of Georgia, the economically disadvantaged represent 50% of the population and students with disabilities are at 12%. There appeared to be a wider gap between economically disadvantaged students than students with disabilities when comparing this rural school to other schools in the state of Georgia. With this economical disadvantage being so high it causes the area of eligibility for free and reduced lunch for this county to be high. In order for a student to qualify for

free and reduced lunch, family income must be considered. These statistics only reinforce the fact that this rural county middle school is challenged economically.

Participants

In a case study, Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that researchers might consider any number of sampling strategies in a qualitative inquiry. Creswell (1998) stated that researchers need to have clear criteria in mind and should provide clear and convincing rationale for their decisions when designing qualitative studies. The type of sampling chosen for this study was systematic. There were 115 eighth graders at the middle school. From a master list of all students, every 19th student was chosen resulting in 6 student interviews. Since most of these students are from single parent homes, the student list was used to identify parents by choosing every 25th child on the list. This created a total of 4 parent interviews. There are 40 staff members at the middle school. Out of 40 staff members at the middle school, every tenth person was chosen totaling 4 staff members interviewed. Since there are 40 business owners in this small town, every tenth owner was chosen from a list provided by the city hall. There were 4 community members interviewed. The researcher felt that the students are the participants most vital to this study. This is why their number of interviews is higher. The total of interviews for this study was18, which consumed a lot of time between interviewing, transcribing, and coding. The researcher was capable of conducting this number of interviews; the concern will be if enough data was found. Too many interviews would be a waste of valuable time. Too few interviews can always be adjusted if the data does not start showing themes and patterns that repeat (Creswell, 1998). According to Kvale (1996) in interview

studies, the number of interviews tend to be around 15 plus or minus 10, he explained that this number maybe due to time and resources available for the investigation.

Data Collection

The primary source of data collection was interviews. According to Janesick (2004), "Interviewing is a meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic" (p.72). The rationale for the use of interviews in this study is because the researcher's beliefs that simple or brief responses will not answer the research questions. Rubin (2005) suggested that if a researcher anticipates the need to ask people to explain answers, give examples or describe their experiences, then in-depth interviews should be used. In addition, Rubin explained that through qualitative interviews researchers become aware of experiences and reconstruct events in which the investigator did not participate. In this study, the researcher's goal was to understand the perceptions of school violence and how they affect the participants. In fact, Rubin and Rubin explained that the purpose of using interviews in a case study is to find out what happened, why, and what it means more broadly.

All interviews were conducted individually at the local county middle school or at a convenient location for the participants. The site was a private and quiet setting in the counselor office at the middle school. The researcher ensured that the interview room was well suited for everyone in advance to minimize or prevent any problems from occurring, which could be uncomfortable for the interviewees. Prior to the interview sessions, the researcher made contact with the school counselor to discuss any effects that the interview could have on the students. Also, the researcher and school counselor have an

intervention plan in place so that all students who do get emotional during the interview received immediate counseling. The intervention plan consisted of individual counseling, contacting of parent, or group counseling. This was based on individual needs.

The following equipment and supplies were used: a tape recorder, tapes, writing utensils, and interview guide. Also, there were extra materials available in case of a technical problem. According to Janesick (2004), the following format should be followed when preparing for an interview: (a) be prepared with a tape recorder, tape, and a notebook to take field notes while interviewing, (b) before the interview, check your recorder and tape to see that both are functional, and (c) carry a spare tape recorder, extra tapes, and batteries.

An interview guide was used to lead the interviews (Appendix A). The guide consisted of two types of questions: open-ended questions which were general in nature that all participants answered as well as specific questions that were geared towards certain groups, such as students, school officials, parents and community members. Rubin (2005) suggested that a master checklist of interview questions is valuable when asking participants different questions. Also, follow-up questions were asked based on the interviewee responses to clarify or add vital information to the interview. According to Rubin (2005), "follow-up questions are ask in order to get more depth and understanding about an idea, a concept, a theme, an event, or an issue suggested by the interviewees that the researcher feel speaks to research concerns" (p.173). Prior to the interview, consent and assent forms were obtained from each middle school student who participated in the study. Also, the adults signed consent forms. The researcher reviewed with the participant the purpose of the study, the amount of time that was needed to

complete each interview, and plans for using the results from the interview. In addition, the participants were informed that a one-page summary would be provided with the results of the study.

During the interview, the researcher adhered to the questions from the interview guide with an exception of any follow-up questions. Also, the researcher tried to complete the interview within the time specified of 30 to 45 minutes at the beginning of the interview. The most important part of an informative interview is being a good listener. Creswell (1998) informed that an effective interviewer is a listener rather than a speaker during an interview. Furthermore, information was recorded on the interview guide in case of technical malfunction; however, these notes were quickly inscribed notes and not very detailed due to the difficulty of asking questions and writing answers at the same time.

<div align="center">Analysis</div>

The primary source of data collection was interviews; however, collecting the data is only a preliminary step. Wolcott (1994) stated that "the real mystique of qualitative inquiry lies in the process of using data rather than in the process of gathering data and the ultimate challenge lies in organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the collected data" (p.1). Once the interviews were recorded, then the researcher transcribed each interview into a Microsoft document. Rubin (2005) suggested that after transcribing, the researcher will write a summary of the contents of the interview which should include the following: name (or the pseudonym) of the interviewee, the time and location of the interview, the reasons the interviewee was included in the study, and how long the interview lasted. Following the transcription and summary of the interviews, the

researcher organized and prepared the data for analysis. First, the researcher read through all data in order to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. Notes or thoughts were written in the margins for the benefit of the researcher and then, the researcher began detailed analysis with a coding process. According to Rossman and Rallis (1998), coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks before bringing meaning to those chunks (p. 171). The coding process helped to generate categories or themes for analysis.

Rubin (2005) defined themes as, "summary statements and explanations of what is going on" (p. 207). Once the researcher developed the themes or categories, then the data from the interviews was sorted and pasted based on the established themes or categories. According to Rubin, themes enable the researcher to seek answers to the research questions in ways that allow the researcher to draw broader conclusions. Also, once themes have been defined they will be expanded and defined with further data. The researcher looked for ways of reducing the categories by grouping topics that related to each other. After making the final decision on each category, then the themes were organized into a coherent and consistent narrative that described the findings of the study. The researcher placed all data belonging to each category in one place and performed a preliminary analysis. It may be necessary to recode the existing data.

<div style="text-align:center">Role of the Researcher</div>

According to Creswell (1998), writers have agreed upon an explanation about when a qualitative study should take place by stating the following:

> One undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language (p. 14).

The role of the researcher in this study was to become the instrument for data collection. It was the researcher's responsibility to create an interview guide, attain permission for interviews (Appendix B), conduct face-to-face interviews, tape the interviews, and transcribe the interviews. Next, the researcher color-coded the data in an effort to find themes or patterns that arose from the data. Lastly, the researcher used a colleague as a peer debriefer in an effort to enhance the accuracy of the study. The peer debriefer looked at the raw data and themes in an effort to ensure that the researcher was on the right track and served as a sounding board for the researcher.

<div align="center">Ethics</div>

Ethical considerations are of vital importance and demand critical attention. Marshall and Rossman (1995) said, "qualities that make a successful qualitative researcher should be revealed through an exquisite sensitivity to the ethical issues that are present when we engage in any moral working toward openness; avoiding stereotypical assumptions; displaying honest concern and care; actively listening to each participant with empathy; and being non-judgmental (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These participants received written permission to be interviewed and explanation of how, when and where these taped interviews were conducted. Confidentiality for all participants was respected throughout the research process. (IRB Approval #09-03-08-0280736)

<div align="center">Summary</div>

As with any study, there will always be unforeseen circumstances that occur during the research process which may necessitate some flexibility in executing the research plan. The description of the methodology used in this research study provided opportunities to reflect on the practices and procedures that were used. Chapter 4 will

provide communication of the findings and give detailed descriptions of this qualitative study in relationship to the three research questions. Chapter 5 will discuss the immediate and long-range implications of this study. Recommendations for further research regarding the effects of school violence will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATIONS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, teachers, parents, and community members surrounding issues of school violence at a local middle school. This local middle school was involved in an act of school violence that happened on Thursday, September 7, 2007 which caused widespread panic through the small community in which this school is located (WMAZ-TV, 2007). A middle school student held six students hostage in a classroom for over an hour. Even though, this violent act ended without any serious injuries, it affected many people (WMAZ-TV, 2007). Due to the potential safety issues involved with discussing this particular act among the hostage students, this study is focused more broadly on the concept of school violence, rather than the hostage situation.

Data Collection

The primary source of data collection for this study was interviews. The interviewees consisted of 6 middle school students, 4 middle school parents, 4 teachers, and 4 community members. Each interview was recorded on a tape recorder. Then the researcher using Microsoft Word transcribed the interviews. Upon completion of the transcripts, the researcher used a color code system to sort the data in the effort to find themes and patterns that emerged. All tapes, interview sheets, and transcripts were kept under lock and key. In addition, there were short interpretations made of the data called theoretical memos. These theoretical memos were used to check for accuracy within the data. All adult participants received a copy of their theoretical memo. The participants

were asked to read over the researcher interpretations of their answers to help ensure that the data was accurate.

<div align="center">Overall Findings</div>

Perceptions of Students, Teachers, Parents, and Community Members

There were three main research questions that were to be answered in this study. The first research question dealt with the perceptions of students, teachers, parents, and community members concerning school violence. From the findings, there were several perceptions in each subgroup that stood out among the data. The first perception among the parents was that bullying is a factor in school violence. Next, the parents felt that school violence is a concern and more prevalent now as opposed to 10 years ago. Also, the parents believed that the safety of students is the responsibility of the administration and police department. Finally, the parents felt that the confidence level of providing a safe environment has been shaken due to the act of violence that occurred at this school last year.

