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School Resource Officers' Perceptions of Their Role and the Effects of Their Interactions With Students

Tameka Arlene Elizabeth Evans
Walden University

Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Tameka Arlene Elizabeth Evans

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Jana Price-Sharps, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Jessica Hart, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

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by

Tameka Arlene Elizabeth Evans

MA, Argosy University, 2006

BSc, London Metropolitan University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The use of school resource officers (SROs)—trained police officers who have been assigned to schools—has markedly increased with the rise in school shootings in the United States. However, after several high-profile incidents of excessive force by SROs, there has been a movement toward removing them from schools. Although researchers have studied the use of SROs in schools, few have examined how the relationship between SROs and students affects students' perceptions of the police. The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of how SROs experience their interactions with students and how those interactions affect students' perceptions of police officers. Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological theory and Raven and French's power theory underpinned the study. As part of the qualitative phenomenological study design, a purposive sample was drawn of seven SROs working in a middle school system for at least a year. Data analysis, which involved the use of Miles and Huberman's coding system, yielded four themes and two subthemes. The themes were the importance of formal SRO training, the role of the SRO, the nature of the relationships between students and SROs, and changes in student perceptions of the police. The subthemes were educating staff on the role of the SRO and the way these relationships affect students. Participants perceived SRO relationships with students to be beneficial in changing students' perceptions of the police and potentially making students feel more comfortable with reporting infractions. The results suggest that the presence of SROs may improve the current climate of distrust toward the police. The study may promote positive social change by informing policy development on the use of SROs in schools.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Thomas A. E. Evans, KC. Although he was not here to see the end, his help was invaluable in completing this degree.

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I want to thank my committee for their assistance and support. Thank you for all the feedback and support you have provided me over the years. I would also like to thank the Royal Bahamas Police Force for their help and support in completing the interviews.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

School resource officers (SROs) are specially trained police officers assigned to work in the kindergarten through Grade 12 school system (Sullivan & Huasman, 2017). There have been renewed debates about whether police officers should be in schools following protests about police brutality (Ghavami, 2021). Researchers have not found definitive answers about the roles and efficacy of SROs (Devlin & Fischer, 2021). Wood and Hampton (2021) suggested that future research should examine the roles of SROs and the interactions between the SROs and students. Further support for the need for further study on the effects of interactions between students and SROs comes from Sullivan and Hausman (2017). Sullivan and Hausman (2017) stated that rigorous testing was needed to determine the results of SRO programs. Few studies examine the long-term effects of the relationship between students and SROs. A study by Ghavami et al. (2021) examined the roles of the SRO but not the SROs' relationship with students. They found that the school environment determines the role that SROs play.

Various agencies, including the National Association of School Psychologists, endorse programs that include SROs acting as educators and counselors (Crichlow-Ball et al., 2022). This idea is supported by the idea that one of the roles that SROs play in schools is to act as counselors (Almanza et al., 2023). Almanza et al. (2023) further suggested that SROs could support students and create a sense of community within the school system. This study can offer information about how SROs' rapport with students can affect students in the future. This information can inform best practice guidelines on training and deploying SROs. In the current qualitative study, I examined the role of the

relationship between SROs and students. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher explored the experiences of SROs in schools and the SROs' view of the role of SROs' relationships with students.

Background

Individuals develop attitudes towards the legal authorities during adolescence (Granot et al., 2021). Granot et al. (2021) further state that law-abiding behavior also forms during this time. This behavior is often associated with teenagers' interactions with police. The authors further noted that individuals are more likely to behave in a law-abiding manner when individuals perceive law enforcement to act in a just manner. Support for this idea comes from a study by Fine et al. (2019), which found that teenagers' confidence in law enforcement has declined over the last decade.

Curran et al. (2021) stated that future researchers should consider the daily interactions between SROs and students in a school setting. The authors further suggested that studies on daily interactions should take into account the costs and benefits of the SROs' interactions with students. Forber-Pratt et al. (2021) found that students are more likely to speak openly with an SRO if the students have built rapport. The authors also found that SROs have stated that the SROs build rapport by communicating openly with students. Students who have a rapport with SROs are more likely to report threats made by peers (Crichlow-Ball et al., 2022). Crichlow-Ball et al. (2022) further stated that students who spoke to SROs reported feeling safer in the school environment more frequently.

Students involved in violent incidents often become truant or drop out of school (Forber-Pratt et al., 2021). Unfortunately, this study also found that many SROs lack special training. The authors suggested that SROs have stated that law enforcement is the SROs' primary role. This belief leads to the use of punitive measures when dealing with situations. Cobbina et al. (2020) stated that although studies on school safety exist, the majority of those studies are quantitative in nature. The authors further stated that the social and emotional aspects of school safety are important factors in students' perceptions of school safety. The authors further stated that the students' perception of safety may have a greater effect on students than the facts of safety, such as the number of fights or other acts of aggression within the school.

Some literature exists about the role of the SROs (Debnam et al., 2022). However, these studies have not used qualitative methods. Therefore, research must be completed to determine the SROs' roles. It is essential to know what SROs experience as the role of the SRO. This will provide a better understanding of how these roles affect SROs' relationships with students. Support for this came from Curran et al. (2020), who stated that further research is needed on the daily activities of the SROs and how they interact with stakeholders.

Fischer and Devlin (2020) stated that little research exists on the efficacy of SROs. The authors further state that studies examining efficacy often only consider the presence or lack of an SRO. The question of whether SROs should be placed in schools cannot be answered without understanding if SROs are effective. Further, Glen et al. (2019) suggested that future research should include SROs' perspectives on the efficacy

of safety programs and the needs of SROs. Espelage et al. (2022) stated that further research was needed on the efficacy of SRO training programs. Based on this research, the purpose of the current study was to determine SROs' views on the role of their relationship in shaping students' opinions of the police.

Problem Statement

Irwin et al. (2021) found that there were 188 school shooting incidents with casualties in the 2021–2022 school year. Curran and Bozer (2023) stated that the rise of school shootings has led to the use of SROs in the school system. Chan et al. (2019) stated that in the 2015–2016 school year, there were 77,200 physical attacks on school premises. These attacks were violent but did not involve weapons. During this same year, there were 11,700 attacks with weapons.

Cavanaugh et al. (2021) stated that legal socialization occurs because of interactions with police. They further stated that students who interact with police regularly have multiple opportunities for legal socialization. Renbarger et al. (2022) stated that the literature lacks consensus on whether the benefits outweigh the costs of SROs' presence in the school. Vernon and Curran (2023) stated that future research should use a qualitative method to determine whether SROs' presence is helpful or harmful to students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to increase the understanding of how SROs experience how SROs' interaction with students affects students' perceptions of police officers. I explored the role of the SROs and the effect of the SROs' interactions

with students. Attitudes toward the police are formed during adolescence (Granot et al., 2021). This study contributed to the literature to determine how the interactions between students and SROs affect students' perceptions of police.

Research Questions

This qualitative study regarding the possible effects of the interaction between SROs and students was underpinned by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How do SROs perceive how SROs' relationships with students may affect the students' perception of police officers?

RQ2: How do SROs perceive their relationship with high school students?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theory that grounded this study was Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that various ecologies, or layers, contribute to a child's development. Each ecological zone furthers the child's development. The zones begin with the self and extend outward through various layers of interactions. The classroom is one of the ecological zones.

The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of my study include Bronfenbrenner's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which states that influences within systems, such as the classroom, affect teens' development. This can help to understand how a student's relationship with a SRO can affect the students' perception of police officers. Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological theory will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Raven and French's power theory also underpinned this study. This theory states that there are six bases of power (Raven & French, 1959). One is coercive power. This suggests that people may respect another person's power because that person has the power to punish. Another base of power is legitimate power. This suggests that people respect other's power because an organization has given that person authority. Legitimate bases of power may also explain student's desire to report incidents on campus to SROs. However, this will not be discussed because it does not explain long-term changes in perception. The third base of power is referent power. This base suggests that individuals respect authority that is given to another individual by an organization or government. This base will be considered as a possible alternative reason for students reporting incidences.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I used a phenomenological qualitative research design. A semistructured interview with open-ended questions was used (Ghavami et al., 2021). These questions elicited detailed information about how SROs experience their relationships with students. A snowball sample of SROs was used to understand how this population perceives their relationships with students and the impact of these relationships on students' perceptions of police officers. For this study, seven SROs were selected if the SROs had worked in a middle school for at least 1 year.

Definitions

In this study, I define SROs as sworn police officers assigned to work in schools or school districts to maintain the physical safety of school personnel (Fisher & Devlin, 2020).

Assumptions

Because the police who participated in the study did so voluntarily, the participants may not represent all police (Ghavami et al., 2020). The officers who volunteered for the study may be exceptional. The majority of officers may not have the same work ethic. This difference in the officers' work ethic may limit the results' generalizability. The second assumption in the study is that SROs have varying levels of training. Differences in the training of SROs may lead to varying levels of effectiveness in program development and the effectiveness of programs. This difference in training may alter the SRO's ability to create healthy relationships with students. This variation can skew the results of the study. If most SROs interviewed are trained officers, the results may not be generalizable to all officers. The third assumption is that officers who become SROs may have different personality traits than other officers. These traits may lead officers to choose to become SROs.

Scope and Delimitations

The participants chosen for this study were SROs. The SROs were officers who had worked in a middle school setting for 1 year or more. The participants were selected using a snowball sample. The sample were invited to participate by a flyer in their email group. SROs without a minimum of 1 year in a middle school setting or officers who do

not work directly with students were excluded. The SROs were interviewed to determine the SROs' perception of how SROs' relationships with students affect the students' perception of police.

The population was chosen because few studies have addressed the SROs' perception of the long-term effects of SROs' relationship with students. Many studies have examined the role of the SRO (Ghavami et al., 2021). This study will not examine the role of the SROs. The interview will only examine the relationship between the SROs and the students. Due to the limited number of participants available for this study and the subjective nature of the phenomenon in question, the results of this study may have limited transferability to other populations.

Limitations

In this phenomenological qualitative study, the experiences of SROs were explored, and how SROs perceive how SROs' relationships with students may affect students' perception of the police. Because of the specialized nature of SROs, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to other police populations. The SROs that were interviewed may have specialized training compared to other officers.

P. Ellis (2019) stated that qualitative interviewing does not have the same blueprint because of the unique situations in which qualitative research is conducted. Ellis further states that due to the type of decisions that must be made in qualitative research, the researcher must ensure that the reader understands how and why the decisions are made and how the dependability, credibility, confirmability, and rigor of the research are established. Coleman (2021) suggests methods such as member checking,

mechanical recordings, examining contradictory evidence, and using multiple coders to ensure dependability.

Social desirability bias is a form of respondent bias. This bias occurs when participants give responses that make them appear more socially acceptable. The participants in this study may want to present themselves and the police force in a more positive light. The interview questions should be presented to negate the possibility of bias so that general questions are asked first. This technique helps the participant become more comfortable with the interview before the interviewer asks sensitive questions (Bispo Junior, 2022). Bispo Junior (2022) further suggests that researchers must ensure confidentiality. Participants may not answer questions truthfully if they believe that their answers will be shared with others.

Significance

The findings of this study may fill a gap in the literature. In reviewing the literature, I found few studies on the possible long-term effects of the relationship between SROs and students. These results may add to the body of knowledge about the SROs' perceptions of the efficacy of SROs and SROs' perceptions of how SRO relationships with students may improve students' views of the police.

