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A Qualitative Study of How Students Experienced Exclusionary Discipline Practices

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Abstract

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MS, Coppin State University, 1984

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Abstract

As a result of zero tolerance policies, a significant percentage of students who experience exclusions from schools also experience negative outcomes such as high dropout rates, academic failures, and encounters with juvenile justice agencies. While several researchers have found a relationship between unintended consequences of exclusions and juvenile delinquency, few have examined this phenomenon from the perspectives of juveniles who experienced exclusions. Guided by the framework of operant conditioning, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how students experienced exclusions from school. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who experienced both exclusions from schools and involvement with juvenile delinquency. Of the 30 potential participants who initially agreed to participate in the study, 26 actually participated. Data collection and analysis included capturing and grouping emerging themes and patterns from face-to-face interviews and observations that revealed the essence of how juveniles experienced exclusions from schools. According to participants, failure on the part of administrators to listen to their accounts of events that led to referrals for disciplinary action resulted in avoidable suspensions. Participants' narratives further highlighted the prevalence of disruptive behavior in schools throughout the United States. School administrators and policy makers should not only use data from this qualitative study to inform disciplinary policies and practices, but they should also consider input from students and other community stakeholders who are impacted by those decisions. These findings will promote the understanding that effective disciplinary practices are needed to meet the educational needs of all students. Even participants in this study were concerned about the impact that suspensions had on their education.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the children and adolescents who experienced exclusionary practices in schools that did not have adequate resources to meet the myriad of needs that each brought into the schools. It is equally important to recognize the efforts of teachers who came into the teaching profession expecting to use their academic abilities to impact student achievement, but encountered student behaviors that significantly interfered with teaching and learning. Results from this dissertation could add context to quantitative research results; especially if the results show a significant relationship between exclusionary discipline practices and juvenile delinquency.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to my wonderful family; especially my husband who put up with years of cooking his own dinners, doing all the vacuuming and occasionally waiting on me when my dedication to my job and my dedication to improving how schools respond to students' behaviors were, at times, overwhelming. Our faith in an awesome God helped us get to this finished product.

I also would like to recognize Dr. Carmoney and Dr. Thomlinson for taking the time to answer the thousands of questions that I had along the way. Dr. Carmoney stood by me when the path was a bit difficult. I will always remember her energy and how she encouraged perseverance no matter the struggles. I will always remember Dr. Thomlinson for his quiet demeanor and quick responses to what I thought were complicated questions. This has been a journey, but worth every second, every minute, and every hour mainly because I had an opportunity to share the journey with some very deserving young people who allowed me to "live" their experiences!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

To address behaviors that interfere with school safety, teaching, and learning, schools continue to rely on zero tolerance policies that were initiated by the U. S. federal government under the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA, 1990; U. S. Department of Education, 2012). In 1994, the GFSA required schools to expel students for at least 1 year for possessions of firearms; however, the policy continues to influence current discipline policies and practices that now include excluding students for offenses that are not mandated by federal law (U. S. Department of Education, 2012). The majority of the disciplinary actions taken in school settings are out-of-school suspensions even though such practices have not reduced problem behaviors. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011) reported that of the 767,900 disciplinary actions taken by schools in the United States during the 2007 – 2008 school year, 76% of those actions were suspensions. Seventy-four percent of all disciplinary actions taken by school administrators during the 2009–2010 school year included suspensions of 1 or more days (NCES, 2014). School officials need to re-evaluate current policies and practices and respond accordingly to ensure that responses to problem behaviors include more than exclusions from schools.

The outcomes for children and adolescents who are subjected to exclusionary policies are far reaching, as reported in this study. For example, the disproportionate assignments of suspensions to minorities, inconsistent applications of zero tolerance policies, and increased acts of delinquent behaviors are unintended consequences of zero

tolerance policies (Sprague, Walker, Stieber, Simonsen, & Nichioka, 2001). Unintended consequences of exclusions include rewards (i.e., time off from school, opportunities to avoid difficult tasks). For example, some students may prefer suspensions and/or expulsions (Bruns, Moore, Stephan, Pruitt & Weist, 2005), especially if suspensions are perceived as rewards. Exploring this phenomenon from the perspectives of those who experienced exclusionary practices provided explanations that could ultimately inform discipline policies and practices that are not laden with negative outcomes or unintended consequences.

In this study, I used a qualitative approach to capture the lived experiences of a sample population of students who experienced both exclusions from school and involvement with juvenile justice agencies. While quantitative inquiries were employed in previous research to describe relationships between zero tolerance policies and unintended consequences, especially juvenile delinquency, those closest to the phenomenon were in a better position to explain the meanings that they attached to their experiences. The qualitative approach provided opportunities for participants to explain the meanings that they ascribed to their experiences - aspects of research not attainable from quantitative approaches. Examining this phenomenon from the perspectives of juveniles who experienced exclusionary practices has implications for changing how children and adolescents are disciplined in schools and reducing the negative outcomes associated with exclusionary policies.

There are reasons to be concerned about ineffective disciplinary practices that may contribute to juvenile delinquency. For example, between 1960 and 2007, juvenile

court delinquency caseloads increased more than 300%, and of the 1,666,100 delinquency cases processed in 2007, 54% involved youth younger than 16 (Maryland Department of Juvenile Services [MDJS]: 2006 – 2007, 2010). Recent data show that in 2010, courts in the United States handled 1.4 million juvenile cases which is approximately 3,700 cases per day. Even though quantitative research suggests that zero tolerance policies significantly influenced juvenile delinquency, Agnew (2005) suggested the need for a better understanding of background issues that may also influence juvenile delinquency. Exploring this phenomenon from the perspectives of students who experienced zero tolerance practices has promising implications; for example, the students purposively selected for this study were in the best position to explain any influences that exclusions from school and/or background factors may have had on their behaviors. Those who experienced both, as suggested in this study, can support or deny these claims.

Comprehensive examinations of historical and current school disciplinary policies and practices follow in Chapter 2. Outcomes for students, alternatives to exclusionary practices, and possible connections between zero tolerance policies and unintended consequences; especially juvenile delinquency, are also discussed in Chapter 2.

Background of the Problem

The GFSA (1990) required schools to expel students for possession of firearms; however, some schools in Maryland, the study site, took advantage of the authority; granted by the GFSA that allowed school districts to adjust school policies to include suspending students for offenses that were not mandated by federal law (U. S. Department of Education, 2011). A suspension, according to Maryland Department of

Education (2014), involves removing a student from the school building for a specified period of 10 or fewer school days. An expulsion means the removal of a student from a school program for 45 school days or longer for conduct that the superintendent determines, on a case-by-case basis, is violent or poses a serious danger of physical harm to others in the school. These practices led to an overreliance on zero tolerance policies that resulted in more than 1 million disciplinary actions taken in schools in the United States during the 2009 – 2010 school year (NCES, 2011).

During the 2011-2012 school year, NCES (2014) reported that there were 3.4 million in-school suspensions and 3.2 million out-of-school suspensions in public schools in the United States. There is research that suggests a relationship between exclusionary discipline policies and juvenile delinquency; however, this phenomenon has not been examined from the perspectives of juveniles who experienced exclusions from schools. Understanding the experiences of this population is needed to inform school disciplinary practices.

Statement of the Problem

Overreliance on exclusionary discipline policies and practices has not significantly reduced behaviors that interfere with school safety, teaching, and learning. Exclusions from schools are ineffective, lead to increased problem behaviors, and contribute to juvenile delinquency (Abrams, 2006), American Psychological Association [APA], 2006, 2008); Gottfredson et. al., 2001; Gottfredson et al., 2004; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Kajs, 2006; Justice Center, 2012; Loeber, Farrington, & Petechuk, 2003; Loeber, Slot, & Van der Laan, 2008; Losen, 2005;

Martinez, 2009; Petitclere, Bivin, Dionne, Zoccolillo, & Tremblay; 2009; Rice, 2009; Saunders, 2009; Skiba & Leone, 2002; Skiba & Russell, 2008). However, 73.9% of disciplinary actions taken in schools during the 2009-2010 school year included exclusions (NCES, 2014) and only 39% of all public schools in the United States employed alternatives to exclusionary practices (NCES, 2011). This means that school administrators can choose to suspend or not to suspend. Understanding the information used to inform decisions to suspend or not to suspend could expand discussions to include key stakeholders (e.g., students who experienced exclusionary practices, parents, community leaders) as a means of fostering changes in how school leaders respond to students' behaviors.

Considering the ineffectiveness of past and current discipline policies and practices, is necessary to examine the impact of exclusionary practices from the perspectives of children and adolescents who experienced this phenomenon. There are no qualitative studies on this phenomenon from the perspectives of students who experienced both exclusions from schools and involvement with juvenile justice agencies, however, quantitative scholars showed a low to moderate correlation between discipline policies and studies and juvenile delinquency (Sprague et al., 2001). Understanding the influences of disciplinary policies and practices on juvenile delinquency from the perspectives of students who experienced this phenomenon may reduce the over-reliance on exclusionary practices and generate support for alternative measures for addressing student behaviors.

Purpose of the Study

A qualitative paradigm was selected for this study to gain an understanding of the experiences of juveniles who were subjected to zero tolerance policies for violating school rules and policies. Quantitative researchers have suggested a relationship between zero tolerance policies and juvenile delinquency (Sprague, et al., 2001); however, researchers have not explored this phenomenon from the perspectives of juveniles who experienced exclusions from schools. Drawing from the experiences of this population and how they interpret their experiences may help to explain any influences that zero tolerance policies and practices have on juvenile delinquency and provide information to inform how school leaders respond to behaviors that violate school policies.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to capture the experiences of students who experienced both exclusions from schools and involvement with juvenile justice agencies:

1. How do juveniles who experienced school suspensions perceive school discipline policies and practices?
2. What disciplinary outcomes did juveniles expect when they were suspended and/or expelled for violating school discipline policies**?**
3. What are the perspectives of juveniles regarding the effectiveness of suspensions and/or expulsions from school?

Conceptual/Theoretical Frameworks

Operant conditioning, a theory grounded in behaviorism, is used to define behavior controlled by consequences (Ramnero & Torneke, 2011). Operant conditioning may explain any influences that zero tolerance policies may have on juvenile delinquency. Reinforcement theories, components of operant conditioning, are defined as events that strengthen behaviors (Maag, 2001). The two kinds of reinforcers; negative and positive reinforcements, further explain the phenomenon presented in this study. For example, reprimanding a student for refusing to complete an assignment and then referring the student to an administrator for disciplinary action "leads to a related and undesirable phenomenon called negative reinforcement trap" (Maag, 2001). Removing the student from the classroom negatively reinforces the student's behavior. The likelihood that the student will use the same behavior when confronted with a difficult assignment is great (Maag, 2001). Thus, reinforcement of any kind strengthens behaviors (Morris & Maisto, 1999). This topic is explored further in Chapter 2.

In this study, challenging behaviors are conceptualized as functions or behaviors that are motivated by environmental factors (e.g., rewards, avoidance) and may require responses that are function based (Dunlap & Fox, 2011). For example, some students use inappropriate behaviors to provoke disciplinary actions; especially suspensions that they see as time off from school (Cameron & Shepherd, 2006). Therefore, suspensions may lead to increasing or rewarding problematic behaviors.