The second subgroup consisted of students and their perceptions of school violence at their school. The students' first perception was that they felt safe while at school, although they perceive that some students do not feel safe. Feelings of not being safe while at school appear to be on the rise. In fact, research is demonstrating that there is a relatively high and increasing number of students who report feeling unsafe in school (Brady, K., Balmer, S., Phenix, D., 2007).) Next, the students perceived that the most frequent occurring acts of school violence are fighting, arguing, teasing, hitting, and bullying. Also, the students believed that the most serious acts of school violence are

holding people against their will, fighting, and bullying. Lastly, the students felt that they would report any school violence to an adult at their school.

The teachers made up the third subgroup. The teachers perceived that it would take a team effort to reduce acts of school violence. Next, the teachers believed that school violence has affected their mindset by worrying about what could happen. The teachers felt that they have taken on extra roles in the classroom. For example, they are expected to teach the curriculum, manage their classroom, follow safety rules set by the local board, and are suppose to be a good role model. Finally, the teachers believed that school violence could impact a student's academic achievement. This could happen by being absent from the classroom. When students are absent from the classroom then they are missing valuable instruction. However, if the students are in the classroom and are preoccupied with feelings of fear then they are also missing important information.

The last subgroup, which consists of community members, revealed their perceptions about school violence. The first perception was that there are certain behaviors that could lead to school violence such as peer pressure and lack of communication. Next, the community members' felt that their participation could be helpful in creating a safe school environment. The community members believed that this could happen by them being more observant and aware of things happening. Finally, the community members felt that it is the responsibility of the parents to reduce school violence. The following topic discusses how school violence has affected student learning.

Impacted Learning Environment

The next research question dealt with the way in which school violence acts have impacted the learning environment for both teachers and students. Teachers have been affected by school violence from the viewpoint of becoming more fearful. Now, teachers are not only held accountable for teaching the curriculum but also for controlling violence in their classrooms. According to the teachers who were interviewed in this study, school violence has changed the way that they think. Since the violent act occurred, they have all these thoughts about safety in the back of their minds, and it has distracted them from teaching the curriculum. It was the perceptions of the teachers that when students are afraid to attend school due to being fearful of bullies or a violence act occurring, then this can cause lack of concentration and increase absenteeism. When students are absent from school, they miss the instruction that is occurring in the classroom, which most likely will minimize their academic success.

Main Causes of School Violence

The last research question related to the main causes of school violence. According to the parents, bullying is the main cause. The students felt that a bad home environment and touching others are the main causes of school violence. The teachers believed that a certain kind of home environment is the main cause of violence at school. The community members perceived that substance abuse like drugs and alcohol and a low socioeconomic level are the main causes of school violence. The next section will focus on the patterns and themes that emerged from this study.

Middle School Parents Perceptions

Bullying

Some common themes emerged in the data when exploring parents' perceptions of school violence. One of the themes that emerged was that the parents' definition of school violence was centered on the word bullying. This word kept being repeated because participants considered this to be the primary factor in school violence. According to one of the parents, school violence, "has a lot to do with bullying" (P1). Also, participants theorized that school violence could have originated from bullying. In fact, another parent said, "school violence comes from bullying" (P4).

The parents who were interviewed gave several definitions of bullying. All the parents believed that bullying involves hurting or threatening others. In fact, the parents stated that bullying is, "the result of someone feeling insecure about themselves and finding the need to take it out on another just to feel good" (P3). Also, it was felt that bullying was not an isolated event. One of the participants said that bullying was "persistent bothering or threatening of one student by another" (P2).

In addition, one of the parents gave her definition of a bully, which dealt with intimidation and fear. She defined a bully as the following:

> A bully is a person who deliberately tries to intimidate others. A bully usually tries to keep fear in others and picks on them constantly. A person who bullies others also take things from their victims or makes their victims bring things to them to avoid being punished by the bully. (P3)

From the parents' perceptions of a bully, it appears that a bully not only inflicts pain on others but also intimidates them by forcing their victims to do things to avoid getting hurt or being punished by the bully.

The parents perceived bullying as the origin of school violence due to the fact that being bullied on a daily basis can alter one's mindset from an easy going person to an angry person. For example, one of the parents explained that "the students being bullied just take all that they can and finally just snap" (P2). This parent continued to discuss feelings that could contribute to a student losing control and acting out of desperation or abandonment. She stated, "these students probably feel desperate for a way to end the bullying situation and feel abandoned by all the adults that have tried to smooth the bullying situation over or even just dismissed the problem" (P2). School violence seems more likely to occur when bullying is a part of the schools culture and is a reoccurring event. One of the parents stated that, "Sometimes when bullying continues for an excessive amount of time, the one being bullied no longer gives in." This results in bullies taking other alternatives to pressure them into getting what they want (i.e. fighting and using weapons)" (P4). Also, the participants felt that when bullying is overlooked, it can become more serious. One of the parents said this about how overlooking bullying could cause school violence to occur.

> I think bullying causes school violence because it is overlooked. Most people want to say a child is acting out because of a lack of attention at home. Some even say that the child needs attention, acting out of jealousy, or comes from a single parent home. When these behaviors keep going on unaddressed, it gets worse and the violence starts. Then you have other students who want to try the same thing to get away with bullying. (P2).

This parent perceived that children see bullies acting out in the schools and not getting into trouble, so this breeds more bullies. In addition to bullying being linked with the origins and definitions of school violence, it was also associated with classroom management. The participants felt that teachers tend to overlook bullying in their

classroom, which could lead to violence in the classroom (P2). The parents felt that teachers need to be more observant and handle situations in the classroom as it happens. In fact, one of the parents was quoted as saying, "teachers try to ignore bullying than trying to handle the problem at the time that it takes place" (P2).

Violence More Prevalent

Another theme that emerged was that the participants viewed school violence as a concern. In addition, the parents perceived that school violence is more prevalent now as opposed to ten years ago. The act of violence that occurred at the local middle school left an impression on parents. One parent said that after the school violence act happened at the middle school that all she could think about was, "it has hit home now" (P4). The parents perceived that the growth of gangs could be a factor that has impacted school violence. One of the parents explained why the participants felt that school violence is more prevalent now as opposed to the past by saying, "10 years ago gangs were not evident like they are today" (P2).

Participants were concerned about all the media coverage that acts of school violence have received. School violence appears to be more prevalent than in the past because more incidents are being reported. In fact, one of the parents stated that, "every day, I think that you are hearing something on the news that is happening whether it's at a middle, high, or elementary school" (P4). Also, there was a concern about how all this media coverage affects children. One of the parents stated that, "it makes you wonder if seeing all this violence at school could influence a child so strongly that he or she might go to school and commit an act of violence just for the publicity" (P3).

Safety Responsibility of Administration and Police

The next theme that emerged was that participants believed that the safety of the students should be placed on the shoulders of administration and the police department. One of the parents felt that it is the responsibility of the "administration, but then the local police department should come in and really let the children know what is going to happen when they misbehave" (P1). Another alternative for the safety of students was aimed at the efficiency of campus police or security guards on school grounds. One of parents stated the following concerning campus police or security guards:

> Some schools should have campus police or security guards and maybe if we had more of that and they are really strict about what's going to happen and what will not happen then maybe violence will be reduced in the school. (P2)

Whether the safety of students is provided by the local police department or security guards, participants felt that the administration is primarily responsible for providing safety for all students due to the fact that administrators are usually seen as being in charge. In fact, one of the parents said that it was, "the responsibility of the person in charge like the head of the school because they are there" (P3).

Confidence in Keeping School Safe

The last theme that emerged was dealing with the parents' confidence level regarding the school's ability to keep their child safe while at school. The parents felt that the school does not do a good job protecting their children since an act of violence took place at this middle school when students should have been safe. It appears that this incident that happened at the middle school last year has shaken the confidence level of some parents. In fact, one of the parents stated the following:

> I do not feel very confident about schools in this system, especially the upper levels because of our experience with the act of violence that occurred at the middle school. They think that children around here would never do anything, and that it would never happen here. Just like people everywhere else think that it will not happen in their school system but it does. (P1)

Confidence levels may have been reduced due to the fact that some of the parents believed that the middle school has not made the necessary changes to protect their children. One of the parents commented, "I am able to just walk right in the school. So, I feel that nothing major happened after the incident. I feel that if another person wants to commit another act of violence, then they will" (P4). On the other hand, some of the parents felt that the school could only do so much in the area of safety. One of the parents said that, "I think that the school does as much as they can to protect all children. But there are some things that get out of hand before the school is able to get control of the situation" (P2). When parents decide to send their child to a certain school, they have to find a way to be confident that their child is safe while on the school grounds. One of the parents felt that the answer is "prayer" (P3). In fact, the phrase used by one of the parents seems to say it best, "with prayer all things are possible" (P3).

Summary of Parents Perceptions

Parents perceived that bullying has a strong influence on school violence. It could be considered to be one of the main causes of school violence. The parents also perceived that teachers tend to overlook bullying in the classrooms. Researchers believed that when bullying is left unattended, it can lead to prolonged violent behavior that invariably affects the school environment. Arnette and Walsleben (1998) verified that the school setting is a common place for bullying to occur, setting fear for many students. Also, the

parents believed that violence is more of a concern and more prevalent now than ten years ago, which they contribute to the growth of gangs.