These results also add to the body of knowledge in policy making. The opinions of SROs are critical in implementing or altering school policy (Ghavami et al., 2021). Ghavami et al. (2021) further stated that the success of any program schools implement depends on SROs' willingness to participate. Support for this comes from Debnam et al. (2022), who stated that although SROs perform many roles, there is little research on

SROs' opinions of these roles. Debnam et al. (2022) further stated that police departments need information on the best training practices to prepare SROs for SROs' changing roles.

Summary

Chapter 1 began by providing information about the rationale for the study. The gap in the literature that this study fills was identified. Studies examining the role of SROs exist, but further information is needed to determine what roles SROs should fill. Few studies examine how the relationship between SROs and students may affect students' perceptions of police officers. The theoretical framework was provided for the study. This study was framed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory suggests that children develop by interacting with various ecological systems.

A background for the study was given. This suggests that students are more likely to report threats to SROs if the students have a rapport with them (Grannot et al., 2021). However, the research problem is a lack of knowledge about how this rapport may affect students' perceptions of police officers. This leads to the first RQ: How do SROs perceive how an SRO's relationship with students may affect the students' perception of police officers?

The participants were selected using snowball sampling from a pool of SROs who have worked in a K12 school for a minimum of 1 year. This provided a small sample of participants. This sample size limited the generalizability of the findings. However, the findings add to the research on the topic. The results also add knowledge about SROs'

perceptions of best practices for training and policy involving SROs. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the current literature on the long-term effect of SRO-student relationships on students' perceptions of police officers in general. This will provide a comprehensive background of the study and the identified gap in the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this phenomenological qualitative study, I examined how SROs experience how SROs' relationships with students affect students' long-term perception of police officers. SROs are specifically trained officers assigned to kindergarten through Grade 12 schools (Sullivan & Huasman, 2017). However, due to highly publicized incidents of police brutality, the debate about the use of SROs has grown (Ghavami, 2021). Devlin and Fischer (2021) stated that there is little evidence of the efficacy of SROs or the roles that they should play. However, few studies examine the long-term effects of the relationship between students and SROs. A study by Ghavami et al. (2021) examined the roles of the SRO but not their relationship with students.

There is a gap in the research on the long-term effect of the relationship between students and SROs (Crichlow-Ball et al., 2022). Studies previously focused on the role of SROs (Debnam et al., 2022). Wood and Hampton (2021) supported this suggestion, stating that future research should examine the interactions between SROs and students. Further, Sullivan and Hausman (2017) stated that studies need to be conducted to determine the efficacy of SRO programs in schools.

Granot et al. (2021) stated that people's attitudes toward legal authorities develop during adolescence. They further stated that people develop this attitude based on the nature of their interactions with legal authorities. For this reason, the interactions between students and SROs may predict the students' attitudes toward the police. Therefore, the education system needs to understand how SROs should be assigned. This may also be

used to determine how SROs are trained. Shamserad (2023) stated that students' interactions inform students' perceptions of institutions such as the police. This qualitative study increases the understanding of how SROs experience how SRO interactions with students may affect students' perception of police officers. This study explored the role of the SROs and the effect of their interactions with students. Attitudes toward the police are formed during adolescence (Granot et al., 2021).

I will begin Chapter 2 by discussing the literature review process, focusing on the search terms and databases used. The chapter will continue with a discussion of Bronfenbrenner's theory of development and how this theory relates to this study. I will then examine the various studies that informed the study. This examination begins with studies that underpin the methodology, followed by a review of the literature regarding the concepts under review.

Literature Search Strategy

While planning this study, I accessed several databases to find articles that informed the study's methodology, theoretical basis, and concepts. The following databases from the Walden Library were searched: ERIC, PubMed, SAGE Social Sciences and Humanities database, APA PsycInfo, and MEDLINE with Full Text. I used the following terms in my database searches: *school resource officer*, *student perceptions*, *long-term*, *psychological*, *school staff*, *principals*, *assistant principals*, *bullying*, *school shootings*, *drug use* AND *abuse*, and *mental health*. The list of articles was reduced by limiting the time frame to only articles published in the last 5 years and published in scholarly journals. This search was repeated, including the function to search

the text of the articles instead of just the titles. This search was repeated in each database to ensure all possible articles were included.

Theoretical Foundation

The theory that framed this study was Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that five systems affect a child's development. The first system is the microsystem. This system includes people with whom the child interacts regularly. This system includes the child's family, friends, classmates, neighbors, and school staff. The SROs will be included in this study because the children interact with them in school. The second system is the mesosystem. This system includes interactions between people in the microsystem. An example of this is the interactions between parents and the school, or in terms of this study, the interaction between the parents and the SRO.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) third system is the exosystem. This system includes the environment that affects the child, even though they do not interact with it directly. This includes the community that the child lives in. An example would be the resources that are available in the community. The fourth system is the macro system. This includes the cultural views and norms that inform the child's view of the world. An example of this would be their family's view of the police. The final system is the chronosystem. This system includes the effect of time and childhood experiences on development. This system can include the child's interactions with SROs and community police officers.

The literature is split on the use of ecological systems theory. Three of the studies used the SROs as the center of the school. The SROs' interactions with the students are

informed by the interactions of the system (Curran et al.,2019 & Forber-Pratt et al., 2021). Other studies suggested that the SROs' interactions with the system inform SROs' view of SRO roles and what is seen as appropriate behavior (Ghavami et al., 2021, and Benitez et al., 2022). Other studies view the student as the center of the school, with students' interactions with SROs as the mesosystem (Arambula, 2023; Flynn & Mathias, 2023). These differences in perspective encourage a broader debate: Do SROs' roles change because of the school, or does the school change because of the role of the SROs?

The systems in Bronfenbrenner's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) can be used to understand how students develop particular views of the environment around them. Students develop a view of whether school is a good or bad environment through interactions with school officials, such as SROs (Flynn &Matthias, 2023). The current study focused on this phenomenon from a different viewpoint. The researcher examined the school with the student as the microsystem. The SROs were seen as the mesosystem. This interaction helped to determine whether students' interactions with SROs shape their views of police officers.

The second theory that framed the current study was Raven and French's power theory. Raven and French (1959) stated that there are five bases of power. The five bases of power are reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. The first base is Reward power. Students may want to obey SROs because the students think that the SROs can reward them for their behavior. The second base is coercive power. Students may obey SROs out of fear of the consequences of disobeying them. The third base is legitimate power. Students may respect the SROs because the

students feel that the government gave the SROs authority over the students. The fourth base is referent power. Students may obey SROs because the students identify with the SROs. The final base is expert power. This base suggests that students will obey SROs because the students believe that the SROs have knowledge that the students do not.

Some researchers have use the power theory to explain why individuals obey the police (Reisig et al., 2023; Joullié et al., 2021; Jarman, 2021). Other researchers have used this theory to explain how relationships form between people with power and the people those persons have power over (Fast & Overbeck, 2021). Raven and French's five bases of power can be used to understand why students report infractions to SROs. Examining the bases of coercive, referent, and legitimate power determines whether students report infractions to obtain rewards because the students are afraid of the police or because the students know the SROs or are familiar with the SROs. This study will examine legitimate power and coercive power.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

School Environment

In their book *Reimagining School Discipline for the 21st Century Student: Engaging Students, Practitioners, and Community Members*, Williams and Lewis (2022) stated that school discipline is highly debated in kindergarten through Grade 12 schools. They used data from the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Database for the 2018 school year, which found that African American students received the most significant percentage of discipline referrals. They further stated that harsher disciplinary actions are more often taken against racial or economic minority students. They further

stated that although the principal plays the primary role in discipline, other stakeholders also have a role. The author further stated that assistant principals, teachers, and other school staff all play a role in discipline.

Ogwumike et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative case study of a primary school in the First Independent School District in urban Texas. The study included eight participants: four school staff members and four district workers. The researchers used archival data, observations, and interviews with the participants to determine themes for the study. The archival data consisted of emails, memoranda, school reports, agendas, and notes taken by the district workers. The researchers used priori codes that were associated with transformational leadership. They found themes consistent with these codes, such as challenging assumptions, facilitating learning, and supporting independent thinking. The authors found that students who are often suspended feel less connected to the school community and are more likely to be arrested. The results of this study help to show the school's role in reducing criminal development.

Obadire and Sinthumule (2021) conducted a qualitative study using a purposive, non-probability sample of teachers, administrators, and school board members. The teacher participants were eligible if they had 5 years of experience or more in school discipline. The researchers used interviews, which they transcribed and coded to determine themes. They found that a lack of discipline in schools negatively affects student academic performance. They further found that all educational stakeholders must play a role in maintaining discipline. Understanding the way that discipline roles are

distributed assists with understanding the ways that SRO roles fit within the school structure.

Demirkol (2023) conducted a relational research study of 499 teachers in the city of Elazığ in Turkey. They used the Organizational Commitment Scale, Organizational Support Scale, and the Enabling Support Scale to determine how school structure affects organizational commitment. They found that roles and responsibilities must be clarified to optimize communication and decision-making. Studies such as this one show that the importance of clarifying the roles of educational stakeholders can be generalized to other cultures.

Melnick (2024) reviewed Educational guidelines proposed by the Department of Education during the tenure of various Presidents. Beginning with the guidelines set during President Obama's tenure and tracing changes up to President Biden's tenure. He further found that other Presidents may retract the guidelines set by previous Presidents. The author ended with a review of the guidelines set by President Biden. These guidelines attempted to clarify appropriate punishments for various infractions. The guidelines also encouraged the use of alternatives to out-of-school suspensions.

Ivaniushina and Alexandrov (2022) studied 1,6809 students representing 213 schools in Kaluga Oblast. The participants comprised 52% girls and 49% boys, with an even distribution of students in each grade level. This study formed part of a more extensive study between 2016 and 2019 and used information from the 2019 study cycle. The students comprised 12–15-year-old students in Grades 6–9. The questionnaires used were Cornel's Disciplinary Structure Scale, the Bullying by Teachers Scale, and the

Prevalence of Bullying and Teasing Scale. The researchers also used Hymel et al.'s Moral Disengagement Scale. They found that schools with consistent and just rules have a lower rate of bullying. Understanding the system in which SROs work is imperative to understanding the roles and responsibilities they must play in a school. The theoretical underpinning of the current study refers to the school as an ecology; however, to understand what this really means, the researcher must understand how this ecology operates and how its operation affects the students who encounter it every day.

School System

Principals. To highlight the principal's role in creating a school's atmosphere, Farr et al. (2020) conducted a case study of Harper Elementary School in an urban area of Texas. Harper Elementary has changed demographics between 2005 and 2015. District leaders sought to hire more diverse principals and teaching staff. The school had a history of high suspension rates but sought to use restorative justice practices to lower infraction rates. They found that the principal's job is to create a safe and productive student environment. They further stated that principals' policies can impact students' future success. It is important to understand how the roles of the various persons in the organization interact to create a successful outcome for the students.

Golan and Jones (2024) supported this by conducting a qualitative case study of 17 principals in a medium-sized urban school district. The principals represented primary, middle, and high schools. Due to low response rates from initial invitations, the researchers used a snowball recruitment method. The study aimed to determine how

principals view discipline and how they balance care and control. They found that principals greatly influence how policies are enacted in their schools.