Behaviors are motivated by functions and reinforcements strengthen behaviors. Both of these concepts are related to this qualitative phenomenological study because

only those who experienced the identified phenomenon can describe the functions of their behaviors.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a qualitative phenomenology research approach because previous researchers have not captured the lived experiences of juveniles who experienced exclusionary school discipline practices. Participants responded to four interview questions designed to encourage them to openly discuss how they experienced suspensions and expulsions from schools. The qualitative data were categorized to extract themes that were subsequently compared and contrasted to illustrate any influences that school disciplinary practices had on delinquent behaviors.

Assumptions

As the researcher, I initially assumed that access to incarcerated youth would not pose a problem; especially because I initially, believed that the population of incarcerated youth were in the best position to explain their experiences with exclusions from schools. However, the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services denied my request to recruit incarcerated youth for this study. Thus, the preferred participants, juveniles incarcerated in Maryland's juvenile facilities, were not accessible because of their vulnerability. Now that I have completed the interviews and analyzed the data, I have no immediate means of determining if incarcerated youth were in the best position to explain their experiences with exclusions from schools; especially when compared to the participants who did participate in the study. In the context of the study, the literature overwhelmingly suggests a relationship between exclusionary discipline practices and juvenile

delinquency; thus, it was a reasonable assumption that incarcerated youth were in the best position to define their experiences and validate or refute research that suggests a relationship between juvenile delinquency and exclusions from schools.

Scope and Delimitations

The study was limited to interviewing students who experienced both exclusions from schools and involvement with juvenile justice agencies, especially because most students have not been suspended or involved with juvenile justice agencies and access to the preferred population of incarcerated youth was denied because of their vulnerability. In Maryland, the study site, approximately 9% of the student population committed the majority of violations that resulted in exclusions from schools (NCES, 2011). Because a small percentage of students commit the majority of offenses, understanding their experiences may inform plans to improve how schools respond to students' behaviors.

Behaviors that are more easily managed by classroom teachers (e.g., excessive talking, calling out, occasional back talk) were not representative of the population in this study. Administrators' responses to violations of school policies was the focus of the study with attention to responses that resulted in exclusions from schools. The study was confined to purposively collecting data from juveniles who experienced exclusions from schools.

The results of this study may apply in other states that have students who experienced both exclusions and juvenile offenses; however, generalizing in qualitative studies poses threats to external validity (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). Thus, discussions in this study focused on themes elicited from the categories formed during data analysis in

order to provide deeper understandings of the phenomenon that could contribute to the validity of the results (Creswell, 2009, p. 192).

Limitations

Qualitative studies, according to Rudestam and Newton (2007), should include detailed descriptions of participants and the setting to allow for transferability to other settings. However, the rich stories that are elicited from those who experienced the phenomenon studied represent the hallmark of qualitative studies more so than transferability (Creswell (2009). It is not feasible to generalize the results of this study to the population of Maryland's students who experienced suspensions because the majority of students who experienced exclusions from schools in Maryland, the study site, have not committed juvenile offenses. Only students who were subjected to exclusionary school discipline practices participated in this study to determine whether zero tolerance policies influenced their delinquent behaviors. Understanding any influences that zero tolerance policies may have on juvenile delinquency will support my professional objectives and contribute to existing knowledge from quantitative studies in order to show a relationship between zero tolerance policies and juvenile delinquency.

Significance of Study

Excluding students from school for problem behaviors is not supported by research primarily because exclusionary practices have not significantly reduced problem behaviors and may have influenced juvenile delinquency and other negative outcomes for children and adolescents (Sprague, et al., 2001). Juveniles who experienced exclusions are in the best position to explain this phenomenon. The meaning that children and

adolescents attach to their experiences could add to the existing body of knowledge associated with discipline policies and practices in support of efforts to replace exclusionary practices with alternatives (i.e., prevention and intervention measures).

Summary

The overreliance on zero tolerance policies and practices that mandate exclusions for children and adolescents who violate school policies is not supported by research. Zero tolerance policies are ineffective. Researchers, however, have not explored this phenomenon from the perspectives of students who experienced exclusions and committed juvenile offenses. In this qualitative phenomenological study, I explored the meaning that this population attached to their experiences. Chapter 2 includes a review of pertinent literature on past and current school disciplinary policies and practices with attention on outcomes for children and adolescents. A description of the research design, participants, methods, and procedures for collecting and analyzing data is covered in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 includes a detailed description of the findings, and Chapter 5 includes interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Following the enactment of the GFSA, an over-reliance on zero tolerance policies in schools may have influenced juvenile delinquency and other unintended consequences of suspensions and/or expulsions from schools. According to Daniels and Bondy (2008), zero tolerance policies have become a commonplace system of discipline in an age of standardized solutions to complex issues. For example, during the 2009-2010 school year, more than 1 million children and adolescents experienced exclusions from schools for behaviors that interfered with school safety, teaching, and learning; and of the 1,666,100 delinquency cases processed in 2007, 54% involved youth younger than 16, who accounted for 54% of all delinquency cases (Knoll & Sickmund, 2011). This data strongly suggest that suspensions and expulsions contribute to juvenile delinquency, however; exploring this phenomenon from the perspectives of those who experienced suspensions and/or expulsions from schools may offer different **insights.**

Gaining an understanding of the experiences of students who were subjected to exclusionary discipline policies and practices was the purpose of this phenomenological study. During my search, I did not find any qualitative studies that focused on the possible influence of zero tolerance policies on juvenile delinquencies from the perspectives of students who experienced both exclusions from school and involvement with juvenile justice agencies. Their experiences, as reported in this study, may inform

school disciplinary practices in the United States and direct attention to proactive measures designed to prevent problem behaviors.

The review of the research and related literature in this study includes historical accounts of school discipline policies and practices followed by a review of current zero tolerance practices. Next, the chapter describes the outcomes of exclusionary discipline for children and adolescents, followed by discussions focus related to alternatives to exclusionary practices. The review continues with summaries of results from both quantitative and qualitative studies on the relationships between disciplinary practices and juvenile delinquency. The ultimate goal was to gain an understanding of this phenomenon from the meanings participants attached to their experiences.

Literature Search Strategy

University databases were the primary sources of information/data; however juvenile justice websites and websites that featured educational databases were also useful for accessing data related to violations of school policies, subsequent disciplinary actions, and relevant demographics at local, state, and national levels. To focus the search, I initially used only the search terms *zero tolerance policies* and *school discipline codes* for locating information related to the historical ramifications of school discipline policies; however, local and state education websites provided most of the information related to school discipline policies. To cover the complicated features related to school discipline policies and practices, I employed a broad range of search terms including *disruptive behavior-onset and developmental implications*, *school readiness indicators*, "*zero tolerance policies and juvenile delinquency*, *school suspensions and expulsions*,

behavior management, *juvenile delinquency*, *persistently dangerous schools*, *alternatives to suspensions and expulsions*, *unintended consequences*, *statistics on school violence*, and *operant conditioning*.

Another search for qualitative research and related literature that directly or indirectly addressed relationships between zero tolerance policies and juvenile delinquency revealed only a few studies. These results did not offer significant data as evidence of a relationship between zero tolerance policies and juvenile delinquency. The literature was replete with language that suggested a correlation between zero tolerance policies and juvenile delinquency, but none that provided significant evidence of a strong relationship between the two variables. The results from this study did not provide significant evidence that zero tolerance policies influence juvenile delinquency; however participants' accounts of their experiences with exclusions from schools contribute to existing data that are directly related to the impact that disciplinary practices and policies in schools have on students' behaviors.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study is that zero tolerance policies and practices influence juvenile delinquency. The policies include predetermined consequences (e.g., out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, in-school suspensions) for a range of behaviors (Kajs, 2006). While exclusions may remove an offender for a period of time, the offending student is more than likely allowed to return to the same school upon satisfactorily complying with district guidelines for reinstatement (NCES, 2015). The same practices apply even if a student is suspended multiple times in a school year

(NCES, 2015). Multiple suspensions provide students who wish to avoid difficult academic tasks or evade mandatory attendance policies a way out (Dunlap & Fox, 2011). For repeat offenders, exclusionary practices provide multiple opportunities for students to avoid school and related activities. Consequently, some students perceive time off from school (i.e., suspensions, expulsions) as rewards and not punishment. Several researchers suggested that unintended consequences (e.g., high dropout rates, academic failure, disproportionate assignments of exclusions for minorities, rewards) result from exclusionary discipline practices (Bruns, et al., 2005; Noguera, 2003; Sprague, et al., 2001; Tobin & Sugai, 1996); thus, understanding how these unintended consequences influence student behaviors may explain a link between exclusions and juvenile delinquency.

According to Dunlap and Fox (2011), challenging behaviors are connected to foreseeable consequences. For example, suspensions and expulsions may satisfy the goals of students who violate school policies. Some students may welcome exclusions from school that enable them to avoid challenging environmental factors (e.g., academic challenges, safety concerns) and/or gain rewards (e.g., circumventing mandatory attendance policies, attachments to the community). Understanding how exclusionary discipline practices influence student behaviors may lie in existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks. For example, a behaviorist theory that may explain this phenomenon is operant conditioning, a term coined by B. F. Skinner (Ramnero & Torneke, 2011) and defined as “behavior controlled by consequences” (p. 80). Watson, the founder of behaviorism, believed that behaviors are acquired through conditioning or

interactions with the environment (Ramnero & Torneke, 2011). Therefore, when students misbehave, they may be trying to change existing circumstances (Ramnero & Torneke, 2011). Operant behavior, according to Ramnero and Torneke (2011), is "purposeful behavior" and escaping a difficult assignment by violating a school rule, for example, allows a student to change his/her circumstances. The defining feature of operant conditioning is that it is a method of learning that involves rewards and punishments or learning by consequences (Ramnero & Torneke, 2011).

Without a clear definition of behaviors that result in suspensions, administrative responses to the behaviors may not be adequate or appropriate. Ramnero & Torneke (2011) noted that "consequences can increase or decrease the likelihood of behaviors" (p.81). While some consequences are rewarding, some have a punishing affect that is described as positive and negative reinforcements. Positive reinforcements involve increasing a consequence that increases the likelihood of a behavior, and negative reinforcements involve decreasing a consequence that decreases the likelihood of a behavior (Ramnero & Torneke, 2011). An example of a positive reinforcement is suspending a student repeatedly and the behavior that was expected to decrease actually increased.

Students' operant behaviors demonstrate that they understand the consequences of their actions. Ramnero and Torneke (2011, p. 91) explained that in situations where a student violates a school rule to escape a difficult assignment, the student's actions are functions of the behaviors and the function could be "to get away from an aversive stimulus". Violating school policies as a means of avoiding or escaping difficult tasks or

mandatory attendance policies are purposeful behaviors that zero tolerance policies reward, regardless of the intent of those policies. The intent of this qualitative phenomenological approach is to reveal how participants experienced exclusions from schools. In doing so, participants explained the functions of their behaviors, responses from school officials (i.e., suspensions, expulsions), and the influences that exclusionary practices may have had on their involvement with juvenile justice agencies**.**

Conceptual Foundation

Conceptualizing students' behaviors as functions motivated by environmental factors (e.g., rewards, avoidance) aligns with the theory of operant conditioning in that the premise for both centers on the functions of behaviors. Cameron & Shepherd (2006) speculated that students misbehave to reap the rewards associated with suspensions. Challenging behaviors are conceptualized as functions or behaviors that are motivated by environmental factors (e.g., rewards, avoidance) that may require function-based responses (Dunlap & Fox, 2011). For example, some students use inappropriate behaviors to cause disciplinary actions, especially suspensions that could result in time off from school (Cameron & Shepherd, 2006). The conceptual and theoretical frameworks presented in this qualitative phenomenology study offered an approach for capturing the experiences of students who experienced suspensions and expulsions and who could best explain the functions of their behaviors and/or the forseeable consequences of their behaviors.