There was a concern about how much media coverage an act of violence seems to attract and how it could affect children. According to Levin (1998), media coverage of violence can affects children in several ways such as the following: (a) cause an increase in mean-spirited, aggressive behavior, (b) cause increase levels of fearlessness, mistrust and self-protective behavior towards others, (c) contribute to the desensitization and callousness toward the suffering of others, (d) provide violent heroes whom children seek to emulate, (e) provide justification for resorting to violence when children think they are right, (f) create an appetite for viewing more extreme violence, (g) and foster a culture in which disrespectful behavior is valorized as a way of treating others. In addition, the parents felt that it is the responsibility of the administration and police department to control school violence. Furthermore, the parents expressed that their confidence level had been shaken since the act of violence that occurred at their children's school.

<div align="center">Community Members Perceptions</div>

Main Causes of School Violence

Some common themes emerged in the data when exploring community members', which consist of three business owners and a county official perceptions of school violence. When community members were questioned about the main causes of school violence, they indicated that substance abuse like drugs and alcohol and socioeconomic level, which focused on type of clothing worn by the students, were two of the contributing factors. One of the community members felt that "substance abuse like drugs or alcohol could be one of the main causes of school violence" (CM1). In fact,

this participant went on to explain that drugs and alcohol could be contributing factors in providing students with the determination to commit an act of violence. In addition, this participant stated that, "This could be where they get the courage to go to school and do something" (CM1). Also, a different community member expressed his concern about children who are capable of obtaining illegal drugs. CM4 felt that using drugs could lead to violence.

When discussing socioeconomic levels within the community, being poor or wealthy was believed to contribute to school violence which was identified by the type of clothing students wore. One of the participants commented that a socioeconomic marker such as clothing plays into school violence (CM2). One of the participants explained that, "children are always trying to compete with each other by you know what they wear, how much money they got, and things like that" (CM2). With all the competition occurring among school children, uniforms have become a way of trying to minimize some of the rivalry among students. The participants felt that schools that enforce uniforms could enhance less competition in the area of clothing. In fact, Paliokas (2005) states that with the increasing acts of school violence there is a nationwide trend toward the adoption of more restrictive dress-code policies. One of the participants stated, " kids make fun of other kids in a non-uniform style school" (CM3). He explained this comment by describing how people can determine children's socioeconomic level by observing the kinds of clothing they wear" (CM3). For example, this participant gave the following explanation of why he felt this way.

> Before schools began to implement school uniforms it was very obvious which children were wearing designer clothes and which ones were wearing off brand clothing and if he noticed as an adult then he knew that children in that school were very aware of the difference. (CM3)

Another piece of clothing, which was a determining factor that could be related to a low socioeconomic level, was the type of tennis shoes worn by children. In fact, one of the participants stated that while in the school visiting one day that she "overheard a conservation among a couple of students discussing the cost of their tennis shoes" (CM1).

Behaviors That Lead to School Violence

As a result of the interviews with community members, it was discovered that many of them thought that certain behaviors could lead to school violence. These behaviors are peer pressure and lack of communication in the home, which they believe affect the students both inside and outside of the school environment. The participants felt that lack of communication in the home was a force outside the school that could have a negative effect on students when in the school environment. One of the participants explained that "something was lacking at home like communication" (CM1). Without communication some students lack a sounding board for dealing with problems. In addition, sometimes children are missing one or both parents in the home environment, which could provide the support that is needed to solve problems rationally. In fact, one of the participants believed that children are missing either "a father figure or even a mother at home, which leaves them with no one to discuss problems they are facing" (CM1).

With community member believing that one or both parents are missing from the household, then they felt that the responsibility of raising the children sometimes falls on the grandparents. One of the participants stated that, "in this small community there are a lot of grandparents raising the children and what is that saying to the children" (CM1).

This participant went on to explain that children being raised without a mom or a dad already feel unwanted and being raised in a household with the elderly there could be a lack of communication "happening between the generation" (CM1). However, when parents are in the household, there still is the possibility of a lack of communication. The participants believed that some parents do not know what their children are involved in and who they are friends with inside and outside the school environment. One of the participants stated that, "some parents do not have good communication with their children and do not know what is going on" (CM2). This comment was echoed by another community member who felt that "parents did not know what their children were doing when they were not around and did not talk to their children about right or wrong" (CM4). Even though, these community members are stating broad generalizations about other peoples' situations, it is still their perception that the lack of communication could lead to negative behaviors that could cause school violence.

Peer Pressure

For the community members peer pressure was considered to be a force that could lead to violence in the schools. From an educator and researcher viewpoint peer pressure has always been a factor in the school system. It appears that children just want to fit in at school and be popular. However, when the opposite happens, then the students could become withdrawn or do things that they think will help them fit in at school. One participant commented that "peer pressure is so tough" (CM3). Adults can forget what it is like for children in modern society. One of the participants commented that, "We do not know what is on kids' plates when they walk in the door at that school" (CM3). It is not always easy to know what children are experiencing; therefore, adults should be open

to helping them. One of the participants stated that, "We do not know what kind of home environment they live in and what they see" (CM3). Home life can either provide a positive or negative experience for children. One of the participant gave an example of a child's home life by saying the following: "If a child sees two uncles and a mother slapping each other around being rough that's all that kid knows and he thinks that this is the way to settle conflicts" (CM3). If children are learning incorrect ways of solving conflicts, then they could bring this anger to school, which could affect other students. In the participant's view, peer pressure added to bad home life could lead to school violence. One of the participants commented that "peer pressure could cause school violence" (CM1). Her reasoning for peer pressure leading to school violence was that "children are more concerned about what their friends think than doing the right thing" (CM1).

Creating a Safer School Environment

The last theme that emerged during the interviews with community members was that they viewed their own participation could be helpful in creating a safer school environment by being more observant and aware of what goes on within the community itself. There have been changes observed with children clothing's. Due to this change, one of the participants commented that members of the community need to be aware and observant of different things that goes on such as "gang clothing, and jewelry of some sort" (CM1). Not only do the community members need to educate themselves about visual changes, but there needs to be an awareness of their children's friends. According to one participant, it is important for "community members to educate themselves to the habits of their own children and be aware of their friends" (CM1). Educating of

community members about signs to watch for when at home or out in the community could lead to less violence. In fact, one of the participants commented that the "community needs to have the perception of everything now that is going on because you can not protect yourself unless you know what is going on" (CM1). The participants believed that there are ways to be more observant within the community. The community members listed the ways to be more watchful in the community as the following: "watch more of children behaviors and attitudes" (CM2) and be "aware of the activities in which their children are involved whether they be legal or illegal"(CM3, CM4). The overall conclusion is that community members need to be more watchful of students.

<div align="center">Summary of Community Member Perceptions</div>

Community members perceived that the main causes of school violence are substance abuse like drugs and alcohol as well as a child's socioeconomic level, which is marked by the type of clothing worn by the child. According to Anderson (2000), there are 10 top causes of violence: these causes are based on the opinions of young people. This list suggests that substance abuse is ranked second in the list and poverty is ranked sixth. This information demonstrates that the community members who were interviewed have a good perception of the main causes of school violence. In addition, The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher (1999) cited the following fact concerning alcohol and other drugs: Nationwide, alcohol is the drug most closely associated with violence. Drugs or alcohol is cited by 39% of seventh through twelve graders as a major factor in why violence occurs in schools.

The community members listed behaviors that they perceived that could lead to school violence, which are peer pressure and lack of communication in the home.

According to Farrington (1989), stressful family environments, such as role modeling of inappropriate behavior, conflicts in the home, lack of fathers in the home, inadequate parenting skills, and poor communication can contribute to students' feelings of worthlessness, which can manifest in the form of violence. In addition, the community members viewed their participation as helpful in creating a safer school environment by being more watchful and being more alert to what is happening in the community. In the next section, teachers' perceptions will be discussed.

<div align="center">Teachers' Perceptions</div>

Home Environment

There are several themes that emerged among teachers who participated in the interview. The teachers believed that a certain kind of home environment was the main cause of school violence. One of the teachers responded by saying that,

> A lot of times I think that it is their home life. Their situation is not good. Maybe they are not loved at home, or maybe they feel that they do not fit in, and they are just mad at the world. They just take their anger out on others and it does not matter who they take it out on (SO1).

Another participant believed that a bad home environment is the main cause of school violence (SO2). His reasoning was that, in the home, children learn a certain behavior and mimic it and possibly repeat this behavior at school. In fact, one of the participants stated that, "what they do and see at home they bring to school" (SO2). Also, several teachers talked about how children are raised at home and how this can carry over into the school system (SO3, SO4). One of the participants said, "Some children do what they want to do. They argue with their parents so when they get to school they argue with their teachers and with other students" (SO3).

Violence and its Effect on the Classroom

The next theme that emerged was that teachers perceived that school violence has impacted the role of the classroom teacher by the realization that violence could happen at any time and they have to be watchful for signs of trouble and teach the curriculum at the same time. One of the participants said that teachers are starting to feel fearful in the classroom (SO1). Feeling fearful in the classroom maybe contributed to the fact that an actual act of violence has occurred at this school. In fact, one of the teachers said that, "you never know what may happen" (SO1). Even when teachers believe that they have a handle on situations it is not always true. One teacher commented that, "you try to watch for things that are going on around you and make sure that things do not happen and try to prevent things by helping children that seem to be having problems by trying to counteract violence" (SO1).