Ferguson et al. (2023) conducted a study of 234 principals from various states in the United States. The principals were given vignettes of a school and asked to imagine the day-to-day running of the school. They were then given another vignette, one of a discipline infraction from that school, and asked to determine the best way to handle the discipline matters presented. They found that principals' attitudes can determine the policies implemented in a school and that they also determine how discipline is administered. Welsh (2023) supported this idea by conducting a qualitative study of principals, vice principals, and teachers. They used a qualitative method, using semistructured interviews. They stated that principals have discretion in handling discipline matters. A principal's discretion can include whether to involve an SRO in the incidents they encounter daily.

Assistant Principals. Administrators also play a role in discipline (Burks, 2023). Support for this idea came from Williams et al. (2023), who conducted a quantitative study of 2,367 schools to determine whether assistant principals' number of years of experience affects their response to discipline issues. They used a multiple regression analysis and determined that assistant principals spend most of their day dealing with discipline matters.

Johnson et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative multisite case study of 43 school administrators. The administrators interviewed were selected from middle and high schools that participated in a larger study. The study used a semistructured interview to

determine the administrators' attitudes and cultural competencies. They found that assistant principals need to understand their own biases and beliefs because these will affect the assistant principal's affective responses to the students. They further stated that assistant principals must understand the policies and systems of the schools in which they work. The question of the proper role of an SRO is integral to understanding the possible efficacy of SROs. Further studies suggest that some SRO roles make SROs better ambassadors for the police. Assistant principals must know the policies related to SROs to ensure that the SROs are allowed to perform their proper roles.

Teachers. Burleigh and Wilson (2021) conducted a qualitative study of teachers to determine whether they can identify microaggressions in their classroom and how they deal with them. They found that teachers must maintain safe classrooms. They accomplish this by upholding policies that reduce disturbances in the classroom. The authors used a narrative approach to determine whether teachers could identify microaggressions in the classroom.

Romano (2023) conducted a qualitative study of 25 secondary school teachers to answer whether teachers use assessment to determine their discipline practices. The authors found that teachers' perceptions of discipline practices are more pronounced when the infraction is more subjective. The author uses the example of defiance. The author further stated that more objective infractions, such as bullying, are less affected by the teacher's perception of discipline. The lack of concrete practices can lead to perceived bias in a school. One of the roles of SROs is to understand the law and determine proper

discipline in certain cases. This shows the need for SRO input in interpreting proper practices.

Furthermore, Blake et al. (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study of 515 teachers. The teachers were given vignettes and asked to determine the discipline method they would use. They found that many zero-tolerance policies focus on the infraction without accounting for the circumstances surrounding the infraction. They further stated that the teacher's philosophy may determine the type of discipline used. The author further stated that students who feel unfairly punished can disengage from learning. This disengagement can lead to academic challenges and behavioral issues. These behavioral issues can lead to future criminal activity. This disengagement may be ameliorated by the SROs playing the role of mentor. The current study will examine whether the roles of the SROs can deter future criminal activity.

Alternately, Scott (2021) presented an article discussing the negative consequences of out-of-school suspensions and the unbalanced ways that these suspensions are imposed. The author stated that teacher-student relationships are imperative to reducing negative student behavior. Burger et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative study of 750 seventh-grade girls representing 20 Prague, Czech Republic schools. The study aimed to determine which teacher interventions effectively reduced bullying incidences. The study found that when teachers do not intervene in bullying situations, the behavior will become worse. The bully will believe that bullying will not result in punishment, and the victim will no longer feel safe in school. SROs operate within the school system, and one way that Bronfenbrenner's theory understands a

child's development is to examine how the student's interactions with the school influence the child. Also, one of Raven and French's explanations of why children obey SROs' orders is fear. A student's interactions with school personnel may reduce or increase their fear of not obeying orders, which can skew the study results.

School Safety

Assaults on Fellow Students

Lowry et al. (2023) conducted a quantitative study of 28,442 ninth- through 12th-grade students from public and private schools across the United States, using participants from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. The researchers found that interpersonal violence often occurs on school campuses. They also found that students who had been victims of interpersonal violence were more likely to carry weapons to school than those who had not been victimized. The reasons that SROs are placed in schools are related to students' weapon possession. This provides an understanding of the kinds of issues that SROs are asked to handle in schools.

Miliauskas et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative literature review of 42 studies about community violence involving participants aged 10 to 24. The researchers defined community violence as a form of violence that occurs between persons who are not in a relationship. They further state that community violence occurs in institutions such as schools and workplaces. The study found that individuals exposed to violence are more likely to report mental health symptoms.

Siller et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study comprised of 3,404 students and 1,150 members of staff from 25 schools in New England. The study aimed to determine

how school climate and interpersonal violence are connected. The authors divided interpersonal violence into three categories: bullying, sexual violence, and physical assault. The researcher found that teachers' perceptions of school climate were associated with lower rates of interpersonal violence.

Support for this came from Irwin et al. (2021), who combined surveys from various sources, such as the CDC, the Department of Education, and the Department of Justice. The authors divided interpersonal violence into two categories: fatal and nonfatal incidents. Examples of nonfatal incident types include sexual assault, physical assault, and theft. The current study hopes to provide further information to the current body of literature on whether to have SROs in schools. To understand whether they should be there it is important to understand why they were placed there.

Basile et al. (2020) used the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey results of ninth- through 12th-grade students in the United States. They used the results of this survey to determine the effects of sexual violence on adolescents. They found that 8.2% of students reported being victims of sexual dating violence in 2019. A further 8.2% of students reported being victims of physical dating violence in the same year. One in eight students reported experiencing any form of dating violence during this period. Irwin et al. (2021) combined surveys from various sources, such as the CDC, the Department of Education, and the Department of Justice. They found that 30 out of every 1,000 students experienced violence on campus.

Kelly et al. (2023) analyzed the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. They found that students who experience violence at school often begin using substances to cope. They

also found that victims also develop depression. Some support for this came from Berny and Tanner-Smith (2024), who conducted a quantitative analysis of 294 adolescents who were undergoing treatment for substance abuse. The study aimed to determine the connection between exposure to violence and substance abuse and suicidal ideation. The study found that the victims of interpersonal violence might experience higher levels of suicidal ideation.

Further support came from Miliauskas et al. (2022), who conducted a study to determine the impact of community violence on mental health. To complete this, they reviewed a body of observational studies that included participants between the ages of 10 and 24. They found that interpersonal violence can result in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Previous reported studies explain the need for SROs in the school system. The SROs can handle physical bullying and other forms of violence on campus, and the administration can handle many forms of bullying. However, students who commit assaults or carry weapons need to be referred to the SRO because they are criminal offenses.

Assault on Teachers

Harrel et al. (2022) presented the findings of surveys conducted by the following federal agencies: the National Crime Victimization Survey, sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System - Occupational Supplement, sponsored by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the National Vital Statistics System sponsored by the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Census of Fatal

Occupational Injuries sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They found that nonfatal assaults on teachers accounted for 25% of all cases of assault on government employees. The majority of the assault cases involved incidents of simple assault. However, the violence against teachers also included incidents of intimidation, sexual harassment, and humiliation. Support for this came from Moon et al. (2020), who conducted a quantitative study of 1,628 teachers in the southwest region of the United States. They found that 40% of the teachers they surveyed experienced physical, verbal, or sexual aggression in the previous year. The incidents included kicking, hitting, pushing, lewd comments or gestures, yelling, or mockery.

McMahon et al. (2024) worked with the American Psychological Association task force on Classroom Violence Against Teachers to understand the prevalence and effects of violence against teachers. They used a mixed-method study with participants from 1,007 schools, including teachers, administrators, school psychologists, and other school staff. They found that teachers who were the victims of aggression often suffered from anxiety and stress. They also felt disengaged from teaching, which can lead to teachers quitting. Support for this came from McCluskey et al. (2024), who conducted a quantitative study involving participants from the 50 largest school districts in the nation. There were 4,005 participants employed at 609 schools. They found that victimized teachers experienced higher rates of burnout and lower rates of job satisfaction. They also found that victimized teachers had higher rates of job turnover. It is vital to understand the issues they must confront in schools to understand the proper roles of SROs. One of

the roles of the SRO is to understand the law. As the representatives of the police force in the school, SROs must understand their role in enforcing the law on school campuses.

Bullying

Valle et al. (2020) defined bullying as repeated and intentional acts of aggression against another person. They further stated that bullying is exacerbated by power imbalances and intended to harm others. Support for this came from Bussey (2023), who described bullying as the deliberate act of harming a less powerful person by a more powerful person. The author delineated bullying into the following categories: physical, verbal, and relational. Physical bullying relates to acts of physical aggression, such as hitting or pushing. Verbal bullying includes incidents of threats, cursing, name-calling, and insults. Relational bullying includes incidents that make the victim feel left out, isolated, or embarrassed. These incidents can include excluding the victim from social events or spreading rumors about them (Bussey, 2023).

Thomasen et al. (2024), in the 2022 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, found that 19% of students experienced one of the forms of bullying during the 2021–2022 school year in the United States. Kennedy (2021) conducted a meta-regression of bullying studies conducted between 1998 and 2017. The author found that although in-person bullying decreased between 2000 and 2017, cyberbullying rates increased by 6% during the same timeframe. Conversely, Li et al. (2020) reviewed the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. This survey used 72,605 participants, forming a representative sample of U.S. high school students. They found that the rate of

cyberbullying and bullying in person did not change significantly between 2011 and 2019.

The World Health Organization (2022) stated that bullying is a significant health concern that affects students' health, education, and social well-being. Support for this came from Ndetei et al. (2024), who stated that bullying can lead to suicidal ideation in teens. Overstreet et al. (2023) noted that bullying can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, and greater absenteeism. Support for this idea came from Boulton and Macaulay (2023), who conducted a longitudinal study of 836 participants between the ages of 12 and 13. They found that bullying was strongly correlated with social anxiety and concentration in classroom settings.

Eyuboglu et al. (2021) conducted a study of 6202 participants between the ages of 11 and 18. These students were middle and high school students in the Anatolia region of Turkey. They found that victims of bullying may become bullies themselves. They further state that victims who become bullies have a higher risk of externalizing their feelings, which can cause interpersonal problems. Dowdell et al. (2022) analyzed media reports of school shootings from 2013 to 2019. They found that 60% of school shooters reported being bullied. Support for this came from Kowalski et al. (2021), who conducted a review of 57 school shootings. Their study replicated a study by Leary et al. (2003). They found that school shooters appeared to have experienced some form of rejection. Further, Paez et al. (2021) conducted a review of the K–12 School Shooting Database, which was created by the Naval Postgraduate School's Centre of Homeland Defense and Security. They found that school shooters often targeted specific targets. One of the

SRO's roles is mentoring students. In this role, they form relationships with students to learn about infractions in the school. Because of the possible outcomes of bullying, lowered attendance, behavioral issues, and school shootings, SROs need to know the extent of bullying in schools.

School Shootings

The CDC (2019) described school shootings as a violent death that occurs on a school campus while students are heading to school or a school-sponsored event. Conversely, Paez et al. (2021) stated that the existing research on school shootings uses various definitions for school shootings. They further state that the definitions used include shootings where students are harmed but also incidents where only the shooter is harmed. However, they also concede that there is no clear definition of what constitutes a school shooting.