Review of the Literature

According to the research and related literature, zero tolerance policies lead to negative outcomes for children and adolescents. However, researchers do not endorse abolishing the policies (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). In the broader context of addressing antisocial behaviors in schools, zero tolerance policies are needed, especially for the original intended purpose of responding to violations that involved weapons. However, research findings have not supported an overreliance on exclusionary policies for other infractions because exclusions have not reduced problem behaviors and may be linked to several negative outcomes for students.

Some researchers have documented a relationship between exclusions from school and juvenile delinquency. One study conducted by Loeber and Farrington (2001), documented a moderate-to-strong correlation between school disciplinary problems and community offenses. However, Sprague et al. (2001) used juvenile arrest data and school disciplinary referrals in a quantitative study to explain a relationship between the data sources. Though Sprague et al. (2001) predicted a strong relationship between the sources of data, results from the study showed a low correlation. A limitation of that study was the small sample size of 44 students who were selected in a multiple gating approach that included teacher nominations, risk factors, data from a local youth services agency, and parental and teacher checklists (Sprague et al., 2001).

Historical Account of Zero Tolerance Policies

Prior to the use of zero tolerance policies, corporal punishment in schools was the standard practice for disciplining students throughout the 19th century and parts of the

20th century (Middleton, 2008). According to the scholarship of the time, one of the reasons for implementing corporal punishment was to guarantee learning (Parker-Jenkins, 1997, p. 4, as reported by Dupper & Montgomery-Dingus, 2008). Additionally, during the 19th century, parents and children felt that corporal punishment (i.e., physical punishment that included spanking, hitting, slapping, and using a paddle with the intent of correcting and/or modifying behaviors) was reasonable and fair (Paolucci & Violato, 2004). Educational theorists suggested that the threat of punishment worked equally as well as other forms of motivation to encourage student achievement (Middleton, 2008). However, the reported cases of students physically fighting back, as noted by Middleton (2008), imply that those who experienced corporal punishment attached different meanings to their experiences than those who approved the disciplinary policies and practices.

Criticism of corporal punishment also came from several professional organizations including the American Psychological Association (APA), the National Education Association, American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) that favored non-punitive alternatives to disciplinary practices (McCarthy, 2005). Child development theorists also challenged corporal punishment practices and prompted parents and educators to question the practices. Thus, the use of corporal punishment began to diminish in 1960, and its use declined from 1.5 million cases in 1976 to approximately 340,000 during the 1999-2000 school year (McCarthy, 2005). Public concerns, legislative actions, and mounting litigations against educators also contributed to the banning of corporal punishment in

most states in the United States (NASP, 2006). According to the Center for Effective Discipline (2010), the number of students who experienced physical punishment decreased by 18% in 2006, and 31 states have now banned corporal punishment. These findings, when compared to existing zero tolerance policies, suggest the need to involve stakeholders, especially; students, parents, community members and leaders who are directly or indirectly affected by decisions made without their input.

Like corporal punishment, zero tolerance policies are defined as predetermined consequences for problem behaviors (Kajs, 2006). These policies were initially intended to remove students with behavioral problems from schools to provide a safe learning environment for all other students (Nolan, 2011). Zero tolerance policies, however, have dominated disciplinary practices since the 1990s (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Nolan (2011) explained that "zero tolerance, a term appropriated from the criminal-justice system, took an aggressive stance against guns and drugs in schools" (p. 30). Nolan further explained that enforcing the pre-determined consequences

> called for swift punishment in the form of suspensions, expulsions, and, at times, police intervention for all violators. The near universal adoption of zero tolerance policies occurred because federal funding for schools became contingent on states' adoption of the policy, so it is now widely used, in some form, throughout the United States. State and local versions of zero tolerance policies have often extended the federal legislation by broadening the definition of "weapon" (p.30) to include any sharp or potentially dangerous object and such things as a butter knife innocently stowed inside a lunch box. In addition, at a district level,

> zero-tolerance policies around the country have been broadened so that today even students who commit small infractions may be subjected to the consequences of zero tolerance. (p. 30).

According to Rice (2009), some defining features of zero tolerance polices now include the broad range of offenses covered by the policies and the emphasis on punishment. Shortly after the adoption of zero tolerance policies, suspensions and expulsions increased significantly, for example, in Massachusetts suspensions increased from 90 to 900, and in Chicago, suspensions increased from 81 to 1000 (Rice, 2009).

Both corporal punishment and zero tolerance policies are controversial actions, possibly because both were intended to punish (i.e., inflict pain upon and/or exclude) those who violated school rules. In addition, researchers have defined both methods as ineffective practices that cause negative outcomes for children and adolescents. However, even with the negative implications, both practices continue to exist as means for addressing student behaviors.

Current Disciplinary Practices

Even though some states in the United States continue to allow the use of corporal punishment in schools, Dupper and Montgomery-Dingus (2008) noted that corporal punishment has been prohibited in most states due to a blitz of litigations, oppositions from professional organizations, and statistics which showed that it was an ineffective practice that may have influenced violent behaviors. However, zero tolerance policies remain in full effect in most schools.

Many schools in the United States have taken advantage of the authority granted by the GFSA that allows school districts to adjust school policies to include suspending students for offenses that are not mandated by federal law (U. S. Department of Education, 2011), for example, the discipline code of the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) includes 30 violations and three levels of severity that list suspension as an option (2011). Jane Sundius, the director of the Education and Youth Development Program at the Open Society Institute-Baltimore, reported that results from a study conducted in Texas showed that 60% of the 1 million students studied were suspended or expelled one time or more between seventh and eighth grades; a trend that parallels Maryland, the study site for this research. Not only is this data attracting attention from researchers, the data strongly suggest the need to rethink exclusionary discipline policies and practices in order to improve school climate and maintain safe schools for all students and staff.

Even though they expressed significant opposition to zero tolerance policies, researchers have not suggested total elimination of the policies. For example, proponents suggested that all schools should establish zero tolerance policies as the norm for bullying and any behaviors that cause harm to others (Rice, 2009). Many people may question the effectiveness of the policies and practices, however, schools throughout the United States continue to rely on zero tolerance policies for addressing a range of student behaviors. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011) reported that of the 767,900 serious disciplinary actions (i.e., suspensions of five days or more) enforced by 46% of the schools in the United States during the 2007 – 2008 school year, 76% of those actions

were suspensions, and the number of suspensions had not reflected considerable decline since 2004.

More recent data showed a significant decline in the number of serious discipline actions taken by schools from 767,900 to 433,800 during the 2009-2010 school year; however, 73.9% of those actions involved out-of-school suspensions for 5 days or more; 6% involved exclusions with no services and 20% involved transfers to alternative settings (NCES, 2011). NCES reported that of the 433,800 serious actions taken in U. S. public schools during the 2009 – 2010 school years, most (265,000) were responses to physical assaults, offenses that are not covered under federal zero tolerance policies. Offenses for firearm possession accounted for 5,800 disciplinary actions with 3% of students reporting threats or injuries with a weapon at least once, 2% reporting three encounters, and 1% reporting four to 11 threats or injuries with weapons (2011).

Of the 1,183,700 overall disciplinary actions taken at schools, including in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions during the 2009 -2010 school year, 482,100 were violent incidents (i.e., rape, sexual assault, thefts) that occurred in primary schools. Middle schools reported 375,200 and high schools reported 264,400 violent incidents (NCES, 2011). Thirty-nine percent of middle schools reported that bullying occurred at their schools while approximately 20% of primary and high schools reported daily incidents of bullying. NCES (2011) reported that other behaviors included sexual harassment, verbal abuse of teachers, and classroom disorder. The research and related literature clearly showed that current zero tolerance policies and practices have not reduced antisocial behaviors in schools, and the decline in serious disciplinary actions did

not account for the more than 1,000,000 non- serious disciplinary actions that included exclusions for fewer than five days and in-school suspensions).

Outcomes for Children and Adolescents

From a historical perspective, excessive use of corporal punishment (McCarthy, 2005; Paolucci & Violato, 2004) and overreliance on exclusionary practices (Sprague et al., 2001) may have influenced negative outcomes for children and adolescents, however, most research and related literature reviewed for this study suggested that negative outcomes for children and adolescents such as dropout rates, poor academic performance, juvenile delinquency, and unintended consequences (e. g., disproportionate assignments of suspensions/expulsions to minority students, rewards, avoidance behaviors), could be attributed to zero tolerance practices that included a reliance on suspensions and expulsions (Atkins et al., 2002; Bruns, et al., 2005; Hawkins et al., 2000: Noguera, 2003, Sprague et al., 2001; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). Likewise, this study will explore the idea that environmental factors influence behaviors that subsequently lead to juvenile delinquency. Understanding this phenomenon from the perspectives of children and adolescents who experienced exclusionary discipline practices could reduce the overreliance on zero tolerance policies.

In support of measures designed to prevent antisocial behaviors, Bradshaw, Ialongo, Petras, and Schaeffer (2009, p. 953) reported that "transactional theories of development suggest that displaying high levels of antisocial behavior early in life and persistently over time causes disruption in multiple life domains, which in turn places individuals at risk for negative life outcomes" (p. 953).

Students who exhibit disruptive behaviors experience a greater amount of academic difficulties and higher rates of risk factors and conduct problems with an increased risk of negative life outcomes (Bradshaw et al., 2009, Bru, 2009; Peterson & Schoonover, 2005; Semke, Garbacz, Kwon, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010). Noguera (2003) suggested that maintaining orderly school environments was more important in some schools than the quality of education offered. Peterson & Schoonover, (2005) cautioned school officials about the consequences of zero tolerance policies by noting that "unjustifiable harsh consequences may have negative effects on students' perceptions of school climate, and cause school administrators to be associated with actions not in the best interest of children in the community" (p. 2). In addition to casting educators in the role of oppressors, zero tolerance policies do not always work the way their enforcers intend (Peterson & Schoonover, 2005).

From a theoretical perspective, evidence indicated that exclusionary policies and practices have negative consequences and accomplish the opposite of the intended purpose by rewarding students who disrupt the learning environment. For example, suspensions may intensify disruptive behaviors because some students prefer suspensions (Bruns et al*.,* 2005; Noguera, 2003; Sprague, et. al., Tobin & Sugai, 1996)**.** To demonstrate this phenomenon, Atkins et al., (2002) reviewed the disciplinary records of 314 students in third through eighth grades to determine variations in students' responses to discipline. Results showed that detention and suspensions for the students who experienced the most disciplinary actions increased suggesting that the disciplinary

actions functioned as rewards (Atkins et al., 2002). However, rewarding disruptive students with time off from school is not the only unintended effect of zero tolerance.