The hostage situation last year seems to still be on the minds of the teachers and has made them feel like they need to be more alert. One of the teachers replied that after the incident happened last year with the student holding children in a classroom with a knife, "teachers have got to be on their peas and cues because now you are wondering what is going on in these kids minds" (SO2). The teachers felt since the hostage situation that they have to be more alert to what is happening not only in their classrooms but the hallways and bathrooms. There is the perception that another violent act could happen in this school and the teachers felt that they needed to be prepared by being more watchful. It makes the teachers wonder if the children came to school today to learn or to vent anger toward someone.

Teachers felt that because of the act of violence last school term that there are procedures that they go over in their mind everyday before class starts and during class which affects their concentration in the classroom. One of the teachers explained that the possibility of a school violence act makes you question yourself, "Do I have my door locked? Do I have emergency contact numbers" (SO2)? All these questions and thoughts take the teacher mind away from teaching. One participant said, "with all these thoughts in the back of your mind, it affects what you should be doing, which is teaching" (SO2).

Teachers were concerned about procedures such as locking classroom doors, which was enforced by the local board because it causes a disturbance when they have to stop teaching and open the door. One of the teachers replied that, "this is annoying because I have to open my door if someone is tapping on it and it disturbs my class" (SO3). Not only are participants teaching and dealing with safety procedures but also they are expected to be a good role model in the classrooms whether it is toward the students or towards other teachers. One of the teachers gave an example of trying to be a good role model toward another teacher when she brought her children back late after class had already started. She gave an example of this by saying the following:

> Today, I had a teacher that brought my students back late because they were taking a test; it drives me absolutely crazy when I have to restart my class because kids are late. So, when the teacher came in I was smiling and talking kindly even though internally I was mad. I hope that the students saw that even through them being late for class was not what I expected to happen but that I handled it calmly (SO3).

The teachers believed that being a good role model is important because children mimic what they see, and the teachers felt that they needed to set a good example for all students. Classroom teachers felt that setting a good example could leave a lasting

experience on the young minds of students. One of the participants commented that she believed that "being a good role model can set the tone in your classroom and that it can show the students that disagreements can be solved without violence".

Finally, teachers felt that school violence can affect students' academics by causing them to be fearful and unable to concentrate. One of the participants talked about students who are intimidated on a daily basis tend to be absent from school (SO3). This can affect students' academics achievement due to the fact that, "attendance is a large part of being in the classroom every day which helps the student to be able to understand what the teacher may have gone over" (SO3). Also, there was a concern about children asking questions in the classroom. In fact, one teacher commented that, "some children will not ask questions because they are afraid of being teased" (SO3). In fact, being teased is a form of bullying. Several teachers said that, "if children were worried about school violence, then it could play with their minds" (SO4, SO1). Playing with their minds in this statement was referring to how school violence could occupy the students' thoughts. Therefore, if the students' thoughts are on school violence, then it will not be on their academics.

<div align="center">Summary of Teachers Perceptions</div>

Teachers felt that a maladjusted home life was the main cause of school violence. In today's culture, the family has been expected to deal with virtually all familial problems inside the home. However, stresses make it very difficult for some parents to meet all of their children's daily needs. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (1991), there are factors that could contribute to these stresses such as the following: economic necessity for both parents to work, the increase in the number of

single-parent households, and the increase in teenage mothers, whose understanding of the demands of parenting is almost always inadequate. School violence can not be successfully addressed without examining the home environment. The family plays an obvious role in a child's development and resiliency to violent behavior (National Crime Victimization Survey, 1991). The National Crime Victimization Survey (1991) referred to resiliency to violent behavior as a child's ability to control his or her reaction to behaviors that will result in aggression and or/ victimization.

From the participants' viewpoint, they believed that school violence does affect classroom teachers in several ways. First, the teachers are concerned about safety for themselves and the students. Also, they feel that the apprehension about safety possibly affects the effectiveness of their teaching. According to O'Halloran (2002), violence against teachers appears to be on the rise, and assaults on teachers are averaging at least one per day. In addition, the teachers perceived that student academics could be affected by school violence. It was their perception that if students are concerned about school violence, there would be a higher rate of absenteeism. Finally, if a student is fearful while in school, then they may be concentrating on the feelings of fear rather than their academics. The following section will demonstrate how students perceive school violence.

<div align="center">Students Perceptions</div>

Main Causes of School Violence

There were several themes and patterns that emerged when interviewing the eighth grade students. Specifically, the students felt that home environment and touching others were the main causes of school violence. From the students' perspectives, touching others refers to one child having his/her hands on another child. When students are

touching each other, it usually starts off as a playful interaction. However, when one of the students get tired of the playful interchange, then it can lead to violent acts such as fighting, hitting, and kicking. The students gave examples of what happens when touching others becomes more personal such as, "touching others leads to fights" (S2) and "picking on and touching others" causes students to get mad and then "they end up fighting" (S4).

Also, the students felt that another cause of school violence was the home environment. In fact, one of the students said that "problems at home" (S1) was a main cause of school violence. When problems exist in the home, then there is the possibility of students bringing these negative feelings to school which can lead to "students fighting or worse" (S3). It appears that a maladjusted home life can determine what kind of attitude students might have when they come to school. If they come to school already angry and then are picked on by other students, they might not tolerate a lot of teasing. One of the students said that, "kids getting picked on, get mad and then they fight instead of walking away" (S6). It appears that a child's temperament could be a factor of whether that child is capable of committing a school violence act. This disposition can begin at home.

Acknowledgement of Safety

Evens with these concerns of school violence students generally acknowledge that they feel safe when at school. There seemed to be an overall agreement among the participants that cameras in the hallways and classrooms have provided a sense of safety. In fact, one of the students commented that she felt protected because of the "cameras all over the place" (S1). Not only did the cameras provide this feeling of safety, but also

teachers provided a sense of security. It was commented that the students felt that the teachers were, "always taking care of us and are strict with us" (S1). It appears that the teachers are a trusted form of authority within this school. Plus, the teachers are very visible in the school since it was felt that they would be able to control a fight immediately. One of the students said that she felt safe because, "I know that if a fight starts that the teachers will stop it" (S2). Another student commented that he felt safeguarded, "because we have the teachers" (S5). He went on to explain by saying that, "the teachers make sure that strangers do not come into the school" (S5). Teachers are serving as a security blanket for some of the students. Another student said that he felt safe and "did not have to worry about bullies" (S6). From the comments made about the teachers, they seem to be well trusted and liked in this school. The students felt that if a problem were to happen, the teachers would be there to help resolve the situation. The feeling of being safe was indicated among all eight students; however, some students felt safe but were unsure of the reasoning behind the feeling (S3).

Interviews with the students revealed contradictory responses. All students who participated in the interviews agreed that they felt safe at school; however, when they were asked about other students, they acknowledged that other students might feel unsafe. Reasons provided by the students of why other students might feel unsafe were the following: "sometimes students talk about others" (S2), "because they are scared" (S3), "people could bring a weapon and do something. You will get in trouble for it" (S4), and "because some kids get picked on everyday" (S5). Several of the students commented that they perceived other students feeling unsafe but really could not comment on why they felt this way.

Frequent and Most Serious Acts of Violence

Students shared their perceptions of what they considered to be the most frequent occurring acts of violence at their school. According to the eighth graders the most frequent acts of violence consist of the following: fighting, arguing, teasing and hitting, and bullying. Next, the students listed what they considered to be the most serious acts of school violence. They are the following: holding people against their will, fighting and bullying. When comparing their answers, it implies that bullying and fighting was considered to be a frequent and serious act of violence at their school. However, under the most serious acts several of the students said that they considered holding people against their will to be the most serious act that has occurred at their school. In fact, one of the students replied that the most serious act happened, "when that boy came to school and locked us in our rooms. He had a knife" (S3).

The act of violence that occurred at this school is having an effect on how the students perceive school violence. Holding people against their will was listed as the number one serious act of school violence that has happened at their school. Even through, a year has passed since the hostage situation; it still seems to be on the minds of the students. This one act of violence seems to have left a lasting impression on their young minds and has affected the way that they perceive school violence.

Safety on School Grounds

Another pattern that developed was concerning how the students felt about their safety or others' safety while on the school grounds. They all said that they would report unsafe issues to an adult at school. There were reasons given by the students of why they would tell an adult if they felt threatened. One of the reasons dealt with not being harmed

and receiving a good education. One of the students said that she would report a threat "because I do not want to get hurt and I want to have a better education" (S1). Another reason involved the feeling of being safe. In fact, one student said, "I want to feel safe at school and I want my friends to be safe. I do not want to come to school feeling scared all the time"(S2). The next reason that was given involved the safety of others. One of the students commented that I do not want "kids to get hurt and have to go home for fighting" (S6). Some of the participants felt that if they did not tell that it could make a situation worse. One participant replied that she would tell because "it might get worse" (S3). Several participants believed that reporting issues of safety to adults could keep them safe. In fact, research suggest that peers are not to be overlooked as sources of valuable information concerning behavior problems due to the fact that they might be more aware of certain behaviors or issues than the teachers (Mishna, F., Alaggia, R., 2005).

<div align="center">Summary of Students Perceptions</div>

The students perceived that the main causes of school violence are home environment and touching others. Also, all eight students responded that they felt safe at school but commented that other students may not feel safe. The fact is violence of one sort or another is part of many schools today. This usually involves a small group of people fighting amongst themselves. According to Kelly (2000), a completed study of the Class of 2000 provided the information that 96% of students said that they felt safe in school. However, 22% of those same students said that they knew students who regularly carried weapons to school.