Irwin et al. (2023) analyzed survey data from various sources, such as the CDC, the Department of Education, and the Department of Justice. They found that there were 188 school shooting incidents with casualties in the 2021–2022 school year. They further stated that this increased over the previous year, with 93 incidents with casualties. Support for this came from Seekman et al. (2023), who stated that there were 51 school shootings in 2022. They further stated that these shootings occurred in 31 states. These shootings resulted in 101 injuries and 39 deaths.

Hicks et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study of 50 school counselors. These counselors were from Tennessee and Alabama. They found various causes for school shootings. They listed possible causes as bullying, a lack of relationships with peers,

experiencing violence in their homes, and an inability to solve disputes without violence. Further, Mizrahi-Warner et al. (2024) conducted a narrative review of articles on school shootings. In their findings, they highlighted the effects of shooters' interactions with others on pro-school shooting online forums. They further stated that these interactions offer potential shooters support and normalize the attitudes and beliefs that potential school shooters have that lead them to feel emboldened to commit shootings.

Turanovic and Siennick (2022) reviewed meta-analyses conducted between 2000 and 2020. They found that the causes of school shootings include the following: antisocial behavior, a history of child abuse, having an antisocial friend group, narcissism, and moral disengagement. They further state that students with a history of aggressive behavior in the community can predict in-school acts of violence, such as school shootings. Further, Flannery et al. (2021) stated that a bidirectional relationship exists between school shootings and gun ownership. They stated that the availability of guns can be a causal factor in school shootings. However, they also found that gun purchases increase after incidents of school shootings.

Elsaesser et al. (2020) stated that students who witnessed a school shooting experienced symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). They further stated that students who knew the students involved in the shooting suffered from more severe symptoms of PTSD. Support for this came from Alexander (2021), who stated that students often exhibit symptoms of PTSD and other mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and stress disorders.

Turanovic and Siennick (2022) stated that the consequences of school shootings included mental health disorders, substance abuse disorders, future offending, and a decrease in school performance. Support for this came from Kelly et al. (2023), who conducted a study that analyzed the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. They found that female students had higher truancy rates because they felt unsafe in school and traveling to and from school. Valentina et al. (2021) stated that students who witnessed school shootings may demonstrate increased levels of alcohol use. They further found that these students may also have decreased attendance and test scores. SROs play a vital role in schools' responses to school shootings. For this reason, the extent of the problem must be known. The current study is intended to add to the body of literature on the possible role of the relationship between students and SROs. This relationship may help students feel safer in school.

Substance Abuse

Friedman et al. (2022) reviewed data from the CDC's Wide-Ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research Program. They found that in 2020, 30.4% of 10th-grade students in the United States had used drugs in the last year. This number decreased to 18.7% in 2021. Support for this finding came from Johnston et al. (2022), who conducted a quantitative study of eighth-, 10th-, and 12th-grade students. This study consisted of 32,260 students from public and private schools. They found that 13% of 12th-grade students had used drugs in their lifetime. They further found that in 2021, 4.1% of students used marijuana daily. Further, Johnston et al. (2022) found that in 2021, 1.2% of 12th-grade students used cocaine in the last year. This finding is essential to this study

because drug possession is a criminal offense and must be handled by SROs. One of the SRO's roles is to provide students with information about the law on drug use and possession. This can be linked to Raven and French's (1959) theory because students may respect SROs because they are experts in the law.

Afifi et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study of 986 high school students in Beirut. They used a stratified sample method to select students from 24 schools. They found that adolescents had a higher risk of substance use if they experienced any adverse experiences in childhood. This included interpersonal violence, bullying, or trauma. Support for this idea came from Leban and Gibson (2020), who conducted a quantitative study. They used participants from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods study. The study included 1,911 adolescents who were 9, 12, or 15 years old. They found that individuals who had larger numbers of adverse childhood experiences were at increased risk of drug use and committing interpersonal violence.

Steinfeld and Torregrossa (2023) stated that the use of marijuana by adolescents may lead to psychosis. Support for this came from Hamidullah et al. (2020), who stated that nicotine consumption was associated with increased symptoms of ADHD, depression, schizophrenia, and lower cognitive abilities. They further stated that students who smoked had higher levels of difficulty concentrating due to more significant attention deficits.

School Resource Officers

Renbarger et al. (2022) defined SROs as law enforcement officers assigned to work in schools. Devlin and Fisher (2020) stated that SROs can assist with school

disturbances that may not be considered criminal activities. They enumerated the kinds of disturbances, including bullying, disrespect in classroom settings, and gang activities. Support for this came from Curran and Bozer (2023), who stated that the rise of school shootings has led to the use of SROs in the school system.

Further support for this came from Gottfredson et al. (2020). Gottfredson (2020) conducted a quantitative study using a pretest and posttest method of 33 schools in California. They matched the schools that had increased SRO presence with ones that did not. The schools were studied at 11 months and 20 months after the increase to determine changes in disciplinary rates and actions. They stated that the media coverage of school shootings has led to an increase in fear and concern about the safety of the school environment. They further stated that this fear has led to an increase in the use of SROs in kindergarten through Grade 12 schools. Students who fear for their safety at school often experience physical and mental health difficulties (Hong et al., 2022). These studies serve as a basis for this study by determining why SROs were placed in schools and why their numbers have increased.

History

Almanza et al. (2023) stated that the first SRO program began in Flint, Michigan, in the 1950s. They further stated that this program was deemed successful and was acquired by Fresno, California, in 1968. However, they further stated that no other districts had acquired the program for quite some time. According to Renbarger et al. (2022), the number of SROs increased after the government provided funds to employ SROs in the 1990s. Almanza et al. (2023) further stated that the presence of SROs

increased in the aftermath of several school shootings that garnered media attention. These studies outline the history of using SROs in the school system, why they were added, and why the number increased. It is vital to understand what schools require from SROs to understand whether the expectations of SROs and schools align with each other.

Husar et al. (2020) reported that during the 2017–2018 school year, 51% of primary schools had a security officer on campus every week. They further stated that 80% of middle schools had a security officer during that school year. Finally, they stated that 84% of high schools reported having a security officer. These security officers include SROs and Security Guards. Homer and Fisher (2020) found that 29% of schools interviewed stated they had an SRO employed at their schools. This study is essential to the current study because it speaks to the number of SROs in schools and how that has changed over time.

Roles

Demirkol (2023) stated that the roles and responsibilities of an SRO must be clarified to optimize communication and decision-making. The National Association of School Resource Officers (2018) proposed a triad model of SROs' roles. The triad model suggests that SROs should be teachers, mentors, and law enforcement officers. As teachers, SROs are to offer students information about education-related laws. As counselors, the SROs must deal with student violations without issuing discipline. They can also refer students to school personnel as appropriate. Finally, as law enforcement officers, SROs must know and abide by state laws. These sources are essential to the

current study to understand what role the SRO should perform. This knowledge will assist with understanding whether SROs may be effective in executing these roles.

Gottfredson et al. (2020) stated that despite having a triad model, the SROs' roles differ between schools and school districts. Support for this came from Renbarger et al. (2022), who presented a literature review of studies about the roles of SROs. They stated that SROs lack clear guidelines on adequately using their time. This, along with differences in SRO availability, leads to role confusion. Rhodes and Clinkinbeard (2020) conducted a qualitative study of SROs. The 20 participants for the study resided in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri. The study was conducted using interviews and observation of SROs. Some SROs stated that they determined their roles during on-the-job training. Other SROs stated that they were formally trained through the National Association of School Resource Officers. These findings relate to the current study because the current study seeks to understand how the SROs' perceived roles affect their relationship with students. Further, the study seeks to understand how these relationships affect students' views of police officers. These studies offer a foundation for this study. They speak to the same debate as the current study.

Walters (2020) authored an article examining the debate on using SROs in schools. The author stated that studies must be conducted to assess appropriate SRO roles. Lesley (2021) studied Memoranda of Understanding from school districts around South Carolina. The author found that schools and law enforcement must have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to determine SROs' roles in the school. Further, the school must determine the behavioral issues it faces to determine what is needed from

an SRO. The author further stated that MOUs are written but not followed by the schools and SROs in many states.

Training

DeBarr and Pettit (2022) stated that SROs need specific training to know what roles they should be performing. Support for this came from Bolger et al. (2019), who conducted a quantitative study of SROs. The study consisted of 179 SROs chosen using a convenience sample. The study aimed to determine if SROs chose different discipline options and whether the trained SROs conceptualized discipline outcomes differently. They found that formal training only made a difference in cases of classroom disturbances. SROs' years of experience played a role in their responses in cases involving autistic students. This study examines whether harmful decisions that SROs make can be circumvented by training. SROs' daily decisions can help or harm their relationships with students. Training practices can change how SROs understand their roles and ensure they are more effective. The study above shows that differences in training can cause changes in SRO perceptions of efficacy.

Further, Glenn et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study of 456 participants. The study aimed to determine what changes SROs felt should be made to make their programs more effective. The researchers used the open-ended questions section of a study conducted by the North Carolina Center for Safer Schools. The themes found included the need for better access to training and improved training methods.

Forber-Pratt et al. (2021) studied 35 SROs from the Southeastern United States. They used a qualitative method to determine the SROs' views of Trauma-informed care.

They used vignettes that were part of a training module on Trauma-informed care and dealing with students with adverse childhood experiences. The researchers concluded that the modules helped SROs understand that trauma can affect how students interact with others. They also found that the modules helped SROs understand that it is crucial to build trust with students.

Riccardi et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative study of police in a city that was not named to examine the efficacy of a training program called 'Recognizing and Responding to Traumatized Youth.' The program's purpose was to teach officers how to approach traumatized youths, cues that might signal an escalation of aggression, and how to de-escalate situations. The study comprised 871 participants who completed the pre- and posttraining surveys. The researchers found that 63% of SROs reported plans to incorporate the information into future student interactions. Further, 37% reported that the information about teens' cognitive and emotional development was helpful.

The studies above speak to a critical aspect of SRO performance in schools. The level and kind of training SROs receive can change how they interact with students and handle discipline infractions. These findings highlight an aspect of the relationship between students and SROs that must be studied. SROs need to know what role they should play in the school and the best way to perform these roles.

Legal Socialization as a Factor in Students' Relationships With School Resource Officers

Legal socialization is the process by which individuals develop beliefs about the law and the people who uphold and create the law Fine and Trinkner (2020). The authors

further stated that people see authority as legitimate when the authorities share the individual's beliefs and values. Fine and Van Rooij (2021) supported this by conducting a quantitative study of 1,000 participants to determine how much people's views of the legal system affect legal socialization. They found that people's perception of the police as just and fair was associated with the obligation to obey the law. They found that the perception of legitimacy was more significant than the moral obligation to obey the law. They also found that perceived police bias was associated with changes in people's obligation to obey the law.

Support for this came from Piccirillo et al. (2021), who conducted a quantitative study of 669 students in Sao Paolo, Brazil. The researchers used data from the Sao Paolo Legal Socialization Study to determine if police contact affects adolescents' legal socialization. The researchers found that the type of police contact had a more significant impact on the legal socialization of adolescents. Voluntary police contact led to greater legal socialization. The effect of violent encounters was mediated by the individual's belief that the police are procedurally just. This study shows that the debate on using SROs in schools is international. The current study is being conducted in a country outside the United States. This study forms the basis for the study.