Current data shows that ineffective exclusionary practices rewarded some students, influenced avoidance behaviors, and subsequently influenced juvenile delinquency (Welsh, 2001). Some students, according to Welsh (2001), avoided school or various areas within their schools out of fear. Students may resort to unusual precautions to avoid the cause of their fears (Welsh, 2001), and these precautions could include exhibiting behaviors that resulted in suspensions or expulsions. Welsh (2001) further suggested that some students may value being cool and tough more than following rules. Even though following the rules results in rewards, some students may value more the rewards they garner from a suspension or expulsion. Developmental theorists defined this and similar phenomena as benefits and consequences of previous experiences (Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

Noquera (2003) noted that schools in the United States tend to punish students who have the most needs, especially African Americans, Latinos, and those with academic challenges. Data showed that punishment in the form of suspensions and/or expulsions were the primary actions used to address students' behaviors in schools, a practice that disproportionately affected minorities, rewarded some students, and interfered with academic achievement (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In a study conducted in Texas, all seventh graders were followed and the results showed that 75% of African American students experienced disciplinary actions compared to approximately 65% of Hispanic and about 47% of White students (Advocates for Children and Youth, 2011).

Even though discipline was not applied equitably, the results could be used to inform decision making as it applies to disciplinary practices and policies.

Despite the numerous factors at work in schools, statistics indicate that zero tolerance practices have not reduced exclusions from schools and may have influenced juvenile delinquency. For example, between 1960 and 2007, juvenile court delinquency caseloads increased more than 300%, and of the 1,666,100 delinquency cases processed in 2007, 54% involved youth younger than 16 who accounted for 54% of all delinquency cases (Knoll & Sickmund, 2011) including 60% of assaults, 54% of property damage cases, 58% of public disorder cases, and 38% of cases involving illegal substances (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2011).

Long-term trends in juvenile crime, illustrate the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance policies. In addition to vast increases over 40 years, and fluctuations from year to year, juvenile crime has not reliably decreased in response to zero tolerance policies in schools. For example, in 1960, approximately 1,100 delinquency cases were processed daily compared to approximately 4,600 cases in 2007 (U. S. Department of Education - Juvenile Court Statistics: [JCS], 2011). According to JCS, (2011), courts handled approximately 1,653,300 delinquency cases in 2008 that represented a 12% decrease from 1997, but a 22% increase from the 1985 case rate. Between 1985 and 2008, processed court cases increased 43%. Of the 31 million school age juveniles under court authority (i.e., court supervision, residents of juvenile facilities) 79% were 10 to 15 years old, 12% were 16 years old, and 9% were 17 years old (JCS, 2011).

OJJDP (2011) reported that the number of juvenile court cases remained static from 2000 through 2008; however, juvenile courts conducted approximately 1.7 million cases throughout the United States in 2008. Fabelo, (2008) reported that the stabilization of juvenile crime in 2008 was due to the decrease in the growth of the adolescent population in 2000. Recent growth trends, however, may increase demands for juvenile services (Fabelo, 2008). In a report presented by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2008), the authors noted that the consequences for ineffective practices and strategies offered by juvenile justice systems frequently increased crime, squandered taxpayer dollars, and influenced negative outcomes for children and adolescents–an observation that mirrors the negative outcomes resulting from zero tolerance policies and points to the fact that most offenses are committed by a small percentage of students.

Concerns about students' behaviors in schools seem endless. For instance, Rosenberg and Jackman (2003) noted that one of the most significant concerns in public schools in the United States is students' behavior. At this point, it is important to note that the students who are presenting the most problems are few when compared to the population of school-aged children. However, that small percentage of children and adolescents are affecting the education and well-being of other children and adolescents as well as their own. Bru (2009) acknowledged that students who exhibit problem behaviors in classrooms negatively affect the learning for other students.

School and juvenile justice officials cannot ignore the expansive range of conduct problems exhibited by a small percentage of students. It is important to note that when the researchers examined the percentages of students who engaged in problem behaviors,

they found that a small percentage of students were committing the majority of offenses that resulted in exclusions from school or involvement with juvenile justice departments (Brandt, 2006, p. 132). For example, from 1997 to 2007, less than 6% of students in all schools in the United States carried a weapon on school property; less than 8% injured someone with a weapon on school property; and only 11% engaged in physical fights on school property (NCES, 2011). When the data are further disaggregated for students in Maryland, the study site, with a student population of 852, 211 (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], 2010), during the 2009 – 2010 school year, approximately 9% of the total student population was suspended for possessing dangerous substances, weapons, physical altercations, arson/fires/explosives, sex offenses, disrespect, insubordination, disruptions, and other offenses.

In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2010) reported that survey results from a 2009 representative sample of high school students revealed that 11.1% (12% in 2007) acknowledged participation in physical assaults on school property; 5% avoided school for safety reasons and 5.6% (5.9% in 2007) admitted to possessing a weapon while on school property. Preliminary data from a 2011 report on school crime and safety completed by NCES, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the U.S. Department of Education, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported 828,000 nonfatal victimizations at schools including thefts, assaults, and other incidents committed by approximately 9% of the student population in the United States (CDC, 2011). JCS (2011) reported that of the 75,200,000 children and adolescents under 18 years of age, approximately 11% were involved in juvenile offenses. One of these

students, as reported by Osher et.al (2004), was suspended 31 times, thus increasing that student's likelihood of failure.

Students who are frequently excluded from school because of their behaviors and/or are involved with juvenile justice departments have difficulty engaging in instruction and related activities because of time missed from school (Osher, et al, 2004). Osher, et al. suggested large class sizes, criticism, punishment, deficient skills, academic demands, and negative reinforcement may lead students to misbehave to avoid embarrassment and other challenges. Some students, according to Felson, Liska, South, and McNulty (1994) resort to delinquent behaviors when they face academic difficulties, thus, delinquent behavior becomes the preferred response to academic challenges that seem insurmountable. Welsh (2001) examined the contributions of school factors to disorder and concluded that even fear can influence student behaviors. For example, the student who has the fear of being injured by another student or fear of gang activity may bring a weapon to school for protection; as a result, receive an expulsion as punishment.

Students with mental health needs and/or social-emotional deficits, according to Benson, Leffert, Roehlkepartain and Scales, (cited by Greenberg, et al., 2003), may have specific learning disabilities or behaviors that interfere with the educational experiences of others. In the United States, one in 10 suffer impairments due to mental illness; however, approximately 80% have not received treatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2001). Untreated mental health needs, according to DHHS (2001), impose unnecessary problems on young people. Many schools, for example, more often, respond to students' behaviors by excluding them – a practice, according to Bruns,

(2005), that does not address mental health needs. Excluding students without meeting their needs may lead to repetition of the disruptive behaviors and increase the need for discipline.

Moreover, the time spent on disciplining disruptive students is enormous. For example, teachers reported the loss of at least 25 minutes of instructional time during a 90-minute instructional block because of disruptive behaviors (Bru, 2009). Scates (2005) converted that time into school days and reported that at least 50 school days were lost each year because of disruptions to teaching and learning. Bru (2009) further reported that students with significant disruptive behaviors interfere with their own academic progress; notably, their academic outcomes are significantly lower than the outcomes for their peers. Still, schools continue to rely on current policies to solve behavior problems.

Although disruptive behavior is one of the most pressing problems in schools in the United States (Bru, 2009), the overreliance on zero tolerance policies, inconsistencies in implementations, fallacies in interpretations, and associations with negative outcomes for children and adolescents have resulted in counterproductive outcomes (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2004). The various ways school administrators interpreted zero tolerance policies, according to Dunbar and Villarruel (2004), allowed leniency for one student, but punishment for another student who committed the same offense. Dunbar and Villarruel (2004) reported that discipline practices varied from school to school and district to district. Welsh, Greene, and Jenkins (1999) discovered that schools with the most significant discipline problems were characterized by inconsistent enforcement of discipline policies and vague responses to students' behaviors. In addition, some students

felt that school rules were not justifiable (Welsh, et al., 1999). These inconsistencies may have led to ineffective practices.

Inconsistencies and other problems associated with the implementation of zero tolerance policies may have produced a large number of problems for children and adolescents, especially because the research and related literature contained few significant benefits of the policies. A task force summoned by the APA (2008) found inconsistent implementation of zero tolerance policies across schools and districts and noted that schools were no safer or more effective in managing student behaviors than before the widespread implementation of zero tolerance policies. These observations are crucial when considering how best to reform or replace existing policies.

Research and related literature may support efforts to reform discipline policies; especially if the focus is on preventive measures and/or interventions. Some researchers argue that proactive measures that meet the individual needs of students are best (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Tobin & Sugai, 1996). Other discussions included topics that focused on mental health issues, school failure, juvenile delinquency, cost factors, and a number of other negative outcomes and/or health issues that needed immediate attention. Efforts are underway in Maryland, for example, to provide alternatives to exclusionary practices including alternative environments, evening schools, on-site counseling and mental health services, community outreach, and initiatives that target the needs of parents and communities. Numerous proposed remedies and fully implemented measures for addressing behaviors promise better outcomes, however, for the purpose of this study, I

recommend the identification of proactive measures as a means of reducing antisocial behaviors that could ultimately result in negative outcomes for children and adolescents.

Alternatives to Exclusions: Proactive Approaches

Even though the intent of implementing zero tolerance policies in schools was to maintain safe schools and improve learning, the policy failed to meet the intended purpose. In response, the Zero Tolerance Task Force commissioned by the APA found no evidence that zero tolerance policies ensure safe schools and effective teaching and learning environments (APA, 2008). Furthermore, an overreliance on exclusionary practices may have contributed to negative outcomes for children and adolescents (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). The task force, however, made recommendations to remedy the situation.

The task force suggested reforming zero tolerance policies in areas where needed and/or replacing the policies with a more appropriate set of guidelines, noting that previous school reform focused on academic concerns and subsequently neglected to adequately target preventive behavior supports (McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, et al., 2010). Reinke, Splett, Robeson, and Offutt, 2009) expressed the urgency of having measures in place to address behavior problems and concluded that disruptive behaviors in our schools cause significant public health issues.

The research and related literature portrayed the negative impact that disruptive behaviors had on educational and other life outcomes for children and adolescents who exhibited antisocial behaviors. Notably, even without adequate empirical support (APA, 2006), the research and related literature repeatedly suggested that disruptive behaviors

were connected to juvenile delinquency (Abrams, 2006; Annie E. Casey, 2008; APA, 2006, 2008; Atkins et al., 2002; Bradshaw et al, 2009; Brandt, 2006; Fabelo et al., 2011; Felson e al., 1994, Gottfredson et al, 2001; 2004; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Hawkins et al., Bradshaw et al., 2009; Reinke et al., 2009; Felson et al., 1994; Gottfredson et al., 2001; Gottfredson et al., 2004; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Hawkins et al., 2000; Kajs, 2006; Loeber et al., 2008; Losen; 2005; Martinez, 2009; Noguera, 2003; Petitclere et al., (2009) Reinke, et al., 2009; Rice, 2009; Saunders, 2009; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Skiba and Peterson, 2000; ; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba and Russell, 2008; Sprague et al., 2001; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000; Tremblay et al., 1992.

In the overall analysis of the impact of disruptive behaviors, researchers accessed teacher reports, school record reviews, and suspension data that showed disruptive behaviors contributed to the loss of instructional time, teacher frustration, academic failure, dropout rates, and other negative life outcomes for children and adolescents including juvenile delinquency (Bruns, et al., 2005, Greenberg et al., 2003; Reinke et al., 2009; Skiba and Peterson, 2000; Sprague et al.; 2001; Tobin et al,and Sugai, 1996).