Students were interviewed about the most frequent act of violence at their school and responded that it is fighting. In addition, the students listed the most serious act of violence that occurs at their school is holding people against their will. All 8 students said that they would report threats or any act of violence that they believe might occur. This has not always been true in the past; however, since the shooting at Columbine High School, and other acts of violence which have occurred, it is believed that students are starting to speak up about additional acts of violence that could take place. In fact, Butterfield (2001) reported that tips provided by students in California and Kansas have led to arrests that the police say averted three potential school massacres. This demonstrates that many acts of school violence could be stopped if students shared information with teachers, administrators, or parents. The next section will focus on views of parents, teachers, and community members as it relates to who should be held accountable for reducing school violence.

Difference of Opinion

In analyzing the data, the researcher observed one inconsistency between some of the subgroups in this study. This discrepancy was found when examining the data from interviews with parents, teachers, and community members concerning who they perceived to be responsible for minimizing acts of school violence. The parents theorized that the administration and the local law enforcement should be held accountable for reducing school violence. According to three of the parents (P1, P3, P4), all of them felt that the "administration and the local law enforcement should help reduce acts of violence". One of the parents felt that all the responsibility should be placed on the "local

police department" (P2). It was apparent from the parents who were interviewed they felt that school violence was not their responsibility.

The teachers thought that reducing the acts of school violence should be a team effort. All four of the teachers responded that minimizing acts of school violence should begin with the "parents assisted by school officials, educators, and finally the community members". On the other hand, all four community members believed that the "parents should be held accountable for reducing acts of school violence". All people involved in this study did not feel that it was their sole responsibility to reduce acts of school violence.

The responsible party for reducing school violence seems to be a question that does not have a clear answer. All the participants thought that addressing school violence is someone else's responsibility. None of the participants accepted total responsibility for reducing school violence, and in most cases the participants placed the responsibility on others. The parents placed the responsibility on the administrators and law enforcement. The teachers believe that the responsibility of reducing school violence should be a team effort, which started with the parents and ended with the community members. The community members placed the responsibility on the parents. It was evident from the interviews that in order to reduce acts of school violence; everyone will have to work together.

<center>Evidence of Quality</center>

This researcher followed several procedures to ensure the accuracy of the data. First the researcher conducted all interviews privately and asked questions that were pre-written. Each interview was recorded in order for the researcher to transcribe each

interview accurately. All adult participants received a brief summary of their interviews to check the data for accuracy. The researcher made brief notations of words and phrases that kept repeating on the transcripts to help sort the themes and pattern that developed.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

The overall perceptions of the main causes of school violence are the following: bullying, substance abuse such as alcohol and drugs, low socioeconomic level which was marked by types of clothing worn, bad home environment, and touching others which meant not keeping your hands to yourself. When students have their hands on other students this could start as a playful interaction which can then turn to violence. There were several factors that were perceived to lead to school violence. These factors are peer pressure and lack of communication in the student's homes. In addition, it was perceived that the most frequent occurring acts of school violence that happens within this middle school were the following: fighting, arguing, teasing and hitting. Also, it was perceived that the most serious acts of school violence at this middle school were holding people against their will, fighting, and bullying.

There were other perceptions that came from this study. One perception was that it was believed that violence is more prevalent now than 10 years ago. There were several reasons explaining why the participants felt this way. The first reason was due to the growth of gangs compared to ten years ago. The second reason was due to all the news coverage that acts of school violence is receiving from the media. In addition, it was perceived that school violence has affected not only the role of the classroom teachers but also the students' academics success. Finally, there was a perception of who was really responsible for minimizing acts of school violence. However, no one was willing to

shoulder all the blame; instead, all the participants were willing to blame other members of the community. The last chapter will focus on the types and kinds of violence, and root causes of school violence based on the perceptions of the participants. Recommendations will be made for further research on the topic of school violence.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND
COMMENTARY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of middle school
parents, teachers, students, and community members concerning the topic of school
violence. This section focused on the types and kinds of violence that the middle school
students, parents, teachers, and community members perceived to be the most crucial in a
school setting. According to the participants in this study, fighting and bullying were
major concerns that were perceived to contribute to acts of violence. In addition, the root
causes of school violence based on the perceptions of the participants will be discussed. It
is the participants' beliefs that the root causes are the following: home environment,
substance abuse, bullying, and low socioeconomic levels. Next, the teachers discussed
how they felt about the impact of school violence on student success and teacher
effectiveness. The teachers shared that they are more fearful and more distracted since the
hostage situation. Plus, the teachers felt that the students who were fearful of their safety
at school would suffer from lack of concentration and increased absenteeism. Finally, the
participants perceived whom they felt should be held responsible for reducing acts of
school violence will be discussed.

Interpretation of Findings

Perceptions of Types and Kinds of Violence

This study began with the following research question: What are the overall
perceptions of the school community including students, teachers, parents, and

community members in regards to school violence? This section focused on a discussion of types and kinds of violence and the major types of violence within the school walls.

Types and kinds of violence are defined as a number of people or things having common traits or characteristics that distinguish them as a group or class (Webster, 1995). In this study, types and kinds of violence refer to violence that the participants perceived as the major types of violence that children encounter at school. Children face many different kinds of violence within the confines of a school. However, all violence does not begin inside the school; it could start in the community and end in the school environment. Capozzoli and McVey (2000) organized school violence into three categories based on the beginning point of the conflict and the location.

One type of violence could begin and end at school. Another type could begin at school but end outside the school. The last type may start outside the school and end inside the school. In fact, at this particular middle school the perpetrator was dissatisfied with his home environment, which was confirmed by the local news (WMAZ-TV, 2007), causing him to bring a knife to school and hold other students hostage for over an hour. This act demonstrated Capozzoli and McVey (2000) type of violence that begins outside the school but ends in the school. The outside force, which was dissatisfaction with his home life, led to a school violence act.

The two major types of violence that children encountered at school were fighting and bullying. It was not surprising to discover that bullying was a common theme among the parents and the students. The parents felt that bullying could play a major role in school violence. In addition, the students listed bullying as one of the most frequent and the most serious occurring acts at their school. According to research, as many as 80

percent of middle school students engage in bullying behaviors. In addition, research indicated that 15 to 20 percent of all students are victimized by bullies at some point in their school experience (Shore, 2005). Nationwide, almost one in three children is involved in bullying, either as a bully or as a victim (Shore, 2005).

Another type of violence that is observed most often within the school setting is fighting. There are many different reasons why a fight starts, but usually it is because of a disagreement. According to the Bureau of Justice (1989), most fights that students encountered were with acquaintances; these acquaintances could be family members, friends, or dates. The middle school students who participated in the interviews perceived that touching others could be a major cause of school violence. These students explained that touching others could lead to fights by starting off as a playful interaction between two students, progressing to one student becoming tired and angry, eventually causing one student to lash out. Also, the middle school students ranked fighting as the most frequent and most serious act of violence that occurred at their school. In fact, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1989) estimated 18 physical fighting incidents occurred per 100 students per month. However, the incidence of physical fighting was 4 times higher for male students (28 incidents per 100 students) than for female students (7 incidents per 100). The incidence was highest for black male students (47 incidents per 100), followed by Hispanic male students (35 incidents per 100) and white male students (22 incidents per 100).

Impacted Learning Environment

The next research question was the following: To what extend does school violence impact student success and teacher effectiveness? This section focused on the

teachers' perceptions of how school violence and fear can affect their classrooms and students. Topics to be discussed are lack of concentration, high absenteeism rates, and fear of class participation.

Research has demonstrated that school violence acts can have many different kinds of effects on children, one being a child's ability to learn. Earlier research has linked school violence with increased disruptive student behavior, poor attendance rates, and academic failure, as well as stressful school environment (DeVoe et al, 2005). The teachers in this study felt that school violence can affect students' academics by causing them to be fearful and unable to concentrate. The teachers perceived that students who are intimidated on a daily basis tend to be absent from school so that they do not have to deal with the threats and feelings of fear. A high absentee rate can cause the students to fall behind academically because they are missing vital instructional time. In addition, the teachers believed that if children are fearful of their safety then the children tend to not ask questions in the classroom because they are afraid of being teased.

Teachers can be personally affected by school violence in many ways. In fact, Pik (1987) reported that acts of violence can devastate teachers in the following ways: a multitude of stresses, damaging morale, and self- efficacy. Plus, school violence can force teachers and administrators to make major changes to the classroom curriculum in order to avoid confrontation and drastically reduce teaching time (Pik, 1987). The data from this study demonstrated that the teachers at this middle school perceived that school violence has impacted the role of the classroom teacher. This has occurred by the teachers realizing that violence could happen at any time and they have to be watchful for signs of trouble and teach the curriculum at the same time. In fact, the teachers from this

study felt that since the hostage situation that they have to be more alert to what is happening not only in the classrooms but the hallways and bathrooms. In addition, the teachers felt that because of the act of violence last school term that there are procedures that they go over in their mind everyday before class starts and during class which affects their concentration in the classroom.

Perceptions of Root Causes of Violence

This section focused on the following research question: What do students, teachers, parents, and community members perceive to be the primary contributing factors to school violence? Also, in this section the definition of root causes of violence and violence will be discussed. Plus, the main causes of school violence based on the participant's perceptions will be stated.

The root causes of violence are defined as the underlying or original cause of an incident or problem (Webster, 1995). This study investigated the perceptions of the participants related to the root causes of school violence. When analyzing root causes of violence, it is important to have a clear definition of the term violence. According to the definition offered by the American Psychological Association (1998), violence is the act of purposefully hurting someone. Violence can be used as the reaction for some people when trying to release feelings of anger or frustration. Also, others can use violence to manipulate someone or retaliate for pain or hurt inflicted.