Further support for the generalizability of police contact and legal socialization comes from Hyunjung Cheon et al. (2023). The researchers conducted a quantitative study to determine if crime rates were affected by students' perceptions of police. The study consisted of participants between the ages of 10 and 17 from Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Lucia. There were 2,400 participants in Guyana, 875 in St. Kitts and

Nevis, and 2,102 in Saint Lucia. The researchers found that students' perceptions of the police were related to lower legal socialization. This study is crucial to the planned study because these countries are in the English-speaking Caribbean, as is the country where the study was conducted.

In contrast to legal socialization, legal cynicism relates to individuals' belief that they do not need to follow the law (Cavanagh et al., 2022). They further stated that legal cynicism may lead to increased criminal activity in individuals. They conducted a study to determine the causes of legal cynicism. This quantitative study involved 396 juveniles convicted of a low or moderate-level crime and their mothers. The researchers found that police interactions had a more significant impact on legal cynicism than maternal cynicism. They also found that juveniles less cynical of the law were less likely to reoffend.

In contrast, Nivette et al. (2020) stated that legal cynicism and police legitimacy are different concepts. They conducted a quantitative study to determine whether these concepts have the same root causes. They interviewed 1,675 children from 56 primary schools in Zurich. They found that legal cynicism was rooted in individual factors. In contrast, police legitimacy was rooted in interactions with police. They also found that people's attitudes towards police legitimacy decreased between adolescence and early adulthood.

Although police interactions with adolescents affect legal socialization, Fine et al. (2019) conducted a study to determine if adolescents can differentiate between systems of authority. This quantitative study consisted of 10,491 12th graders in all 48 contiguous

states. The authors found that adolescents differentiate between social authorities such as the church, schools, and legal authorities. The participants stated they trusted the legal system the least.

Granot et al. (2021) conducted a study to determine whether the relationship between SROs and students affects students' legal socialization. The quantitative study involved 1228 students from five public schools in four northeastern districts of the United States. The researchers found that students who saw SROs as legitimate were more likely to obey police in the community. The participants also reported tremendous school success.

Kupchik et al. (2020) supported this finding by conducting a qualitative study of teachers, students, school administrators, and SROs. They conducted focus groups and used a semistructured interview to determine whether SROs succeeded as police ambassadors. They found that the SROs were successful if they prioritized forging relationships with students. These relationships allowed the SROs to teach the students about the police and the law. The current study aims to understand how the presence of SROs on campus and the roles they play may affect students' legal development. The results of these studies show both sides of student legal development. This is vital to the current study because, as stated above, negative interactions with the police may lead to legal cynicism.

The Current Debate on the Role of School Resource Officers

There is a debate on the proper role of SROs and whether they should remain in schools (Nance & Heise, 2022). They stated that two sides of the debate are whether

SROs make schools safer or add to the school-to-prison pipeline. The deaths of individuals at the hands of police exacerbated this debate. Nance and Heise (2022) conducted a quantitative study to address some of the questions in the debate using data from the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), which covered the period from 2009 to 2018. They excluded all specialized schools from the study. They found that schools that had SROs had a significant increase in student referrals to police agencies. This study is significant because it uses empirical evidence to add to the debate on having SROs in schools. This study seeks to add evidence to the same debate as the present study.

There has been an increase in concern about police use in schools (Lynch & Chappell, 2021). To determine the best use of SROs in schools, they used a qualitative method to study the perception of 20 participants from the Southeastern United States. They used semistructured interviews to ascertain how SROs felt about the school system. They found the following themes: role ambiguity, a lack of clear differentiation between discipline and crime, and a willingness to use alternative methods of discipline.

Between 2006 and 2018, the number of SROs in schools rose; however, after George Floyd's death, districts have considered removing them from schools (Vernon & Curran, 2024). The authors added to the literature on this topic by conducting a quantitative study using the Civil Rights Data Collection data. They wanted to determine if the presence of SROs raised the rate of adverse behaviors. They found that a larger number of SROs was correlated with an increase in arrest rates but not the rate of

behavioral incidents. The findings above relate to the beginning of the debate to the present study hopes to add empirical evidence.

Many schools face calls to defund their SRO programs (Heise & Nance, 2021). The authors further stated that this trend is partly due to a belief that increased SRO presence in schools leads to an increase in behavioral incidents being considered criminal, especially for students of color. To determine if there was any merit to these hypotheses, they conducted a quantitative analysis of data from the SSCOS. They found that the presence of an SRO did increase the number of students referred to law enforcement; however, they did not find a disproportionate increase in referral of students of color. They suggested this may be because they had less information on the student referred. The studies described examined the result of SROs on various groups of students. It also shows a gap in the literature.

There is little evidence on the efficacy of SROs in reducing school-based crime and reporting (Fisher & Devlin, 2020). They attempted to fill this gap in the literature by conducting a quantitative analysis of the SSCOS data. They wanted to determine if changes in SRO roles affected their efficacy in reducing crime and the level of crime reporting. They found that SROs who utilized the role of mentor were more efficient. They further found that schools where SROs implemented a triad model showed a decrease in behavioral incidents. They further found that schools with SROs that filled the role of police only showed more significant increases in behavioral incidents.

Students are more likely to report incidents to trusted adults (Espelage et al., 2022). To support this theory, they conducted a qualitative study using focus groups of

students. They aimed to determine what factors encouraged students to report incidents and what factors decreased the likelihood of reporting. They found that students were more likely to report incidents under three conditions: they feel they can trust the adult they are reporting to, they feel that action will be taken, and they fear reprisal by peers. Many students in the study cited a lack of trust in adults on campus as a barrier to reporting. The studies above offer evidence of the difference in efficacy between SRO roles in relationship building. This study used a phenomenological approach, as did the current study.

In the wake of increased violence committed by students in the Philadelphia school system, schools implemented zero-tolerance policies (Goldstein et al., 2019). These policies added to the school-to-prison pipeline by criminalizing behaviors that were previously considered normal teenage misbehavior. These policies set fixed penalties for infractions, leading to higher suspensions and arrest rates. The Philadelphia Diversion Program was implemented to decrease arrests and behavioral infractions in Philadelphia schools.

Goldstein et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study of 2,264 Philadelphia school students arrested or referred to a diversion program to determine if this program effectively diverted students from future criminal activities. The researchers aimed to evaluate the program to determine the efficacy of prearrest diversion in reducing arrests and behavioral incidents. They found that arrests declined by 84% in the first 5 years. They further found that the number of behavioral incidents declined by 34% simultaneously. These findings are critical because they support the idea of SROs

implementing alternative programs to reduce incidents and arrests. This study offers an alternative to removing SROs by examining the efficacy of SRO programs that aim to stop behavioral infractions.

Few studies have examined students' views of SROs and the students' long-term perception of police (Devlin & Rennó Santos, 2022). To add to the literature, they conducted a quantitative study of 346 college students. The researchers aimed to determine if SROs in middle and high schools affected students' long-term perception of police. They also examined whether the role that the SROs played mediated this relationship. They found that there was a negative relationship between the presence of SROs in middle school and students' long-term perception of police, regardless of the roles that they performed. They found a slightly positive relationship between the presence of SROs in high schools and the students' long-term perception of police. This was only found when the SROs performed a triad role.

Robinson et al. (2021) stated that schools have continued to rely on traditional discipline policies despite differences in behavioral difficulties. The researchers further stated that restorative justice practices may offer better results than traditional discipline. To help inform school security about restorative justice, they conducted a professional development program for Security and SROs. To determine if and how the information presented in the program would be implemented, they conducted a study of 36 SROs from three large urban school districts. They found that many SROs had some knowledge of restorative justice and agreed that students needed to remain in school. They further stated that SROs agreed that building trust with students and treating students with

compassion was important. The participants in the study above were SROs. This is the same population as the current study. It also examines the role of the relationship between SROs and students.

Some researchers recommend the total removal of SROs (Zabala-Eisshofer et al., 2024). However, they also state that most researchers call for reform instead of abolition. They conducted a literature review of policy recommendations included in studies on SROs. The researchers did not include the criterion of inclusion in the review. They determined that the policy recommendations in many studies were determined by the politics of the journal that published the article. They did not suggest a position of reform or defunding. This study was necessary because the researchers stated that little is known about how many federal agencies use scholarly research in their decision-making. This article examines the articles that form the body of literature to which the current study aims to add.

In 2020, the Chicago Public Schools began removing SROs from their schools (Arneson et al., 2024). The Chicago Board of Education developed a plan that could replace the SROs. This plan was called the Whole School Safety Framework. Chicago began removing SROs from their public school is the 2020–2021 school year. The researchers conducted a study to determine what changes occurred in the schools after the removal of the SROs. They found no statistically significant differences in the rate of infractions reported. They found no change in teacher or student perceptions of safety on campus. They did find a significant drop in what they called high-level infractions. The

results of this study add evidence to the effect of removing SROs from schools. It is crucial to understand both sides of the debate.

Summary and Conclusions

SROs have been used in U.S. schools since 1953. Due to an increase in highly publicized incidents of aggression by police, many researchers have begun to investigate whether SROs should be placed in schools. To understand the debate on using SROs in schools, it is imperative first to understand the school system and where the SRO fits in this system. The literature on the debate on whether SROs should remain in the school system is robust. Many studies have been conducted on their efficacy, such as the Role of the SRO and the role confusion prevalent in many school districts, and the role of SROs in the legal development of students. Role confusion can be minimized by the different types of training SROs can receive. Whether they effectively clarify role confusion. The alternatives to having SROs in the school system were also studied. The other side of the debate is the removal of SROs and their result.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to increase the understanding of how SROs experience how SROs' interactions with students may affect students' perceptions of police officers. This study explored the role of the SROs' relationships with students and the possible effect of the SROs' interactions with students. Granot (2021) stated that individuals' attitudes toward the police are formed during adolescence. For this reason, the relationship between SROs and students may inform students' views of the police. There is a gap in the literature on the daily activities of SROs in the school system (Curran et al., 2020). Further, Glenn et al. (2019) stated that studies must include SROs' perspectives on SROs' efficacy.

This study was grounded by Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that various ecological systems foster childhood development. The first ecological system is the microsystem. The microsystem consists of the systems that the child interacts with directly. This system includes the school. The microsystem is the system in which the child interacts with SROs. This study was guided by the following RQs:

RQ1: How do SROs perceive how SROs' relationships with students may affect the students' perception of police officers?

RQ2: How do SROs perceive their relationship with high school students?

The results of this study add to the debate on the appropriateness of having SROs in the school system. The results can assist organizations in determining whether SROs

feel that their relationships with students may affect the students' view of the police department. This will also allow SROs to offer their opinions on their programs' efficacy and the roles they should play in the school. Chapter 3 will begin with a discussion of the research design and its rationale. I will then discuss the study's methodology, including the chosen population, the selection criterion, the number of participants, and their relationship to saturation, the instrument used, and data collection and analysis using Quirkos analysis software.