In the face of these results, treatment for disruptive behaviors has primarily consisted of exclusions in the form of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and in-school-suspensions (NCES, 2011). Such practices have not reduced disruptive behaviors and may have increased the behaviors (APA, 2006). Understanding this phenomenon from the perspectives and experiences of students who were subjected to zero tolerance policies and involved with juvenile delinquency agencies, as suggested in this study, has implications for prevention and intervention efforts; however, many of the

efforts to implement alternatives to exclusionary practices have had limited impact on student behaviors. The limited program impact of existing programs sparked numerous discussions about obstacles to program success and strategies for effective implementation practices (Bruns, et al., 2005); Greenberg et al.; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Sprague et al., 2001; Tobin et al., 1996).

Extensive research yielded a wide variety of suggestions for improving program impact. Researchers proposed the use of comprehensive approaches characterized by extensive planning, a range of strategies, partnerships with families and communities, social instruction, conflict resolution strategies, effective classroom strategies for managing student behaviors, early identification of at-risk students, improved methods for managing data, school wide discipline and behavior supports, the use of functional behavior assessments, and implementation of behavior improvement plans (Bruns et al., 2005; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Tobin et al., 1996). Other suggestions included attention to organizational and/or leadership capacity, resources, training capabilities, program feasibility, standards (Gottfredson et al., 2004), emphasizing expected behaviors, individualizing instruction, and reinforcing prosocial skills (McIntosh et al., 2010). The vast array of possibilities must have seemed overwhelming to schools already aware that their policies were not working; however, in schools that attempted to change discipline practices by implementing delinquency prevention programs, results from a national study on the quality of school-level delinquency prevention programs found that most school programs were ineffective due to poor implementation practices. Overreliance on schools for addressing a gamut of social problems, limited resources, and other obstacles

associated with the needs of increasingly diverse student populations also limited the success of such initiatives (Sprague et al., 2001).

In the U.S., schools are expected to accomplish much with few resources; thus, in schools that demonstrated a positive impact of mental health provisions, for example, the key to their success was the availability of supporting resources (Bruns et al., 2005). In a study designed to determine the benefits of expanded mental health services, Bruns et al. (2005) found no significant differences in suspension outcomes between schools with mental health providers and schools without service providers. Bruns et al. (2005) attributed the results of the study to the competing demands placed on staff who worked in schools where adequate resources were not available to sustain school improvement efforts. Lack of adequate resources, among other factors, have proved to be a major impediment in other schools as well.

In a similar study in Maryland, the study site, Schaeffer et al. (2005) found that expenses associated with evidence-based interventions, overcoming resistance from students, maintaining parental involvement, and reluctance of practitioners to use evidence-based programs created challenges. These findings coupled with data which showed that only 39% of all schools in the United States have implemented prevention and/or intervention measures showed that even though problem behaviors are of great concern, the cure-all has not been found (NCES, 2011). One proposed solution to the challenges associated with problem student behaviors consisted of ensuring that all stakeholders, including students, were involved in the identification and implementation of solutions. Measures to address problematic behaviors usually involved clinicians,

administrators, and other professionals (Schaeffer et al., 2005); but did not involve the children and adolescents who were impacted the most. This approach along with other suggestions proposed by researchers, hint at the flexibility required to achieve success.

Some interventions involved disregarding current policies in search of promising solutions. Skiba and Peterson (2000) added that success with implementing prevention and intervention approaches requires the availability of numerous options that go beyond suspensions and expulsions. For example, of the 77 prevention programs developed by Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond, (2004), only one met the standards set by What Works Clearinghouse (WWC); U.S. Department of Education, 2011). WWC found that the programs designed to treat children with early onset of conduct problems (e.g., oppositional defiant disorder, aggression) met the standards of WWC with no reservations and the results were statistically significant (i.e., did not happen by chance). In the study, Webster-Stratton et al. (2004) reported that therapists engaged both parents and teachers to reinforce targeted skills and relevant concepts with the expectation that skills would be reinforced in the home and school. The program, one that clearly went beyond exclusionary practices, included weekly in-class lessons, training for and communication with parents, home activities, and weekly activities in clinical settings.

Other researchers indicated that elements of education, prevention, and treatment are features of promising programs. Also, in support of prevention measures, Reinke et al. (2009) suggested that the proactive practices used in the medical field could serve as models for early identification and subsequent treatment of children at risk of developing

disruptive behaviors. However, most resources from juvenile justice and schools targeted persistent offenders and children in middle and high schools (Brandt, 2006).

On the other hand, the research and related literature showed that disruptive behaviors were evident in preschool and elementary children, and suggested that interventions should begin at the earliest onset of disruptive behaviors (Brandt, 2006; Loeber et al., 2003) because serious delinquent offenses begin at the elementary school level or earlier (Brandt, 2006). Loeber et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of focusing on preschool and elementary children at a time when interventions can impact children's behaviors before the child engages in more serious behaviors. Failure to meet the social and emotional needs of students at earlier developmental stages can compromise their chances of achieving an adequate and appropriate education and their ability to engage in healthy relationships with their peers (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Additional research results showed that prevention efforts were more effective when implemented before children and adolescents began on paths that lead to risky behaviors (Brandt, 2006, Loeber et al., 2003; Tremblay et al, 1992; Wakschlag, Tolan & Leventhal, 2010; Webster-Stratton et al., 2004). In a study that focused on delinquency in children between the ages of seven and 12 and on persistent disruptive behaviors of toddlers up to adolescence, Loeber et al. (2003) suggested that past behaviors predict future behaviors. Thus, prevention programs, according to Brandt (2006), should attend to factors that place children at risk and may lead to the development of problem behaviors later in life. The average ages for the onset of problem and delinquent behaviors in male juveniles, according to Loeber et al. (2003), are age 7 (e.g., obvious in

minor behavior problems), age 9.5 (e.g., marked by moderately serious behaviors), age 11.9 (e.g., evident in serious delinquent behaviors), and age 14.5 when many experienced their first court appearances.

The review of the literature and related research revealed numerous programs designed to target challenging behaviors in school settings. For example, School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), a widely used data driven prevention program, utilizes instruction, environmental factors, system variables (McIntosh, 2010), and proactive measures to prevent problem behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2008). However, while recognized for its effectiveness with meeting the needs of some children, Sugai and Horner (2008) reported that SWPBS did not effectively meet the needs of children with more profound challenging behaviors. In addition, Nolan (2011) suggested the need to gain a new perspective on school discipline practices that consider options other than suspensions and expulsions. Listening to children and adolescents who experienced zero tolerance policies and juvenile delinquency could help to bring about such practices and further inform disciplinary policies and efforts to reduce problem behaviors.

Similar Studies of the Phenomenon

Interventions that focus on prevention have been the subject of several studies. Loeber et al. (2008) noted that children who exhibit early signs of behavioral and school problems require early interventions to reduce the risk of future delinquent behaviors. In addition, some research results and related literature suggested that environmental factors influence or cause students' behaviors. For example, studies suggested that schools that rely on exclusionary policies and practices may increase behavioral problems (Skiba &

Knesting, 2001) or cause students to commit offenses (Saunders, 2009). In a unique study that followed all seventh graders in the state of Texas over a period of six years, the researchers found that approximately 60% of the seventh graders were suspended or expelled (Fabelo, et al., 2011). Of that group, 15% were suspended or expelled 11 or more times, and nearly half of those suspended 11 or more times were involved in the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al, 2011). These statistics raise pervasive questions about disciplinary strategies in general.

Ineffective strategies used to address student behaviors may create environments in which these behaviors are normatively acceptable (Wilson, Lipsey & Derzon, 2003). Even though most students respond appropriately to disciplinary actions, recidivism rates tend to increase significantly for the small percentage of students who commit the most violations (Scott, Park, Swain-Bradway, & Landers, 2007). The Texas results indicate a need to understand how school discipline policies and practices influence or increase student behaviors from the perspectives of those who experienced disciplinary actions first hand.

Data presented in this study clearly show that zero tolerance policies in the United States are not effective and have not significantly reduced exclusionary actions (NCES, 2010). Results from quantitative research reported a possible relationship between school discipline policies and practices and juvenile delinquency; furthermore, Sander, Sharkey, Olivarri, Tanigawa, and Mauseth, (2010) suggested that school experiences are “salient predictors” (p. 289) of juvenile delinquency. To gain an understanding of this phenomenon, Sprague et al. (2001) used multiple assessments and other screening tools

(i.e., teacher referrals, teacher ratings, school records, a search of juvenile records) to identify adolescents at risk of juvenile delinquency. Although the researchers predicted a strong relationship between disciplinary referrals and juvenile delinquency, the correlation resulting from the study was low. The study did find a moderate correlation between severity of delinquent behaviors and frequency of school referrals.

Establishing the relationships among other factors pertinent to school discipline has proved elusive, as well. Tremblay et al. (1992) suggested that the relationship between poor academic achievement, disruptive behaviors, and juvenile delinquency is not clear. Although, results from their study revealed a causal relationship between disruptive behavior at age seven and later delinquent behaviors, the researchers found no causal relationship between poor academic achievement and delinquent behaviors. The limitation associated with the study was the small sample size, however, Tremblay et al. (1992) suggested that the results of their study could play a role in prevention planning. To achieve effective preventative measures, researchers will also need to explore how children and adolescents respond to interventions.

One study conducted by Abrams (2006) examined adolescents' responses to and adoption of treatment measures. In an ethnographic study that used a qualitative approach, Abrams explored the perspectives of 19 juveniles who resided in two correctional facilities where he sought to investigate processes related to changing behaviors and to gain an understanding of how juveniles used the strategies provided by correctional facilities. Abrams found that some students responded favorably (i.e., shared their plans for avoiding involvement in future criminal behaviors) to the treatment

offered, while others used manipulative tactics to influence their release (2006). Interestingly, Abrams (2006) found that the deterrent effect of residential facilities diminished for adolescents who had adapted to the facility or who felt that the facility was more accommodating than their familial conditions. These findings parallel those regarding children and adolescents who may feel that exclusions from school are rewards. No research to date has examined this phenomenon from the perspectives of children and adolescents who experienced both exclusions from schools and involvement with juvenile agencies. A clear understanding of behaviors that result in juvenile delinquency may inform disciplinary practices and efforts to develop alternatives to exclusionary measures.

Some research implies that student's perspectives will contribute to the solution, for example, results from a qualitative study on the potential benefits of students' input in school decision making suggested that students' perspectives on their school experiences have implications for improving school discipline (Noguera, 2007). Responses to a survey in the study revealed that students felt that teachers should not allow the actions of students to interfere with learning (Noguera, 2007). Noguera (2007) concluded that this response and similar responses offered strategies for improving schools. Students, according to Noguera, (2007) also offered recommendations for improving school safety including consequences for problem behaviors, supporting teachers who have difficulty managing their classrooms, providing alternatives to suspensions, securing resources from their communities, and enlisting the input from students on disciplinary actions (Noguera, 2007).

As stakeholders, students may have meaningful ideas for improving schools (Felson et al., 1994; Noguera, 2007) and reforming disciplinary practices. Sander et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study to gain an understanding of school experiences that may have influenced juvenile delinquency from the perspectives of juveniles and their parents and concluded that schools' failure to support families, accept input from parents, and foster positive relationships between students and teachers were linked to zero tolerance policies, juvenile delinquency, and other factors including individual and familial dynamics. The limitation of the study was that the small sample of 32 participants could not be generalized to the population of juvenile offenders. I sought to capture the perspectives of the population of juveniles who were subjected to zero tolerance policies and who had experiences with the juvenile justice system.