The causes of youth violence have come under increased scrutiny over the last 10 years. While research conducted on violence in schools has demonstrated that there is no one single cause of school violence, many causes have been associated with school violence (Lerner, 2006). Research suggested that violent behavior may be correlated with

the following: single-parent homes, violent imagery in the media, peer pressure, sense of low self-esteem, exposure to early childhood abuse or neglect, a need to seek respect or attention from others, witnessing violence at home, lack of parental supervision, home environment, bullying, substance abuse, and low socioeconomic level (Lerner, 2006). All these variables have been associated with acts of school violence; however, only the causes that the participants in this study perceived to be the main factors related to school violence will be discussed. These factors are the following: home environment, substance abuse, bullying, and low socioeconomic level.

The data from this study demonstrated that a bad home life was perceived as a factor that could lead to school violence. These findings are based on the perceptions of the participants in this study and the researcher is not trying to make objective correlations. The middle school students and teachers who were interviewed believed that a certain kind of home environment could be the number one cause of school violence. The home is the place where children first learn to develop skills to solve conflicts or problems. According to Roth (1998), violence is a community problem that is brought to school by children who may have been exposed to it by their parents or by the areas in which they reside. A reason as to why some children are more prone to exhibit violent behavior may be lack of parental supervision.

Lack of parental supervision includes the following: younger children being left alone due to a rise in single parent homes, inappropriate supervision by dysfunctional adults, financial stressors that may cause adults to work multiple jobs or longer hours, the high cost of child care and cost of extra curricula activities (O'Donnell, 1999). Parents are suppose to nurture, discipline, and reinforce good behavior. According to the National

Crime Victimization Survey (1991), parents are their children's first and most important role models. When children are provided with the necessities to a healthy development inside the home, then a child will have a stronger defense against violence. If parents are not at home to meet the needs of the children then there is the possibility that they will be incapable of dealing with conflict, disappointment, or frustration. This could contribute to violence and other poor behaviors (National Crime Victimization Survey, 1991).

The community members involved in this study were three business owners and one county official. When these participants were questioned about school violence, they perceived that substance abuse could be one of the main causes. The first community member who was interviewed felt that alcohol and drugs might be the driving force behind someone committing acts of school violence. The research literature showed a similar concern with the correlation between drugs and violence. In 1998, The National Institute of Drug Abuse conducted a study entitled Monitoring the Future (MTF), which was a self-reporting survey administered to 50,000 secondary school students in public and private schools. Fifty four percent of all seniors surveyed indicated that they had at least tried illicit drugs. Among high school seniors alcohol is more popular than unlawful drugs. Four out of five seniors reported that they tried alcohol at least once. Binge drinking was described as five or more drinks in a row and was practiced by 31% of seniors and 14% of eighth graders. Almost 25% of the seniors who reported using prohibited drugs had been arrested and taken to the police station, and close to 50% of the seniors who reported using illegal drugs reported breaking the law (Johnston, 1999).

Another factor that parents identified to be the major cause of school violence was bullying. Researchers have demonstrated how detrimental bullying can be in a school

setting. Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler (1992) concluded that bullying was an international

phenomenon and was one of the most widely practiced forms of aggressive behaviors in

American schools. According to Olweus (1994), a psychologist from the university in

Bergen in Norway who has studied bullying for over 20 years, shares the following about

a student being bullied or victimized:

> A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and
> over time; to negative actions when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to
> inflict, injury or discomfort upon another. Negative actions can be carried out by
> physical contact, by words, or in other ways, such as making faces or obscene
> gestures, and intentional exclusion from a group (p. 1173).

Olweus (1994) argued that bullying occurred when a student intentionally inflicted, or

attempted to inflict, injury or discomfort on another student. Espelage and Holt (2001)

found that bullying had a direct negative impact on students, teachers, school property,

the community, and the educational process.

Garrity (1995) reported that bullying behavior among students had long been a

disruptive factor in the educational realm and continued to affect the emotional and

physical safety of students. Olweus (1994) revealed that many students were anxious

about witnessing bullying and feared that they may become victims of bullying if they

had not already been targeted. Batsche and Knoff (1994) revealed that for many students

school was not the safe learning environment it was intended to be. Also, Lee (1993)

estimated that 160,000 children missed school each day because of fear. He concluded

that bullying was a major cause of this fear and that bullying kept children from

perceiving school as a safe environment.

Vali (1999) found that the development of bullying behavior commenced in

elementary school, and the highest frequency of bullying behavior occurred in middle

school. He concluded that bullying behavior somewhat decreases in high school; however, it is given more attention due to the physical size of students and nature of some of the incidences. Vali (1999) noted that bullying behavior was found to be one of the major causes of violence in the school setting.

Another factor that the community members perceived as a cause of school violence was low socioeconomic levels. In this study, the community members felt that the type of clothing worn in a school system could be seen as a marker for a child's socioeconomic level; this could cause teasing between children who wear name brands and children who wear off- brands. Children begin noticing clothing worn by others when they are little. According to Pellino (2007), children become aware of social and economic status differences at a very young age. In addition, she informs that children grow increasingly aware of both their own social status and that of their peers. In fact, some schools have implemented a dress code as a result of children's reactions to clothing. Research is demonstrating that children feel more like a team when a dress code is in place. According to Wingert (1999), the number one protective factor against school violence is having students feel connected to their school. The sense of togetherness that a uniform policy would instill in a school can not be overstated. When students are all dressed in a similar fashion, the playing field is leveled; each and every student would be similar. This would allow the students to spend more time concentrating on their schoolwork, rather than comparing their own clothing to the clothing of their friends. There would be less ridicule of students due to their inability to dress in a style acceptable to the "in-crowd" (Manual on School Uniforms, 2000).

Perceptions of Who is Responsible for Reducing School Violence

Although the general public agreed that violence is a problem that desperately needs attention, there is not much agreement when it comes to answering the following question: "Who is responsible for reducing acts of school violence?" The act of finger pointing between groups is widespread as shown throughout the literature (Leinhardt & Willert, 2002; Stetson, Stetson, & Kelly, 1998; Willert & Leinhardt, 2003). In fact, the participants in this study had different perceptions of who should be held responsible for reducing school violence. The parents felt that it was the responsibility of the school administration and police department, whereas the teachers believed that it would take a team effort to make a difference in the number of school violence acts. The community members perceived that it is the parents' responsibility to reduce the number of violent acts in the school system.

There were studies conducted that reported the perceptions of school faculty, parents, and community agency representatives regarding school violence and responsibility (Leinhardt & Willert, 2002; Stetson, Stetson, & Kelly, 1998; Willert & Lenhardt, 2003). However, it appears that most of the studies were focused more on teachers than other members of society. According to Lenhardt and Willert (2002), school faculty believed that more responsibility needs to be transferred back to parents who are often disconnected with their own children. Parents, on the other hand, asked for more accountability and effective communication from school faculty. Also, parents felt disengaged and unwelcome in the schools. Likewise, community agencies felt unwelcome and placed the blame on the schools for not taking the lead to establish a team approach (Lenhardt & Willert, 2002).

Another study by Stetson, Stetson and Kelly (1998), focused on identifying teachers' perceptions of violence in society, schools and the responsibility of schools in providing a safer school environment. The participants in this survey included seventy-eight elementary, middle and high school teachers concerning the topic of school's responsibility for producing a civil society (Stetson & Stetson, 1998). From this survey, it was reported that of the 78 teachers, 95% of them reported perceptions of increased violence, while 84% felt that violence increased in their own schools. In addition, 58 % of the teachers reported that schools are mostly responsible for safe school environments, while 21 percent of the teachers responded that schools are either mainly responsible or partly responsible regarding the extent of the school's responsibility for providing a safe school environment.

Additional studies of middle school teacher perceptions were examined concerning their roles and responsibilities in the classroom. Behre et al. (2001), investigated middle school teacher perceptions about intervening in a physical fight at school, either in their classroom or hall. Surveys and follow up interviews with 54 middle school teachers revealed that 57.7 percent would respond differently in their classroom than in the hall. Middle school teachers were more willing to intervene when a fight happened in their classroom than when it occurred in the hall. These teachers responded with diverse reasoning, such as a feeling of efficiency in undefined areas including hallways and a lack of personal responsibility. Teachers reasoned that they would act differently in places other than their classrooms.

Practical Applications

There are practical applications that apply to the findings of this study. Parents can be watchful of their children social involvements both in and out of school and ensure they have adequate after-school activities to keep them positively engaged. As for the teachers, they need to engage their students in classroom discussions on violence, including the different ways people justify violence as a means of retribution and how such justification can perpetuate violent behavior. Through such discussions, students could develop a more sophisticated and thoughtful view of the nature of violence, one that might reduce any tendency to engage in violent behavior. Schools and the communities could provide clubs and sporting activities for children to become active participants in hopes of keeping children out of trouble and out of gangs.

Study Limitations

Limitations of this case study are discussed within the scope of possible generalization of the results of this study to other settings. Due to the limited number of participants interviewed, it is difficult to generalize the results to a broader population. Also, only using one school in which one act of violence occurred limits generalizing to a larger population, because all schools have not experienced an act of violence. Another limitation of this study is the specific socioeconomic status of the district selected. Unlike comparing two districts of different economic and social backgrounds, this study has a more narrow range of data. There is also the possibility that in this type of semistructured interviews the results may have been misrepresented by the participants need to please this interviewer. While participants were certainly aware of being audio taped, some expressed concerns about their answers being known to others in the district, so there was

already a tendency to be more guarded. Also, because of the research methods and design of this study, it was not the researcher's intention to draw correlations between particular factors. In fact, Creswell (1998) informs that a qualitative research begins with a single topic and is not appropriate for drawing correlations between variables. However, it was the intention of the researcher to examine the factors that seemed important for the participants.