Research Design and Rationale

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to understanding human beings' lived experiences (Urcia, 2021). Husserl (1919) described phenomenology as a view of human experiences free from bias and the influence of the world around the individual. He further stated that people understand the world through their consciousness and how they interact. I study utilized a phenomenological qualitative research design to explore SROs' perceptions of how their relationships with students may influence students' views of the police. Phenomenological qualitative research is exploratory and allows researchers to understand how SROs perceive their possible role as police ambassadors in school settings. A phenomenological qualitative method is appropriate when examining the perceived experiences of participants in a study, along with their unique perspectives (J. L. Ellis & Hart, 2023). This study examined the perceived experiences of SROs in interacting with students in a middle school. Due to the phenomenon under review, quantitative research methods would not be suitable for exploring it. Henline-Hall (2024) noted that quantitative research methods are not feasible when studying in-depth

evaluations of phenomena, especially for personal experiences. Other qualitative research methods would also be inappropriate. Case studies are often used when exploring activities, processes, or individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Narrative studies would also be inappropriate because this method involves examining the lives and stories of individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

Wellman and Kruger (1997) stated that the role of the researcher is to describe the phenomenon of interest as accurately as possible without using a schema. For this study, the researcher acted as an interviewer. The interviews were conducted on Zoom or Teams, so the SROs cannot be observed in their school settings. The SRO at the school where the researcher works was not included as part of the sample. Therefore, the researcher had no professional relationships with any SROs participating in the study. The researcher has no authority over the SROs because they work in a different government agency. No incentives were offered to participate. Participation will be entirely voluntary. To control for researcher bias, member checking was used to ensure that the themes accurately reflect the participants' opinions. The participants were allowed to review their transcripts and the highlighted themes. An analysis program called Quirkos was to be used to ensure that themes were not overlooked.

Methodology

The current study's target population was SROs who were willing to participate. All SROs were considered eligible if they were full-time police officers. They must be

sworn and trained SROs. They must be over 18 years old and have been assigned to a middle school for at least 1 year.

Participant Selection Logic

I used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants. A listing of email addresses for the SROs was requested, and those that met the criteria were sent an invitation email. The SROs who met the criteria and responded positively were emailed an informed consent form, a description of the study, and a link to select a convenient time for them to be interviewed via Zoom. The commissioner was asked to disseminate the flyer on the researcher‘s behalf if the email addresses cannot be obtained. Potential participants who did not respond or did not respond favorably were not contacted again. Potential participants who responded were asked to forward the invitation email to other potential participants. If the referred participants agreed to participate, they were given the consent forms and the link to select the interview method and time.

I conducted the interviews in one sitting unless more time was needed. The interviews were planned to last 1 hr or less to avoid causing participant fatigue. This process continued until sufficient participants had been interviewed. The online participant interviews were to be recorded via Zoom. Participants were emailed a transcript of the interview for member-checking purposes. The participants were invited to recommend other SROs willing to participate in the study. They were also allowed to provide feedback on the questions asked.

A purposive sample is a non-probability sampling method that focuses on specific characteristics of the participants (American Psychological Association, n.d.a). The

current study's participants' specific characteristic was working as police officers in a middle school setting, which is uncommon in the general population. There are 15 SROs in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, with eight meeting the criterion for inclusion in the current study. Staller (2021) stated that sample size is determined by the data collection technique used. Phenomenological studies should use between five and 25 participants who have experienced the phenomenon under review (Creswell, 1998). Data collection should cease when the research reaches saturation, meaning no new themes are discovered (Staller, 2021).

Instrumentation

I designed an 11-question questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questions for the questionnaire were derived from various studies on SROs. This questionnaire formed the basis of a semistructured interview. The interviews were to be conducted online (via Zoom). The participants were a homogeneous sample of SROs deployed in middle school settings. They were asked to answer questions about the police. The interview guide was the basis of the interview, but prompts were used to elicit further participant responses.

Content validity is described as the extent to which a study measures the phenomenon that it is intended to measure (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Content validity for the questionnaire used in the study will be determined using a five-step procedure (Taherdoost, 2016). An exhaustive literature review was conducted to determine the types of questions needed. Then, the questions were reviewed to ensure they were all essential. The non-essential questions were removed from the questionnaire.

The completed questions were sent to my committee for review. The questions were edited again based on feedback from my committee.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Permission was obtained from the Royal Bahamas Police Force to contact their officers and ask for their assistance in contacting the officers needed for the study. The officers were sent an invitation via email (see Appendix B) and were asked to email the researcher if they wanted to participate. If they agreed to participate and meet the inclusion criteria, they were sent an email with the consent form. They responded via email, and if they still agreed, they selected a time to be interviewed. They were to be interviewed individually via Zoom. If the email addresses could not be obtained, the commissioner was requested to email the flyers to the SROs. They were informed once again that the interview was being recorded. At this time, they could determine whether they wished to turn on their camera or not.

The interviews were also recorded using Zoom. The interviews took one hour or less; each SRO was only interviewed once. Once the interviews were concluded, they were transcribed. If there were not enough participants, a snowball sample was used. The SROs who participated were asked to suggest other SROs that may have wanted to participate. Once the SROs were interviewed, they were debriefed and determined if they wanted to be contacted as part of the member-checking process. They were not required to participate in any further interviews.

Data Analysis Plan

During interviews, SROs were not referred to by name. Instead, they received codes to replace their real names during transcription. The information on the codes for each participant is kept in a separate document in a separate file. The interviews were coded using inductive coding, described as a method of analyzing primarily text-based data (Vears & Gillam, 2022). Once the interview was transcribed, the coding process began by writing notes about initial ideas of themes. Then, the interview was condensed into a summary. The codes were noted in the margins, and newly detected codes were noted. When all interviews were coded, the number of instances of codes was calculated, and relationships between themes were noted. The themes were compared and contrasted, and discrepant cases were identified and reviewed separately (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Quirkos was to be used to assist with the analysis.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility is the extent to which an experiment's results are true (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple sources of data or multiple researchers can achieve credibility. To accomplish this, I will use peer validation. Loh (2013) defined peer validation as using people familiar with the field of study to ensure credibility. I will send copies of the transcribed interviews and the codes and themes detected to my committee for review. I will also use member-checking to ensure credibility. Transferability is the extent to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other settings (Lincoln & Gubar, 1985). Transferability can be achieved by using purposive sampling and reflexivity (Enworo, 2023). I will maintain a journal about the codes and themes I found during the

completion of my study. I will also use this journal to write any biases that I encounter during the investigation.

Dependability is the extent to which a study's results can be replicated using the same conditions again (Lincoln & Guber, 1985). Enworo (2023) stated that to ensure dependability, the study's processes must be transparent. To increase dependability, I will keep extensive notes for every step in the coding and analysis process and make them available to my committee for review. Confirmability ensures that a study's results are free from researcher bias and reflect the phenomenon under review (Lincoln & Gubar, 1985). To achieve confirmability in this study, I will use reflexivity and triangulation. I will keep a journal of the analysis process to ensure that I am not ignoring any themes or codes. I will also use member checking to ensure the themes are not overlooked.

Ethical Procedures

To complete this study, I needed to obtain permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (02-05-25-1068784). Once it was received, the Royal Bahamas Police Force was contacted to obtain permission to conduct interviews and request informed consent from potential participants. To ensure officers do not feel compelled to participate due to my partnership with the police, they were informed that their participation was voluntary. This was included in the informed consent document. The informed consent document included the purpose of the study and the ethical protections that the participant can expect, such as their right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time, the length and frequency of interview sessions, how their privacy will be maintained, and how the data and results will be used.

The SRO at the school where the researcher works was not included to avoid power relationships. Before they agree to participate, the consent form will be emailed to each participant. They must respond to the email by signing the consent form. They will be given a week to determine if they want to participate. Once data collection is completed, a number was assigned to each participant to avoid using their names. The interview data were saved separately from the list of participant names on a password-protected jump drive for the duration of the study. Only the redacted interviews will be transmitted to my committee members. The complete interviews, including the participants' names, were not transmitted. The study results will form the basis of a PowerPoint presentation that will be presented to the Royal Bahamas Police Force upon completion. This presentation will include the themes and anonymous quotes only; no names, ranks, or years of service will be included.

Summary

The current phenomenological study explored the experiences of SROs and their opinion on whether their relationship with students can affect the students' view of the police force. The criteria for inclusion were that the SRO has worked in a school for at least 1 year. The study used a purposive sample of SROs. The SROs were emailed a packet of information that included information about the study and a consent form. Once they agreed to participate, they selected an interview time. They were also advised that they could cease participation at any time. The study's results will add to the research literature on the roles of SROs. In Chapter 4, I will explore the study's findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to increase understanding of how SROs perceive the impact of their interactions with students on students' perceptions of police officers. Data was collected from seven participants employed in the junior high system for at least 1 year. The interview guides consisted of 12 questions. The following RQs underpinned the study:

RQ1: How do SROs perceive how SROs' relationships with students may affect the students' perception of police officers?

RQ2: How do SROs perceive their relationship with high school students?

In this chapter, I present the themes and concepts that emerged from the data analysis. Similarities and differences between the themes found will be discussed. Issues of trustworthiness will also be addressed.

Setting

I interviewed the participants in church offices and community centers that were not involved in advertising the study. These settings offered a neutral setting, a safe space to speak, and privacy. The church offered an unused classroom on their grounds, and the community center offered a small office that was separate from the main hall. The participants were interviewed over 4 weeks. The participants did not report any personal or organizational conditions that influenced their experiences. No participants reported any PTSD symptoms or trauma at the time of the interviews.

Demographics

The study consisted of seven participants, of whom three were male and four were female. The participants were all full-time SROs. The participants' years of service ranged from 1 to 3.5 years. The differences in gender and years of service impacted the participants' responses. Male participants had to be prompted more than female participants. Participants who had been SROs for more extended periods provided more detailed responses.

Data Collection

The partner agency signed a partnership agreement and distributed the flyer for the study. The flyer was sent to the head of the SRO department, who sent it to the officers. The first officer who agreed to participate provided the name of another officer willing to participate. The officers were hesitant to participate at first. However, after one officer participated and spoke to them about the type of questions asked, more officers were willing to participate. Before each session, informed consent was discussed. The officers provided consent to participate, and we set meeting times via email. During the interview, the officers were reminded that they could choose to end the interview at any time. The handling of the transcripts was explained, and they were assured of confidentiality.

Once the interviews were finished, the officers were assigned an alphanumeric title. Each participant was debriefed by explaining the purpose of the study and walking them through the notes about the ideas expressed. This allowed them to clarify any mistakes or misinterpretations that were made. They were also sent the codes found in

their interview for member checking. These steps ensured greater trustworthiness and ensured that the codes were not biased.

I divided the interview questions into three sections. The first section was demographic information. These questions elicited information on years of service and the number of schools the officer was posted at. This information was removed from the transcripts and kept in a separate file on a separate computer. Any instances in which the officer referred to themselves by name were also removed from the transcript. There was a change in data collection between Chapter 3 and the actual study. Initially, the interviews for the study would be conducted via Zoom. However, the partner agency decided the interviews would be in person. The consent forms were changed, and the interviews were conducted in person.

Data Analysis

In Chapter 3, the analysis plan included the use of NVivo or Quirkos. This was not logistically or financially feasible, so the analysis was done by hand. Once interviews were completed, the audio files were uploaded into Microsoft Word for transcription. The documents were then downloaded and saved to a file in a secure location. The transcripts were then compared to the audio files to verify them. This ensured the accuracy of the transcripts. Once the transcripts were accurate, the process of coding began. Coding involves applying labels to data, such as words or phrases. This helps the researcher to organize data into themes (Isangula et al., 2024). The process of coding began by using deductive coding. Deductive coding is described as using codes found in existing

literature, also known as a priori codes (Tai et al., 2024). Many of these codes were found. These categories were further condensed into themes.