Summary and Conclusions

Throughout the literature review, I discovered that researchers consistently referenced the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance policies and attributed dropout rates, academic failure, juvenile delinquency, and other negative outcomes to the policies. Primarily, quantitative approaches of inquiry supported these conclusions. No qualitative research purposefully captured the experiences of children and adolescents who experienced both exclusionary practices and involvement with juvenile delinquency. This study will contribute to existing knowledge on policies attributed to negative outcomes for children and adolescents. Descriptions of the research design and participants, my role as the researcher, and methods and procedures for collecting and analyzing data will follow in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Ample and long-standing research exists to explain the causes and remedies of juvenile delinquency. Brandt (2006) noted that discussions related to the causes of delinquent behaviors (e. g., school, family, peers) first appeared in the twentieth century, and then researchers revised them in the middle and the end of the century. Brandt (2006) concluded that researchers have established a "fairly clear idea" of the pathways to juvenile delinquency (p.136). Researchers have captured the recommendations and suggestions from professional organizations (e.g., APA, NCES, AAP, OJJDP) on causal factors of juvenile delinquency and on how to address student behaviors and juvenile offenses.

Researchers, however, have not adequately captured the lived experiences of children and adolescents who traveled pathways that lead to juvenile delinquency. This missing information could assist with reform efforts that have not succeeded in reducing problem behaviors and juvenile delinquencies. Therefore, in this qualitative, phenomenological study, I focused on gaining an understanding of the potential influence of zero tolerance policies on juvenile delinquency. The results from this phenomenological inquiry could help researchers to better understand the population of adolescents described in this study and contribute to existing quantitative knowledge on the unintended consequences of zero tolerance policies. This chapter will describe the reasons a phenomenological approach was most appropriate for this study, the

characteristics and means of protecting the population of students who participated, and the methods of data collection and analysis I employed.

Research Methodology

Initially, I considered using a quantitative approach for this study; however, results from previous quantitative approaches offered numerical data that did not provide an informed understanding or explanation of how zero tolerance policies contributed to negative outcomes for children and adolescents who experienced this phenomenon. The phenomenological approach provided an opportunity to explore the human experiences of juveniles who experienced exclusions from schools.

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological approach allowed me to explore how students perceived school disciplinary actions and how they experienced exclusions from schools. This approach provided the means for identifying the real meaning of human experiences as related to a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). The process, according to Creswell (2009) requires researchers to set aside their experiences in order to understand the phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants.

Participants of the Study

For this study, I considered only students who had experienced both exclusions from schools and involvement with juvenile justice agencies. I purposively selected participants from the population of employees at a local fast food restaurant who were at least 18-years-old, but not older than 19. In addition, I set up a station at a local flea market located in a community that contains a plethora of potential participants who met

the inclusion criteria of the study. Race and/or ethnicity did not exclude potential participants. Members of the target population (i.e., at least 18 and not older than 19) who agreed to participate in the research had the option of selecting a location and time for face-to-face interviews, or they could choose to participate at the flea market station. Information from this population could inform school discipline policies and practices in schools throughout the United States.

Measures

The following research questions were used to capture the experiences of participants:

1. How do juveniles who experienced school suspensions perceive school discipline policies and practices?
2. What disciplinary outcomes did participating juveniles expect when they were suspended and/or expelled for violating school discipline policies?
3. What were the perspectives of participating juveniles regarding the effectiveness of suspensions and/or expulsions from school?

Ethical Protection of Participants

The participants in this study were at least 18 and no older than 19. All participants had experienced both exclusions from school (e.g., out-of-school suspensions, in-school-suspensions, expulsions) and involvement with juvenile justice agencies. Protecting the research participants, developing trust with them, and promoting the integrity of the research were crucial to the success of this study (Creswell, 2009).

The resulting interview responses from participants who were in the best position to explain their experiences could inform school discipline policies and practices.

Procedures

To avoid harm to participants, I adhered to the following procedures which served as a sequential guide for recruiting and informing participants, and validating findings.

1. I met with potential participants prior to the actual interviews to discuss the (a) purpose of the study, (b) procedures for protecting participants' rights, (c) potential risks, (d) procedures related to confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality, (e) incentives, and (f) locations for interviews that were convenient for participants (e.g., multipurpose resource centers, meeting rooms in public libraries or community youth centers).
2. After discussing the procedures, I requested consent from potential participants.
3. I conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants who agreed to participate.
4. During the individual interviews, I asked participants to respond to four questions. I asked probing questions if a participant's response illustrated that he/she did not fully understand the questions that I asked. For example, when participants were not able to provide meaningful responses to interview questions, I followed up with the following questions: (a) can you tell me more? (b) Can you give me examples? (c) Why do you feel that way?

5. I redirected participants if they began sharing more information about their past violations than I expected; especially because of the potential risks.
6. At the end of each interview, I reviewed responses with each participant to verify the accuracy of interview transcripts and to have participants determine the accuracy of my interpretations of the responses.
7. All completed interview forms, field notes, and audio recordings were stored in a locked file cabinet at my place of residence and will remain there for five years. I will secure the only key to the file cabinet.
8. I will mail a one to two page summary of the research results to participants upon my fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Data Collection

The main sources of data for this qualitative inquiry were participants' responses to interview questions. I collected all pertinent data in one interview session with each participant. I used an audio recorder to record "naturally occurring interactions" (Roulston, 2011, p. 77) with participants and field notes to capture participants' reactions and responses to questions (Rudestam and Newton, (2007).

The approach for data collection for this study involved open-ended questions developed around the central focus of the study as a means of collecting specific information (Knox and Burkard, 2009). The first part of each interview involved building rapport with participants to generate information that could reveal the "beliefs,

perceptions, experiences, and opinions" (Roulston, 2011, p. 79) of the interviewees which "yields rich and meaningful data while simultaneously helping participants feel safe enough to explore in depth often difficult experiences with a relative stranger" (Knox and Burkard, 2009, p. 567). As the interviewer, I initiated conversations to encourage participants to share information about their communities, interests, career goals, and/or any information that they felt comfortable sharing. Then, all participants responded to the following open-ended interview questions:

1. Were you ever suspended from school? If so, explain that experience?
2. In thinking about your experiences, were the consequences different from your expectations?
3. How do you feel about your school's discipline policies?
4. Are suspensions and expulsions effective? Why or why not?

My expectation was that the interview questions, that I drew from three research questions, would provide the data needed to identify themes and patterns from participants' experiences. Because the ultimate goal was to capture each participant's stories, interview protocol included varying the sequence for asking questions as needed (Knox & Burkard, 2009). I deferred any preconceptions that I had about the phenomenon and focused on how participants told their stories especially because I had the experience of suspending/excluding students from schools. It is also important to note that as a principal of two middle schools in urban settings, I found that many of the students who experienced multiple suspensions violated school policies to avoid difficult tasks and/or to manipulate mandatory attendance policies. For example, two juveniles explained that

their mothers had been arrested and incarcerated for failing to comply with compulsory school attendance policies. Suspensions and expulsions, according to the juveniles, made it possible to circumvent those policies.

In addition to my experiences as a principal in public school settings, I am now the principal of two schools for incarcerated juveniles. I chose not to recruit from this population to avoid any conflicts of interest and access to this population was initially denied. Even though my interest in school disciplinary practices began in 1984 and resulted in the establishment of a school within a school to meet the needs of students who frequently violated discipline policies, my interpretation of the findings were based on how participating juveniles explained their experiences. As the researcher, I set aside my experiences and expectations by identifying and clarifying my expectations and maintaining an open mind during the research (Creswell, 2009).

Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures for this study involved several steps. Johnson, Dunlap, and Benoit (2010) suggested that managing the enormous amount of words created by qualitative research can be challenging. Drawing from the experiences of Johnson et al., and for the purpose of this study, I reviewed transcribed texts in search of statements from participants that suggested themes and specific patterns, and then arranged the information accordingly. Scientific literature guided the process for framing key themes that emerged from the study (Johnson et al., 2010). However, to further gain an understanding of the results, I relied on my experiences as a former educator and administrator to determine categories, relationships, and to capture the authentic

perspectives of participants as they explained the meanings that they attached to their experiences, especially since, as noted by Creswell (2009), it is difficult to separate researchers' interpretations from their own experiences, backgrounds, and prior understandings.

I created a file to store field notes for each participant and divided each file into five sections for relational data, newly generated categories, themes, patterns, and the essential meanings of participants' experiences (Rudestam and Newton, 2007). The first step in the data analysis process included reading field notes and listening to recorded interviews repeatedly to identify categories and themes. Categorizing the data, the second step in the process, involved assigning meaning to information collected during the study to construct conceptual schemes for comparing and organizing the data (Basit, 2003). The next step included creating a matrix that included participants' pseudonyms, questions asked during the interviews, and answers to the questions as a means of providing a framework for comparing and contrasting responses.

Summary

This chapter described the research design, and methods and procedures for collecting and analyzing data for this qualitative phenomenological study on how juveniles experienced exclusions from schools. The data collection included interviews and observations to gain an understanding of the meanings that participating juveniles attached to their experiences. The manager of a fast food restaurant, the collaborating community organization for this study, facilitated access to potential participants who were at least 18 and not older than 19, by distributing flyers that provided information

about the study and the my contact information. Data analysis included generating meanings and themes from participants' responses. In addition to reporting the findings, in Chapter 4, I described the process that I used to generate data and the methods I used to capture and organize the data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of how participants experienced suspensions and expulsions from schools. Research tools used to collect data included the following four open-ended interview questions that captured the voices of participants who volunteered to share their stories:

1. Were you ever suspended from school? If so, explain that experience?
2. In thinking about your experiences, were the consequences different from your expectations?
3. How do you feel about your school's discipline policies?
4. Are suspensions and expulsions effective? Why or why not?

I purposefully recruited participants who had experienced exclusions from school and involvement with juvenile delinquency agencies primarily because some research related to school suspension practices suggest that suspensions from schools contribute to juvenile delinquency (Bruns et al., 2005; Noguera, 2003; Sprague et al., 2001; Tobin & Sugai, 1996). In this study, I sought to focus only on how those who experienced this phenomenon described their experiences, especially because of the lack of related literature that captures the voices of youth who experienced exclusions from schools.

Several methods were used for data analysis including plowing through transcribed notes and listening to audio recordings repeatedly. Even though another method used to organize the data included grouping together each participant's responses

to each of the four interview questions as a means of exploring those experiences that participants had in common and to provide a rich description of the phenomenon; this method also streamlined the steps I used to identify themes and patterns across the data.

Coding served to protect the confidentiality of participants' responses and to minimize risks. One form of coding, pseudonyms, not only protected the identities of participants, but also provided a human element to the data presented in this chapter. Coding in the form of study identifications for use in the tables and on the individual files created for each participant was a means of further protecting the identity of each participant and the confidentiality of information reported by each participant.