Benefits of Study

This study provided a starting point from which additional research can be conducted to obtain more insight into the complexity of violence at the middle school level. One benefit of this study is that it supplies valuable data to educators, community members, parents, and students surrounding the perceptions of school violence. One of these perceptions was that fighting and bullying seemed to be the major concern among many of the participants. Also, the participants perceived that the root causes of school violence dealt with a bad home environment, substance abuse, bullying, and a low socioeconomic level. In addition, the persons that the participants felt should be held responsible for reducing acts of violence varied. The parents believed that the administration and police officers should control acts of violence. The teachers felt that it would take a team effort to make a difference in school violence, whereas the community members perceived that it is the responsibility of the parents. Figuring out who should be held accountable for school violence would be very beneficial for this study.

Another benefit of this study is that it provided more information from the participants' perspectives to those who are in positions to make decisions such as the local board members and superintendent. It is important to examine perceptions of

individuals since educators can not solve this problem on their own. The participants in this study shared their insights about how they perceived violent acts at school, which will be shared with professionals in the field of education in hopes of minimizing school violence acts or threats. All participants in this study received a one-page write-up about the perceptions that were found during this study. Plus, the researcher created a slide show highlighting the findings of the research questions, which were part of this study. This slide show was sent countywide through the school's email to all educators employed in this county.

Plan for Action

Although research shows the decline of school violence in public schools nation-wide, violence continues to penetrate the environment set for educating children. This study presented a qualitative approach to identify perceptions targeted at the middle school level. Based on these perceptions, there are actions that are perceived to be of benefit to the school environment. Teachers must be involved in the decision-making process that involves addressing and correcting violence in schools and providing a safe educational environment. Another plan of action could be to increase educators, parents, students, and community member's awareness of school violence. Providing each participant with a one-page summary of the findings from this study will carry this out. Plus, a slideshow will be created and placed on the school wide email, which includes all three schools and the board office. Another way to communicate the findings from this study could be to place the slideshow on each school's homepage so that parents and community members will have the opportunity to read the findings.

The sharing of research could identify strategies and protocols for reaction, which may mandate what procedures to follow in the event of an emergency. This could lead to changes in the county policies and practices. Also, teacher leaders need to create an awareness of how school violence affects the lives of the students. In addition, since bullying was a major concern, in this study it will be crucial for educators to change the way that they respond when a child is bullying or being bullied. Incidents of bullying must not be tolerated in schools. According to Olweus (1994), it is the fundamental democratic right for a child to feel safe in school, and no student should be afraid to attend school for fear of being bullied. Finally, school safety should be placed at the top of the educational agenda in all school districts across the country. Ultimately, each school should adopt a broad-based strategy and plan to deal with violence in our schools. Violence prevention curricula and anti-violence expectations need to be a priority. Our children deserve to feel safe, and indeed be safe while becoming educated in the school setting.

<p style="text-align:center">Recommendation for Future Research</p>

The findings in this study suggested that further research is needed on the factors between violent acts and schools. If time were not a factor, it would be of interest to include other school districts in this research. The rationale for including additional schools would be to contrast and compare perspectives across different socio-economic status samples. According to Pellino (2007), children from low socio-economic levels live in environments with social conditions in which they have little control and it was not their choice to be born into poverty (Pellino,2007). These conditions can make children act out and sometimes this turns into violence (Pellino, 2007). The difference

between socio-economic levels is believed to affect children differently and that is why comparing schools from different socio-economic levels may provide data that could demonstrate how violence acts vary and the amount of violence in school systems.

Another logical step for this research would be to investigate administrator beliefs, biases, and perceptions on a comprehensive scale. In addition, it could be helpful to assess the variable of outside influences on school violence and to explore the nature of these pressures and how they impact decision-making. The decision-making in schools focused more on the symptoms of school violence rather than the causes of school violence. When violence occurs in the school setting it is easier to install security measures instead of determining the causes and rectifying them. In fact, from our knowledge of the many risk factors related to violence, various strategies for addressing school violence have emerged. In schools across the nation it is not uncommon to find metal detectors, in place to identify gun carrying students, dog's that sniff out weapons, bombs, and drugs, security cameras to catch perpetrators of violence, and security guards to patrol school grounds. However, these strategies, "are directed at the symptom not the cause and therefore will have little or no effect on eradicating the underlying problem that prompts society to turn schools into barricaded fortress" (Brooks, 2005).

Reflection

As I reflect upon this adventure as a researcher and educator, it is difficult to find the right words to describe this experience because it has consumed my life. The topic of school violence surrounds my thoughts because they have been influenced by enabling me to understand the feelings of people who have been affected by violence. Also, I feel more confident and prepared to handle acts of violence. My attention is drawn to every

news article or comment made about violence in the schools. My knowledge has grown by leaps and bounds in the area of violence; however, this knowledge extends beyond school violence. While researching school violence, this researcher has become knowledgeable in other areas of violence such as the following: domestic violence, child abuse, neglect, and poverty violence. Also, I have become aware of signs that could lead to a violent act, which is very beneficial for me as an educator. I have become more aware of my surroundings. According to Cullerton-Sen and Crick, (2005) teachers and other professionals who work in schools are in an ideal position to identify students with behavior problems since children spend the majority of their time with them. In the past, I would not have been concerned if I observed a couple of children pushing and talking loud; however, now it would draw my attention and I would intervene. Being more proactive for children who have been affected by violence is a way that I can be more involved by providing support and being available for them.

<div align="center">Social Change</div>

This qualitative research study is significant to scholarly research and literature in the field of education because acts of school violence can be devastating to a school community. There have been tangible improvements within the school walls since the hostage situation. The middle school presently has cameras in the hallways and classrooms. All feeds from these cameras are displayed in a room where monitors are kept under lock and key. However, when there is a problem administrators and teachers view the feed to clarify the problem. Plus, a policy of locking classroom doors has been implemented at the middle school. Since the hostage situation, safety has become a major

issue. This county is now looking at building new schools and safety is an important

issue.

Conclusion

On July 20th of 1998 President Clinton delivered an address to the American

Federation of Teachers on the importance of school discipline and safety that summed up

the situation facing today's schools. He was quoted as saying the following:

> Our progress will come to nothing if our schools are not safe places, orderly
> places, where teachers can teach and children can learn. We also know that in too
> many American schools, there is lawlessness where there should be learning.
> There is chaos where there should be calm. There is disorder where there should
> be discipline. Make no mistake, this is a threat not only to our classrooms, but to
> America's public school system and, indeed, to the strength and vitality of our
> nation.

Even in the latter part of the 1990s, school violence was receiving public attention.

President Clinton called upon Congress to support his efforts to improve and reform K-12

education. These efforts included the following: reducing class sizes, modernizing our

schools, investing in technology, expanding after-school learning opportunities, ending

social promotion, raising teachers and student standards, helping states to strengthen

teacher preparation programs and providing incentives for well-prepared individuals to

teach in public schools (Clinton, 1998).

Now in the 21st century, school violence is still a growing concern and a problem

in society. Not long ago, the most serious problems detected in our schools were students

running in the halls, making excessive noise, cutting in line, talking-out-of-turn, chewing

gum, or violating dress code (Lerner, 2006). However, these problems do not compare

with the issues found in today's schools, because acts of violence have become more

widespread. We are now facing new types of violence in the schools such as the

following: hostage taking, sniper attacks, murders, suicides, bomb scares and real bombs (Lerner, 2006).

Many factors have been related to the causes of school violence, and all of them need to be addressed in order to make a difference. Research is helping us to understand the relationship between the many different types of violence that occur within the schools. There has been a dramatic increase in alcohol and substance use among children; peer pressure and gang involvement have been on the rise as well. In addition, we are learning from research that children who are tormented and teased go on to harm themselves and others (Lerner, 2006). Also, we are seeing the effects of parents working long hours and an absence of parental supervision, a lack of respect for authority and a lack of family involvement within the schools. However, there has also been a change in the family structure such as a large number of single parent families, grandparents and extended family living in the home. All of these changes could affect children in a negative way.

Research has demonstrated that some people believe the solution to school violence could include installing metal detectors and surveillance cameras, and banning bookbags. According to Lerner (2006), a consultant in the area of school crisis prevention there are certainly benefits gained from taking these steps; however, it is believed that they all fail to address the root of the problem. His advice as a school crisis consultant is that we must help our children and adolescents develop and enhance their communication and problem-solving skills. They must be taught how to actively listen and to empathize when relating with others. Also, he informs that we must enable children to understand the importance of verbalizing their feelings about themselves and for others, and to know

that it is okay to err on the side of caution when expressing concerns about others. In addition, Lerner (2006) advised that we must regularly remind children that they can turn to their parents and/or school support personnel who will take the time to listen and respond to them.

Lerner (2006) stated that communication is the key to prevent violent school based tragedies. However, he believed that it would take a multimodal approach, which would include the following strategies: we must help our children and adolescents to identify physiological changes in their bodies, which may precede or coincide with feeling of frustration and anger. Also, we must help them to understand which behaviors or actions cause others to become frustrated and angry. Plus, we can teach children to become aware of and to identify negative self-statements that generate feelings of frustration and anger. And, we can help our children learn to replace self-defeating statements with positive coping statements. Behaviorally, we must model and advocate appropriate moral behavior, set limits and be consistent with our responses to deviating behavior. Ultimately, we must teach our children to show compassion and sincerity in relating with others.