After completing the deductive coding, inductive coding began. Inductive coding involves creating codes from the data to help identify new phenomena (Zhoa et al., 2024). There were discrepant cases in terms of the roles of the SRO. Some officers assist with administrative duties, but many said they did not. Also, officers differed on the role of educator. Some officers state that they agree to hold classes for absent teachers, as an opportunity to assist with subjects other than legal education. Other officers stated that they educate students on offenses and proper decision-making only. The other area of discrepancy was whether the SRO wanted to be an SRO. Most said they did not, but this difference did not appear to change the officer's perception of the importance of their job or their desire to continue being an SRO. The themes and subthemes found will be discussed in the Results section. They are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
The importance of formal SRO training	
The role of the SRO	The proper role of the SRO
	Educating staff on the role of the SRO
Nature of the relationships between students and SROs	The way these relationships affect students.
Changes in student perceptions of the police	

Note. SRO = school resource officer.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Although the purpose of the study was to provide an unbiased and trustworthy view of the phenomenon, there are threats to trustworthiness that must be discussed. The first concern was the Hawthorne Effect. This effect is defined as a conscious or unconscious change in the behavior of participants and researchers due to four biases. These biases include selection bias, confirmability bias, social desirability bias, and observation bias (Berkhout et al.,2022). The second threat encountered is the sample size. Due to using a purposive sample, the pool of possible participants was small. The participants were drawn from a pool of Bahamian SROs on the island of New Providence. The results may differ if the participants came from a different island or a different country. Although the subjective nature of qualitative research complicates trustworthiness (Haq Kakar et al., 2023). Lincoln and Guber (1985) suggested four strategies to ensure trustworthiness. These strategies include ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each one will be discussed separately in the following paragraphs.

Credibility is the extent to which an experiment's results are accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the study's credibility, the interviews were all coded consistently. Each interview was coded first deductively to determine if the themes aligned with previous research. A research journal was also used to act as an audit trail. Member checking is another method that was used to ensure credibility. Another method of

ensuring credibility is member checking (Lim, 2025). The study themes were sent to the participants for them to examine. This allowed them to correct any misconceptions or misrepresentations in the results.

Transferability is the extent to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The basis of transferability is using a robust sampling process (Samuel & Merkebu, 2025). The transferability could not be conclusively ensured because the participants were pulled from a pool of SROs in New Providence. To mitigate this, all members of the participant pool were encouraged to participate. All potential participants who consented to participate and met the criteria were interviewed.

Dependability is the extent to which a study's results can be replicated using the same conditions again (Lincoln & Guber, 1985). Audit inquiries improve the dependability of research. An audit inquiry involves an outside evaluator evaluating the study process (Lim, 2025). My committee and the Institutional Review Board of Walden University oversaw this study. Both parties approved the steps and materials used in the study.

Confirmability ensures that a study's results are free from researcher bias and reflect the phenomenon under review (Lincoln & Gubar, 1985). Lim (2025) suggested three methods of improving confirmability, which were used in this study. An audit trail involves documenting every step of the research process. For this study, every step was documented. Similarly, the second method is reflexivity. Reflexivity includes noting any biases, decisions made, and perspectives. For this study, a journal of the processes used in

the planning, execution, and analysis of the study was kept. The final method is member checking. The themes were sent to the participants to check for any misconceptions or misrepresentations in the results.

Results

Theme 1: The Importance of Formal School Resource Officer Training

All participants emphasized the importance of training classes for SROs, separate from the general courses during police training. Participant 1 stated,

> I would say learning to listen to children, knowing that when they are angry, to leave them alone and come back to deal with them later. I also understand that I am an educator, educating students on various criminal offenses. Things of that nature, because many children are unaware that they could be charged with certain criminal offenses. They believe that, you know, the school is the only form of discipline that they can receive.

Support for this came from Participant 2, who stated that.

> I learned that adolescent brains do not develop until adulthood, maybe around 20 if I remember correctly. So, understanding that helps me be more patient with the children because I know their brains and my brain are not on the same level. Thus, when I think before I do something, I think about the consequences or reaction to what I did, but they don't necessarily think like that. Furthermore, even speaking with them is just different. They're still learning and they're still developing. And that's one thing I learned and will never forget from the training.

However, some participants felt that the training program needed to be upgraded to ensure greater relevancy to the Bahamian school system. Participant 6 stated, “They went through for stuff. It was kind of. American base. So it was also interaction with the kids, basically delving into their emotional needs.” Partial support for this sentiment came from Participant 7, who stated that,

> We had to go through a different program. A workshop on a different training on how to deal with certain things regarding children: it's like additional workshops and seminars. I assisted with more like enforcing the law, but also like being an assistant to keep order in the school, and all that stuff. But we are dealing with tiny humans, and they have feelings too. We need to know how to deal with them.”

Changes over the year could not account for the discrepancy between the training levels. Participants 1 and 6 graduated from the police college in the same year; however, they had very different views of the training they received.

Theme: The Role of the School Resource Officer

As found in the literature, the participants spoke about their roles and educated the administration about them. These areas were handled as subthemes of the theme role.

Subtheme: The Proper Role of SROs

The participants all agreed that their primary role was to assist the administration. Participant 1 stated

> For example, in a simple threat of harm, until it's an official complaint, it wouldn't necessarily be a police matter. So, we are there to assist them. So with an incident

> that happens on campus, you can't turn it over to the police and say Hey, you. Deal with that. No, the fact is that yes, it happened on the school campus with school students. So, my job is to assist you with the matter. So like I said, it's just helping them.

Participant 3 agreed with this. They stated, "Police officers in schools are to assist. We come in after the administration has done their due diligence, and they will say, We cannot deal with it. It is a police matter. We need you to act."

They also stated that they do not handle discipline matters, although there were discrepant cases. Participant 4 said, "I don't handle discipline, in terms of physical discipline or suspensions". Participant 2 was a discrepant case. They stated that,

> Discipline, physical discipline. No, we're not allowed to discipline students physically. But everything I deal with, even if it's outside of my scope of work, is based on the fact that I have a good relationship with the staff at the school. I've been to the school for a very long time. It's the same principal from then to now. So even though, like for example. Dealing with a school suspension that doesn't come under my portfolio. However, because I have a good working relationship with my school, I tell them that, you know, I don't have an issue with helping one or two children if they're on in-school suspension.

Similarly, Participant 6 stated, "So. I put my hands in everything, to be honest. Even in mostly school-based things, administrators are needed in any matter that comes to me."

Subtheme: Educating Staff About SRO Roles

Another subtheme of the theme of role is education. Outside of the training that the SROs received during their police college programs, many of the participants spoke about educating others. Many spoke about educating the students about the law. Participant 1 stated, “I am an educator, educating students on various criminal offenses. They're not aware that they could be charged with certain criminal offenses; they believe that, you know, the school is the only form of discipline that they can receive.” Similarly, Participant 6 stated, “I try to feed them the information that I know that they don't get. It must be reinforced before I take anything to another level because you want to go through certain steps.” Participant 5 similarly stated, “Many teachers sometimes would invite you into the class just to speak to the students on, you know, common criminal offenses that you would find in the schools.”

The participants also spoke about educating the administration about their roles. Participant 1 stated,

> I let the administrators know what they should know because it's a partnership between the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the Ministry of Education. So with that being a partnership, I consider myself the administrative partner, and I let them know my duties as the SRO.

Similarly, Participant 5 stated, “Explain to them this is what it is. This is what I'm here to do.”

Theme 3: The Nature of the Relationship Between School Resource Officers and Students

The theme that appeared most frequently in the participant responses was the theme of the relationship between SROs and the students in the schools to which they are deployed. The relationship theme had a subtheme of the role of the relationship. Many participants spoke about their relationship taking on an almost familial tone. Participant 1 stated, “So my relationship with the students is more like a big sister or a mother.” Likewise, Participant 7 said, “I am not your mother, but if I have to be, I can be. Sometimes the students need extra attention.” Participant 2 stated, “On some occasions I'm a big sister, I can be a mother, and I can be a senior mistress sometimes.” Similarly, Participant 3 stated, “Now you have one or two who will be mad at me because I'm going to, I'm going to be your mother. I'm not going to be your friend.”

The female participants spoke about being the students' mother or sister. In contrast, the male participants did not. They talked about their relationship being more of a mentorship. Participant 4 stated, “It’s more of a mentorship. Sometimes I have to help them to understand that they use awful logic.” Some participants described their relationship with students in both ways. Participant 7 also stated, “I get to calm them down. I appreciate being a part of their life, so I could prevent this or stop them from doing this stupid thing before they did it. So I'd say I am like a mentor. “

Subtheme: The Way the Relationship Affects Students

A subtheme found for the relationship is the role of the relationship. All participants spoke about the result of the relationship they forged with students. In these

quotes, participants talk about what students speak to them about because of their relationships. Participant 1 stated,

> Once you have established that relationship with them and trust them, they will come to you and report matters going on. It's the child having access to you, because, being the SRO, I don't miss school. I don't miss school, so if it's break time, if it's lunch time, if it's before school, after school, you know, you make yourself accessible to the child. With you being accessible, you know. When I say accessible, it's not like they have to come to your office to find you. You know you're out in their space. They would report anything if they had an issue with another child; they would come to you.

They further stated,

> I find that the students see you as their safe space. They see you as someone on campus willing to listen to them, and they know that you care and are there to assist them. You want them to be in class, you don't want them to get into problems. So they report things to you because of that.

Participant 2 stated,

> It's easy for them to even come to you and share information. That's how I was able to find drugs on the campus, or I would have found knives on campus, or I may have found a knife on a student. It's because of that good relationship you have with the students. They feel comfortable trusting you and coming to you with that information.

This participant also shared a story to illustrate their point.

> If something is happening in their school, as opposed to going to someone at that school, they would share all things with me, maybe because they met me first. If something is happening, like if they have an issue with somebody on that school campus. I know that recently, perhaps about 2 weeks ago, I had a boy signal to me because the schools are close to each other, and he called me over from my school to discuss something that had happened. And I'm like, hey, you know, you have people at your school. He told me I feel comfortable talking to you.

Participant 3 stated.

> My relationship with the students is excellent. Now you have one or two who will be mad at me. Because I'm going to be your mother. I'm not going to be your friend. And then they would say, Officer, man, you should. I have to do this because it's my job to save you. I don't want to see you in the next 5–10 years when I have to draw a chalk line around you or have to see you in jail, so I have to be strict at some point. But I believe that my children and I have a great relationship where they can come to me and tell me about things happening.

Participant 4 stated, “All police aren’t bad guys. Some police are not good, but we are not all alike. We are here to help and will do the right thing.” Similarly, Participant 5 stated, “Sometimes we may be the first police that people meet. We can show them that they can talk to us.” Participant 6 stated,

> They're in a microcosm of society itself, so they have to know that there are certain rules that the school has that can extend. They need to know how things are in society itself. They need to learn, and I have to inform them so that when

> they get out into the real world, they will not get into many problems and will learning from them. I can teach them from here before it escalates to that.

Theme 4: Changes in Students' Perceptions of the Police

The final theme that was detected in the interviews is the theme of perception. All participants spoke about changing students' and parents' perceptions of the police force. Participant 1 stated,

> Like I stated earlier, a lot of people are anti-police, so it just changes the whole outlook that they have on police. Sad to say, many students go based on what their parents say or the community that they live in says, because they might not experience an accountable police force. That community says the police are this or the police are that. You know the police lock you up for no reason at all. They are inclined to believe what their community and parents say. But my being in the school changes their whole outlook on police positively because now that you are there, you genuinely care about them. You have their best interest at heart. You want them to come to school, you want them to be safe. You want them to get good grades. You care about them. You're protective of them. You're like a mother figure, it's just a good positive interaction, even with the kids with their parents, everybody has a more positive interaction with you as the police.