All interviews took place in participant-selected locations that included a community center, libraries, and fast food restaurants. I attributed participants' generally relaxed demeanor during the interviews to the nonthreatening self-selected locations that they chose for their interviews, the codes used for their names to ensure confidentiality, and the opportunity to voice their opinions and share their perspectives on how they experienced exclusions from schools. Each interview session lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

Of the thirty respondents who expressed an interest in the study, 26 actually participated. The twenty males and six females were residents of Baltimore City or Baltimore County, Maryland. Even though the age range for students who experienced out-of-school suspensions includes pre-school through high school students as reported by the Civil Rights Data Collection [CRDC], 2014), a data entry tool mobilized by the

United States Department of Education, a convenience group of participants in the 18 to 19-year-old age range participated in this study.

While this approach was practical, it was also important to carefully select a small sample of the total population of potential participants who were easily accessible (i.e., expressed the desire to participate in the study). Participants who worked at a fast food restaurant volunteered to participate in the study. Based on my initial conversations with these volunteers, they were in the best position to answer the research questions. For example, during the recruiting phase of the research, participants responded without hesitation when asked if they had experienced both suspensions from schools and involvement with juvenile delinquency agencies. In retrospect, my experiences as an educator and school administrator for more than 35 years also informed my decision to recruit participants who not only would be able to effectively explain their experiences, but also willing to participate. Table 1 captures brief participant demographic information to further enhance the understanding of information provided in this study.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Demographics	Male	Female
Age		
18 Years	8	5
19 Years	12	1
Race		
African American	19	6
European American	1	0

Data Collection and Verification

The interview protocol included deferring my preconceptions regarding discipline policies because of the wealth of experiences I have had as an elementary and middle school teacher and as a middle school principal. In addition to my experiences as a principal in public school settings, I am currently an educator in two schools for incarcerated juveniles. Therefore, I chose not to recruit from that population to avoid any conflicts of interest.

Face-to-face interviews were held with 26 participants. The use of semi-structured, open-ended interview questions posed little difficulty for participants, who responded to the questions in their own words by choosing what to share and/or how to say it. All responses were transcribed and audio recorded. Each participant reviewed the transcribed notes from his or her interview to confirm accuracy. The interviewees and I listened to the audio recordings to determine if they were satisfied with their responses and my interpretation of the responses. At the end of each interview, I created files and codes for participants' names and emerging themes and/or patterns. Codes were also used as a means of ensuring that participants remained anonymous and responses remained confidential.

Two strategies allowed me to capture participants' experiences. Initially, I grouped the responses to each question together to determine what participants had in common. For example, 52% of the participants felt that the consequences for their behaviors were different from their expectations. In the related discussions, participants offered suggestions on alternative measures for responding to students' behaviors in

schools that included in-school suspensions and measures to prevent behavioral problems (e.g., listening to students who report their concerns and/or imminent behaviors that could result in exclusions from school).

Several students reported that bullying was a problem and that even after reporting their concerns to administrators, the problems persisted. According to this group, fighting was unavoidable. One student, for example, reported that she was tired of going to the office to "tell them about it, but they did nothing about it". Another student explained that she was aware of the potential consequences for her behavior, however, knowing that the school would more than likely suspend her did not prevent her from engaging in behaviors that ultimately resulted in a suspension.

The second data collection strategy involved grouping together each participant's responses to the four interview questions as a means of capturing the full essence of their experiences. For example, one participant's overall experiences with out-of-school suspensions included an unwillingness on her part to avoid suspensions, especially when, according to the participant, she felt threatened and had no one in the school to assist with resolving the dilemmas that she faced. She eventually took matters into her "own hands" and was suspended.

Data Analysis

Common themes and patterns emerged and captured the ways that each participant looked at, thought about and/or felt about their experiences. The following four major themes emerged from responses to the four interview questions:

1. Administrative failure.

2. Negative impacts of suspensions.
3. School exclusions became the norm.
4. Discipline policies were unfair and ineffective.

Tables, figures, and examples of participants' responses capture these phenomena in the remainder of the chapter.

Figure 1 shows that 88% of the participants engaged in fights that resulted in out-of-school suspensions. Nineteen percent of the infractions were related to bullying. In addition, while 38% of the participants suggested proactive measures for preventing out-of-school suspensions, 20% of that 38% expressed concern about the impact that suspensions would have on their education. In the total sample group, 46% of the participants shared their concerns about the impact that suspensions had on their education. One student, Larry, stated, "I didn't really want to get suspended because I didn't want to put it on my school records." Even though 46% of the participants were concerned about the impact that exclusions had on their education and school records, 54% did not report this as a concern.

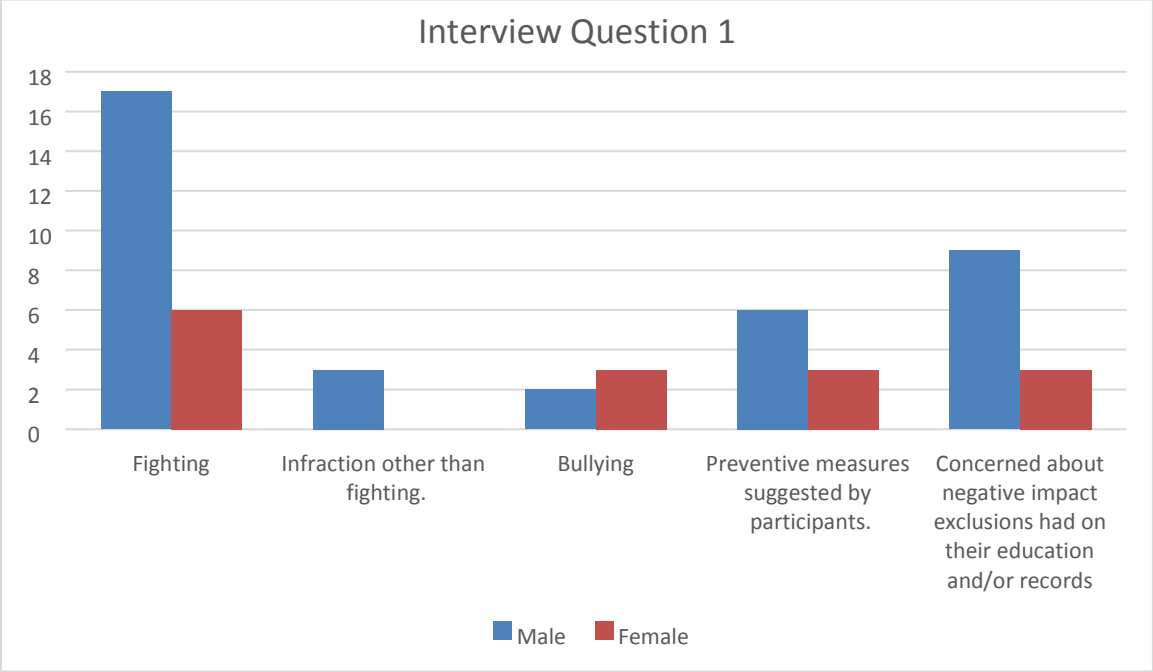

Figure 1. Responses to Interview Question 1 by Gender. Were you ever suspended from school? If so, explain that experience.

Participants' responses to Interview Question 1 included the following:

- "Yes. I didn't want to get suspended, but I was not going to let anyone bully me, so I fought back." (Sam)
- Well, the first time I ever got suspended was in the 10th grade. It was for fighting a female because like since 9th grade I always would get like harassed and stuff and I would always go to the office and talk to them. I always would talk to them, talk to them, talk to them, talk to them, and they don't never really want to do nothing about it. So, it was just one day, she said something to me in the cafeteria and you know, I just let her have it. Like, I got tired of it because I got tired of keep going to the office and telling them but, they not

doing nothing about it. And then they expect for me if somebody come up to me and say something to me, harassing me, I don't spose say nothing back. I don't believe in that bullying stuff. At the same time I was focused on my work in school. Did not have a choice. Tried to prevent it from happening, but *no one listened* until I took matters into my own hands. But soon as when I fought her, they put me out for the whole year. (Kim)

- I was suspended from school once for supposedly fighting with my friend. Um, he had just gotten stitches in the back of his head and I came up and tapped him on the back of the head forgetting that he had stitches. So, then he put me in a head-lock and this was in sixth grade. So, my teachers blew it out of proportion and we both ended up getting suspended. So, we both got sent home for a week. (William)
- I felt like nobody was on my side through the school system cause it was like they don't really listen to the kids' opinion. They always listen to the adults or what they portray of you. (James)
- Yes, I was suspended from school and it was because of a fight that I did not start, but being as though I was in the fight, I got suspended as well. (Randy)
- "Yes, I have been suspended before, once or twice and it was like – it was a bad experience because I was suspended for something I didn't do. A female in my classroom said that I touched her – which I didn't. They didn't see what was going on or my perspective of what was going on until I came back off of suspension and then they found out that the girl was lying. (Mandy)

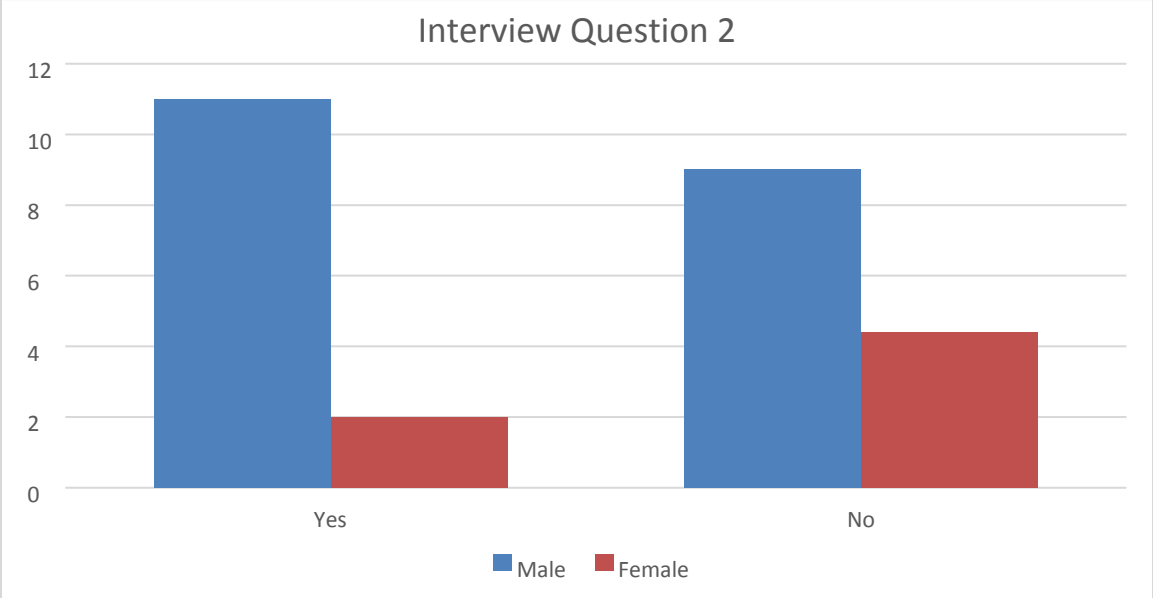

Figure 2. Responses to Interview Question 2: In thinking about your experiences, were the consequences different from your expectations?