In conclusion, it is important to understand what factors may be causing school violence. This study serves as a stepping stone to uncovering these factors that are related to the causes of school violence. The findings are based on the perceptions of middle school teachers, community members which consisted of 3 business owners and one county official, middle school students, and middle school parents. In addition, the effects of specific interventions could make a difference in minimizing school violence acts. However, like many events in a rapidly shifting society, it is the researcher's perception

that we must take initial thoughtful, realistic and logical steps to respond to the problems
that we are facing in our schools by developing effective prevention and response
strategies.

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APPENDIX A
Formal Interview Guide

Statement "As you know, this interview is being recorded."

General Questions of School Violence
1. There is a growing concern about violence in schools. How do you feel about school violence and do you think it is a problem?
2. How would you define school violence?
3. What types of behaviors lead to school violence?

Specific Questions-Teachers/Administrators
1. How long have you been an admin/teacher?
2. How long have you been in your current position?
3. Are you involved in developing or implementing violence prevention programs at your school? If so, please describe.
4. Do you feel that school violence is occurring more now than it was 10 years ago? Why do you feel that way?
5. What do you consider to be the main causes of school violence?
6. What can teachers/administrators do to help create a safe school environment?
7. Do you feel that acts of school violence have impacted the role of classroom teachers? If so, how?
8. Do you feel that acts of school violence have impacted students' academic work in any way?
9. Who should be responsible for reducing acts of school violence?

Specific Questions-Students
1. Have you ever witnessed or been a part of school violence. If so, what happened? When did it take place? How was it resolved (outcome)?
2. What do you consider to be the main causes of school violence?
3. What do you think are the most frequently occurring acts of violence at your school?
4. What do you think are the most serious acts of violence at your school?
5. If you had a concern about your safety or the safety of others, would you report it to an adult at school? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel that your school is safe? Why or why not? Do you think all the students feel safe? Why or why not?
7. What could students do to help create a safe school environment?

Specific Questions- Parents
1. What could parents do to help create a safe school environment?
2. Do you feel that school violence is occurring more now than it was 10 years ago? Why do you feel that way?
3. What do you consider to be the main causes of school violence?
4. Has your child been a victim of violence at school? (beaten up, threatened, etc.)

5. How would you describe your level of confidence regarding the school's ability to keep your child safe?
6. Who should be responsible for reducing acts of school violence?

Specific Questions- Community Members

1. Have you been involved on a committee aimed at reducing violence either at school or in the community? If so, please describe your involvement.
2. What could community members do to help create a safe school environment?
3. Do you feel that school violence is occurring more now than it was 10 years ago? Why do you feel that way?
4. What do you consider to be the main causes of school violence?
5. Who should be responsible for reducing acts of school violence?

APPENDIX B

ASSENT FORM

Hello, my name is Teresa Bellflower. I am doing research to learn about school violence. What it does to students your age. I am asking you to be a part of this. You were one of six students picked from a list of all the 8th graders at your school. I know that an act of violence took place at your school. You will not be asked about what happened. All questions are on how you feel about violence that can happen in schools. You can ask any questions you have before you say yes or no to do this interview. This study involves research, which means that interviews will be audiotaped. The researcher will use your answers from this study in a research paper.

WHO I AM:
I am a student at Walden University. I am working on my next degree. I have been a teacher at Wilkinson County Primary/Elementary School for 6 years.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:
If you say yes to this study, you will be asked to:
- Answer questions that should take 30-45 minutes in the counselor office at the middle school during your exploratory time.
- Your answers will be audiotaped.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE:
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You will not be in trouble with the middle school teachers if you say no. If you say yes now that you want to be in this study, you can always change your mind later by telling me. If you want to skip some parts of the study, just let me know. Since doing this research is your choice, no presents or gifts will be given.

There is a small chance that talking about school violence could make you feel upset. The counselor will be there during the interview in case you need her. This research might help others by understanding what school violence can do to students, parents, and teachers.

PRIVACY:
What you tell me during the interview will be kept a secret. No one will know your name or what answers you gave other than the middle school counselor and the researcher. The only time I have to tell someone is if I learn about something that could hurt you or someone else. No names will be used when your answers are put on paper.

ASKING QUESTIONS:
You can ask me any questions you want. If you think of a question, you or your parents can reach me at 478-272-8265(home) or my teacher at michael.hayes@waldenu.edu. If you or your parents would like to ask my college a question, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210.

I will give you two copies of this form, please send one to the middle school counselor and keep one. I will get both forms from the counselor's office. After, this study ends; I will give you a one-page paper that tells what I found out.

Please sign your name below if you want to join this study.

Name of Child

Child Signature

_____

Researcher Signature

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Your child is being asked to be in a research study about school violence. Your child was one of six students picked from a list of all 8th graders. Every 19th student was chosen. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before saying yes or no to this study.

My name is Teresa Bellflower. I am a student at Walden University. I have been working with children for over twenty years. I have taught at Wilkinson County Primary/Elementary School for 6 years.

Background Information:

Too many schools have been involved in school violence. The reasons for this study is to find out what people think about school violence. Also, how it makes them feel.

P**rocedures:**

If you say yes to this study then your child will be asked to:

- Answer questions that should take from 30-45 minutes.
- Interviews will take place during his or her exploratory time.
- The answers will be audiotaped.
- Interviews will take place in the counselor's office with the counselor there.
- No names will be used in this study.
- No gifts will be given for being in the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

You and your child should decide together if your child would like to take part in this study. Whatever you choose to do is okay. If you say no your child will not be treated any different. If you say yes for your child to be a part of this study, you can always say no later. There will be no gifts or presents given.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Your child might become upset when talking about school violence. The counselor will be there when your child is questioned. This is in case your child needs her. This study might help others by understanding how something harmful can hurt students, parents, and teachers.

Confidentiality:

What your child tells me during this study will be kept private. The researcher will only use your child's answers for this study. No names will be used when your child's answers are put on paper. You will be given a one-page summary of the findings at the end of this study.

Contacts and Questions:

You can ask me any questions you want. You can reach me at 478-272-8265 (home) or my teacher Dr. Michael Hayes at 1-509-338-5033 or michael.hayes@waldenu.edu. If you would like to ask my college a question, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210.

The researcher will give you two copies of this form. One to send to the counselor and the other one to keep.

Statement of Consent:

☐ I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I consent for my child to participate in the study.

Printed Name of

Participant

_____

Parent's Written or

Electronic* Signature

_____

Researcher's Written or

Electronic* Signature

_____

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

APPENDIX D

ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS

Hello, my name is Teresa Bellflower. I am doing a research project to study how school violence can affect a school community. I am asking you to be a part of this study. You were chosen from a list of all faculty members using every tenth name on the list. All interview questions are on how you perceive violence that can happen in schools. You can ask any questions you have before you decide to participate in this study. This study involves research, which means that interviews will be audiotaped. The researcher will use your answers from this study in a research paper.

WHO I AM:

I am a student at Walden University. I am working on my doctoral degree. I have been a teacher at Wilkinson County Primary/Elementary School for 6 years.

Background Information: Too many schools have been involved in school violence. School violence has become a hot topic in the field of education. The purpose of this study is to examine how school violence is perceived and can influence a community and individuals.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

If you say yes to this study, you will be asked to:

- Answer interview questions that should take 30-45 minutes during you planning time.
- The interview will be audiotaped.
- Read a short memo to check my interpretation of the data.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

It is your decision whether or not to participate in this study. If you decide to participate in this study, you can always change your mind later by telling me. If you want to skip some parts of the study, just let me know. Since doing this research is your choice, no presents or gifts will be given.

PRIVACY:

What you tell me during the interview will be kept private. No one will know your name or what answers you gave other than the researcher. No names will be used when your answers are written in a research paper.

ASKING QUESTIONS:

You can ask me any questions you want. If you think of a question, you can reach me at 478-272-8265(home) or my professor at michael.hayes@waldenu.edu. If you would like to ask my university a question, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. She is the Director of the Research Center at Walden University.

I will give you two copies of this form, please return one copy to me through the school mail and keep one. After, this study ends; I will give you a one-page summary about the results.

Please sign your name below if you want to join this study.

Participant Signature

Researcher Signature

APPENDIX E

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Hello, my name is Teresa Bellflower. I am doing research to learn about how school violence can affect a school community. I am asking you to be a part of this study. All interview questions are on how you feel about violence that can happen in schools. You can ask any questions you have before you decide to participate in this study. This study involves research, which means that interviews will be audiotaped. The researcher will use your answers from this study in a research paper.

WHO I AM:
I am a student at Walden University. I am working on my doctoral degree. I have been a teacher at Wilkinson County Primary/Elementary School for 6 years.

Background Information: Too many schools have been involved in school violence. School violence has become a hot topic in the field of education. The purpose of this study is to find out what people think about school violence and how it is perceived though a school community.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:
If you say yes to this study, you will be asked to:
- Answer questions that should take 30-45 minutes at a convenient location.
- Your answers will be audiotaped.
- Read a short memo checking my interpretations of the data from your interview.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE:
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you say yes now that you want to be in this study, you can always change your mind later by telling me. If you want to skip some parts of the study, just let me know. Since doing this research is your choice, no presents or gifts will be given.

PRIVACY:
What you tell me during the interview will be kept private. No one will know your name or what answers you gave other than the researcher. No names will be used when your answers are written in a research paper.

ASKING QUESTIONS:
You can ask me any questions you want. If you think of a question, you can reach me at 478-272-8265(home) or my professor at michael.hayes@waldenu.edu. If you would like to ask my university a question, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210.

I will give you two copies of this form, please return one to me and keep one. After, this study ends; I will give you a one-page paper about the results.

Please sign your name below if you want to join this study.

Participant Signature

Researcher Signature