Participant 2 shared a story that illustrates the same sentiment.

> Oh, they're more comfortable with the officers. They don't have to be afraid because, growing up, parents tend to use their beliefs to scare their children. They are supposed to let them know that the police are their friends when they see the

> uniform. Some of them cry. I'll give you another example. So I have this parent who comes to pick up after school. She has two girls who attend preschool, and one day, I was walking towards my front gate. And I guess their brother was misbehaving, and she's like, see the officer there, she's coming to lock you up, and they instantly started crying. When I said they started crying, they were hollering, and I said Don't do that. Don't scare them. You know, that's not the purpose of us being here. And I told them to cheer up. I'm their friend, and they stopped crying. And now every day. Every day, they have a story for me if she comes to pick them up. They come to me and they hug me.

To further illustrate this point, another participant shared an anecdote about how their relationship changed a student's idea of police. Participant 3 shared this story:

> I interacted with a female, and it was not until we sat down in the meeting. A police officer would have shot a brother of hers. She also told the principal that she was disrespectful to me. However, these are the circumstances in which she thought all of them were alike. And I said I would never disrespect you because everybody has their own choice of what they did in their life, and not all of us are wrong or bad. So I don't want you to ever, at any point in your life, believe that because that happened to you, I would do it to you. And now we speak all the time.

Further, Participant 6 stated

> I state that whatever is being taught to you about police officers, this is the standard here, to let them know that what is being said isn't factual. With them,

> they have this idea that police officers are corrupt, that police officers are this or that.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Participant 7, who stated,

> I tell them OK. We can talk, we can laugh, we can hang out, and all of that stuff. But I draw the line at disrespect. We will have a problem when you start getting out of line. And they get it. I don't like to have to do that, but I think they look at it as OK Not all police are scary.

Summary

I analyzed the data by hand. The interviews were transcribed, and these transcriptions were used for coding. Code words and phrases were detected in the interview transcripts. These codes were then condensed into categories. These categories were then condensed into themes. These themes were presented in this section.

The data analysis yielded four themes and two subthemes. The first theme discovered was The Importance of formal SRO training. Many participants spoke about the importance of their childhood development training. The second theme found was the Role of the SRO. This theme included the subtheme of Educating staff on the role of the SRO. For the subtheme, they also spoke about educating the students about legal issues and educating the administration about their roles. The third theme found was Nature of the Relationships between Students and SROs. The subtheme included in this theme was The way these relationships affect students. The participants spoke about the kinds of relationships they had with the students. In the subtheme, they talked about how their relationships with students affected their willingness to confide in them. The final theme

was the theme of changes in student perceptions of the police. All participants spoke about the impact of their presence on students' perceptions of the police. The findings and their implications for organizational changes and future research will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to increase the understanding of how SROs perceive the impact of their interactions with students and how that influences the students' perceptions of police officers. Attitudes toward the police are formed during adolescence (Granot et al., 2021). Few studies examine the possible long-term effects of the relationship between SROs and students. These results will add to the body of knowledge about the SROs' perceptions of the efficacy of SROs and SROs' perceptions of how SRO relationships with students may improve students' views of the police. A phenomenological qualitative research design was used for this study. As stated in Chapter 4, four themes emerged: the importance of formal SRO training, the role of the SRO, the nature of the relationships between students and SROs, and changes in student perceptions of the police. Two subthemes emerged: educating staff on the role of the SRO and the way these relationships affect students. I will discuss these themes and subthemes in this chapter.

Interpretation of the Findings

The Findings in Relation to Previous Research

De Barr and Pettit (2022) stated that SROs needed specific training. Bolger et al. (2019) conducted a study that found the same. Further, in the study by Ricardi et al. (2022), 37% of their participants stated that they found training on students' cognitive and emotional development helpful. The theme of the importance of formal training found in the current study also supports this idea. The participants stated that they felt

that the training they received on cognitive development and their roles assisted them in executing their duties.

Demirkol (2023) found that the roles and responsibilities of an SRO need to be clarified. Further, the National Association of School Resource Officers proposed a triad model of roles that SROs should perform. This model states that SROs should be teachers, mentors, and law enforcement officers. The participants in the current study also said that they often perform these roles, from educating students about laws and consequences to educating staff about their roles. The participants further spoke about being the students' mother figure or mentor, being there to direct them away from making bad choices. But also, being there to listen to their problems with other students or at home, which is what one SRO referred to as a "safe space" for students. Lastly, all participants stated they are there to provide a police presence in meetings and when incidents become criminal matters.

Piccirillo et al. (2021) found that voluntary contact with police increased teens' legal socialization. In another study (Fine and Van Rooij, 2021), the researchers found that legal socialization was associated with people's perception of the police. The participants in the current study stated that students were more likely to report matters to them because they were accessible and had built a relationship with the students. They spoke about students looking for them to talk about other issues outside of behavioral incidents. Or in some cases, the students speak to them about incidents that have not happened yet. A study conducted by Hyunjung Cheon et al. (2023) in the Caribbean found that people's perception of the police was associated with legal socialization. The

participants in the current study spoke about changing students' perceptions of the police. They spoke about the community and parental perceptions of the police being scary or corrupt. However, their presence changes this perception, which helps students feel comfortable speaking to them about behavioral or criminal issues.

The Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning for this study is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological theory and Raven and French's (1959) power theory. For the current study, the microsystem is the school. The students' perception of the police is formed by their parents. An example was given in the current study of a parent who used the police as a threat to keep her children out of trouble. If the SRO had not interacted with them and changed their perception, they would have grown to obey police out of fear or not obey them at all. In the meso system, the students watch the interaction between the police and members of their family. An example from the current study was the girl who hated all police because a police officer shot and killed her brother. If there were no SROs in her school, she would have continued to hate the police. The third system is the exosystem, which includes the community. The participants in the current study spoke about how the students' perception that the police cannot be trusted comes from the community. The fourth and fifth systems are the macro and chronosystems. In these systems, cultural norms and the effect of time are considered. The students that the participants spoke about would have continued to view the police as unjust, and this belief would have become a part of their worldview over time.

In their power theory, Raven and French (1959) discussed why citizens obey the police. They refer to these reasons as bases of power. The five bases of power are reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. Reward power suggests that people obey the police because they are rewarded for doing it. Coercive power suggests that, like the girls whose mother used the police as a scare tactic, they would obey the police out of fear of retaliation. Legitimate power suggests that people obey the police because they are given power by the government. Referent power suggests that, like all of the students that the participants spoke about, the participants obey the police because they feel a connection to them. The participants spoke about the students telling them about weapons being brought onto campus, because they feel safe speaking to them about potential criminal acts. Expert power states that students would obey the police because they are knowledgeable.

Limitations of the Study

The anticipated limitations of this study included social desirability bias. To combat this bias, the participants were given information about ensuring confidentiality. This appeared to help them feel more comfortable speaking openly. One participant expressed at the beginning that he did not feel comfortable answering honestly. However, once he was informed that his name would never be used in the study results, he became more comfortable and began to speak freely. During the debrief process, all participants felt comfortable being completely honest in their responses.

Another anticipated limitation of this study was generalizability due to the change in the data collection method. The number of possible participants shrank. Initially, the

participants were to be pulled from any island in the Bahamas. However, because the participants had to be interviewed face-to-face, it was no longer financially feasible to interview participants on other islands. Although the original number of participants required to reach saturation was met, the participants were all from one island. Due to this limitation, the results may not be generalizable to other islands.

The participants were all SROs. For this reason, the changes in perception found are the opinions of the SROs. Although it is important to understand how the SROs themselves feel about their work, this is not the students' opinion. Because there were no students interviewed, their true perceptions were not expressed. Students may not truly view all police officers differently because of the SROs that they interact with in school. The only way to know how students truly feel is to interview them.

Recommendations

One of the study's limitations was that all participants were SROs deployed on the same island. For this reason, future research should include participants from other islands of the Bahamas and other Caribbean Islands. Future research should also be expanded to include SROs assigned to primary schools. This will help to understand if the improvements in perceptions seen in this study are generalizable to other countries and other groups of students.

The second recommendation is to conduct future research using students or recent graduates as participants. The only way to know if the students' perceptions have truly changed is to ask the students. Interviewing recent graduates will give the researchers a chance to determine if the changes in perception continue or revert once the students no

longer interact with the SROs on a regular basis, or when the students experience negative interactions with the police outside of school.

Implications

Despite the limitations, the results of this study have uncovered several areas where changes can be made. A few participants spoke about needing time to rest after each school term ends. Due to the stressful nature of the end of the term, the SROs see an increase in threats and physical altercations. This is especially true for the end of the summer term. To combat this increased stress, the SROs can be given a week of vacation time before they are returned to their assigned stations.

Another implication that arose from the study was the training of the SROs. The participants all spoke about the training they received. However, although the training was beneficial, it was insufficient. To combat this, future SROs should be identified in advance and given a full curriculum of formal training that covers a wider range of topics. These topics should include cognitive and moral development, SRO roles, school procedures, threat assessment, situation de-escalation, school safety planning, working with students with disabilities, and hostage negotiations. This curriculum should be specific to our country and the school level at which the SRO is being posted. The instructors for these classes should be police officers, as well as school administrators, school counselors, and social workers.

Positive Social Change

The current social climate in many countries, including the Bahamas, is anti-police. Many children in this country are raised to distrust or fear the police. The use of

SROs in the school system appears to be one way to solve this problem. The findings of this study suggest that SROs truly feel as though they are making a difference in the thinking and development of the students that they work with. Further research into the phenomenon may lead to advancements in the training and deployment of future SROs.

Conclusion

In conducting this study, I aimed to address the gap in the knowledge about SROs' views of their relationships with students. To achieve this goal, seven participants were interviewed. They were asked questions about their views of not only their relationship with students but also their views on their training and role within the school system. Four themes emerged that spoke to training needs, perceptual changes, and the need for partnership between the schools and the police. The participants in this study are proud to wear their badges and see themselves as a necessary part of the school engine. In this current social climate, where the police are seen as the enemy and children are raised not to interact with them, it is essential that SROs are trained and given the support that they need to fulfill their task of building bridges between the future of our nation and the police force.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Did you choose to be an SRO?
2. What did you learn in training that assists you in your post?
3. How long have you been an SRO?
4. How many schools have you been assigned to?
5. What kind of situations do you handle daily?
6. What situations do you not handle?
7. How would you describe your role within your school?
8. What do you wish administrators knew about SORs?
9. How would you describe your relationship with the students?
10. How do you describe your interactions with students?
11. What kinds of issues do students talk to you about?
12. How do you perceive your interactions affect how students feel about police?

Appendix B: Participant Invitation Email

Subject line: Interviewing SROs in the Junior High Schools

Email message: There is a new study about the experiences of SROs that could help the Ministry of Education and the Royal Bahamas Police Force better understand how the use of SROs in schools may help to improve students' perceptions of the police. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences with students and within schools.

About the study:

- One approximately 40-minute Zoom interview that will be audio-recorded (no video recording)
- You will be contacted once more to review themes for accuracy
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identifies you.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years old or older
- Be an SRO in a junior high school
- Have been working in a junior high school for at least a year

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Tameka Evans, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during February.

Please email XXXXXXXXX to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.