For students who expected consequences for their behaviors, their responses Included the following:

- "I expected it." (Gina / Michael)
- "Of course." (Tiffany)
- "I go into it knowing that I'm gonna get suspended." (Sam)
- "Of course there are going to be consequences." (Kim)
- "Fight first. Talk later." (Thomas)
- "No, the consequences were exactly what I expected because I knew people who had been suspended." (Gina)

- "I mean, consequences are consequences. I knew that if I started something at school, I was going to be suspended." (Ken)
- "No, it was really better than I thought." (Chrissy)
- "That wasn't the first time." (Mitchell)
- "I kinda expected what was gonna happen. So, I kinda prepared myself for the fact." (Henry)
- "I knew like in my school, you were going to get the consequence . . . I was like, it was no way you was not going to get in trouble." (Moses)

For participants who did not expect consequences for their behavior, their responses included:

- "I didn't think they were gonna take it that far." (Steve)
- "I didn't think we should have gotten suspended cause we're both friends. It was ridiculous." (William)
- "Beings I did not start the fight, like, I wouldn't get suspended; but unfortunately, it happened and I missed a few days from school." (Randy)
- 'No, I was not expecting it. When I was getting bullied, then I reported it to the principal." (Larry)
- "No, because the situation at hand was not my fault. My brother was bullied and the situation was not handled." (Diane)
- "She was the one who put her hands on me first." (Mickey)

More than in the responses to the other three interview questions, significant variations emerged in responses to Interview Question 3. While some responses reflected students' concerns about not having someone to assist them with the dilemmas they faced and/or not having anyone to listen to them, surprisingly, the other responses to Interview Question 3 varied significantly.

Interview Question 3 asked: How do you feel about your school's discipline policies? Responses included:

- "There are consequences for behavior." (Sam)
- "Unfair." (Tiffany and Gina)
- "Not strict enough." (Thomas)
- "Does not make sense." (Thomas)
- James, Randy, Corey, and Larry were indecisive about their responses to this question.
- "Good." (Yolanda, Moses)
- "Need different strategies." (Lenny)
- "No reason, but keeps chaos out." (Dan)
- "Depends on students' intentions." (Henry)
- "Beneficial." (Ken)
- "Appropriate." (Chrissy)
- "Too strict." (William, Bob)
- "Needed for safety." (Ronnie, Ricky)
- "Poorly." (Mitchell)

- "Needed for progress." (Mandy)
- "Makes me angry." (Diane)
- "Could be better." (Linde, Dennis)

Interview Question 4: Are suspensions and expulsions effective? Why or Why not? Of the 26 participants who responded to Interview Question 4, (Figure 3) 13 emphatically reported that suspensions and expulsions are not effective for the following reasons:

- Suspensions from schools created more problems.
- Suspensions did not resolve their dilemmas.
- Suspensions negatively impacted their education.

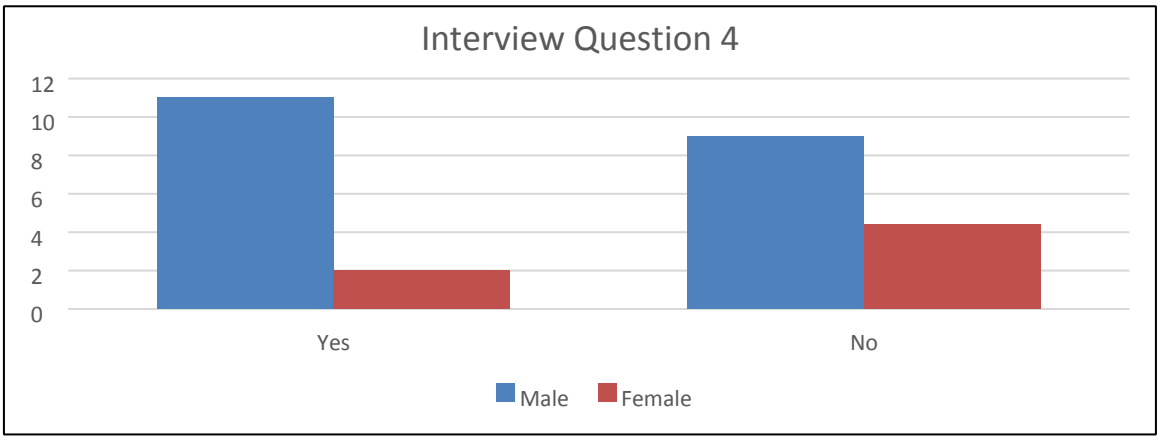

Figure 3. *Responses to Interview Question 2 by gender.*

Two recurring themes in response to Interview Question 2 suggested that discipline practices in schools are unfair. For several participants, the unfairness was attributed to administrators who, according to participants, did not listen to their accounts of what actually happened. Not only did participants feel that discipline practices were

unfair, they also identified other measures that administrators could use instead of out-of-school suspensions; for example, they identified in-school-suspensions and listening to students as measures that could either replace out-of-school suspensions and/or prevent behaviors that could result in out-of-school suspensions. When asked if the consequences were different from their expectations, one student stated, "Like nobody was even understanding how I felt, so I feel the consequences didn't match up to what actually happened."

For the 13 participants who felt that the consequences for their behaviors were not different from their expectations, a second recurring theme emerged suggesting that suspensions could be the norm for them and not the exception. To describe their experiences, participants reported:

- "It didn't surprise me at all." (Thomas)
- "When you do something in school, you get suspended." (Henry)
- "I knew if I started something in school, I would get suspended." (Ken)

For participants who felt that the consequences *were* different from their expectations, their responses suggested that suspensions for this group could also have been the norm. According to participants, discipline practices at their schools either caused more problems for them or they were treated unfairly. For example, participants reported:

- "I was defending myself." (Ronnie)
- "It was my first time." (Gina)
- "I was bullied. I reported it to the principal." (Larry)

- "It wasn't my fault. She put her hands on me first." (Linde)
- "It was because of bullying." (Larry)
- "I didn't think they would take it that far. At least talk to me." (Lenny)

When asked about the effectiveness of their school's discipline policies, participants suggested alternative measures and reported that some students deliberately violated discipline policies to incur suspensions; especially repeat offenders.

- "So, sometimes it works, but sometimes it is giving the student what they want. They don't want to be in school. Have inside suspensions . . . because most kids *is* trying to get suspended so they don't have to go to school period." (Sam)
- No! I'm gonna tell you why. It can work for some people. You have people who get suspended five times, like more than five times in a school year because suspensions do not help. I feel as though they should come up with another program. You send me home for five days, three days. I'm missing work from school. I'm failing. So, what is that really gonna do?" But, that doesn't help because if a person keeps getting harassed or you just naturally have a bad child, that's not going to help. (Kim)
- "Suspensions, they are definitely not effective. No matter how long the time, you're basically sitting at home, not doing *nothing*. And when you come back, you feel the same way. Like, I still don't like that person. If he say something, I'm still gonna hurt him. I don't know how to put it; but it's not effective

enough. And expulsion is definitely not! They just send you away to a different school, or home school or phone school you. You're just sitting at home away from the person that caused something that got you expelled or suspended. It's just not effective. No, it's not effective." (Thomas)

- "So, suspensions only work to an extent. At the same time, you get suspended and you come back to school seeing the same person you got into an altercation with. They gonna have their, you know, outsiders and then it's just gonna build up more drama and y'all gonna wound up fighting again or fighting your peers.
- Suspensions doesn't work. They just have a little mediation, talk to you, suspend you, and then you come back to school."(Kim)
- "Discipline policies need to be fixed because most kids who do get suspended end up getting suspended over and over again." (Thomas)

Another participant suggested that suspensions are not deterrents. Of the participants who felt that suspensions are effective, one participant reported that suspensions keep out students who create unsafe environments. According to another student, simply knowing that suspensions become a part of students' school records and could negatively affect them in the future suggest that suspensions could be deterrents.

Table 2

Brief Summary of Major Themes

Theme 1: Administrative Failure	Theme 2: Negative Impact of Suspensions	Theme 3: Exclusions Became the Norm.	Theme 4: Discipline Policies Were Ineffective and Unfair.
Refusal to listen to students.	Loss of instruction	50% of the participants expected suspensions as a response to their behaviors.	School officials would not listen to students.
Refusal to consider circumstances.	Negative information on permanent records.	However, the other 50% of the participants reported that the consequences for their behaviors differed from their expectations.	Administrative practice of Dis-regarding student-suggested alternatives to suspensions.
Refusal to consider alternative consequences.	Unresolved matters/conflicts.		Suspensions did not address the original problem.
	Repeat offenders.		Suspensions did not act as deterrents.
	Interfered with extracurricular activities.		

In response to the four interview questions, the following themes emerged:

Theme 1: Administrative Failure

Participants described several ways in which school officials were nonresponsive in situations that led to suspensions. Their responses to the first interview question indicated that even though fighting was the most reported reason for suspending students, administrators did not take the related circumstances into account and/or did not make attempts to prevent behaviors (e.g., fights) that ultimately led to suspensions. Further, in describing their experiences, several participants provided suggestions for reducing out-of-school exclusions. They also reiterated their concerns regarding the failure of

administrators to listen to students' concerns. The open-ended interview questions also provided the framework that allowed participants to freely explain their thoughts and points of view. This aspect was particularly salient because several participants felt that administrators were not listening to them.

Theme 2: Negative Impact of Suspensions.

A second theme reflected participants' concerns about how suspensions impacted their education and how others would interpret disciplinary information recorded in their cumulative school records.

Theme 3: Exclusions From Schools Became the Norm.

Theme 3 reflected the sense that exclusionary discipline was the norm, and in some cases, the only option for schools officials. While 50% of the participants expected that responses to their behaviors would result in suspensions and/or expulsions, a proportion that implies that exclusions were the normal consequence for disruptive behaviors within the school; the other 50% did not expect this response.

Theme 4: Discipline Policies Were Unfair and Ineffective.

Participants reported that principals did not listen to them and for one participant, this lead to her "taking matters into her own hands". Repeat offenders, according to participants, deliberately committed offenses so that they would not have to go to school which is an example of ineffective practices.

Summary

Four major themes emerged in this study (Table 2). All participants experienced exclusions from school; however, only one participant's experiences with juvenile

agencies was of a serious nature and involved several arrests. Of the total sample population of 26, 23 were suspended for fighting. Of the 23 who were suspended for fighting, bullying prompted five of the fights. Ten participants suggested the use of other disciplinary measures (e.g., in-school suspensions, mediation, etc.) in response to fights and other unacceptable behaviors that occur in schools, and 12 were concerned about the impact that suspensions would have on their education and/or their permanent school records. In response to Interview Question #2 - In thinking about your experiences, were the consequences different from your expectations? - 50% of the participants expected suspensions in response to their behaviors. This is an indicator that suspensions for this group had become the norm.

One of the most significant outcomes of this research is that responses from those who experienced suspensions and/or expulsions from schools mirror much of what the research reported as far back as 2011 when Dunlap and Fox reported that suspensions and expulsions may satisfy the goals of students, especially the student whose goal is to avoid academic challenges and/or safety concerns. Then, as reported by some participants, there are students whose intent is to gain rewards such as time away from school. These observations and other related observations are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Analysis Introduction

To reiterate, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of how juveniles experienced suspensions and/or expulsions from schools. Only those who actually experienced this phenomenon can adequately describe their experiences, especially since little research has taken advantage of opportunities to explore the lived experiences of juveniles who experienced exclusions from schools. In attempts to interpret how exclusions from schools impacted their lives, participants offered their perceptions of practices in school that centered on elements that were important to them, especially those elements that impacted their lives the most.

Three research questions guided this inquiry: (a) How do juveniles who experienced school suspensions perceive school discipline policies and practices? (b) What disciplinary outcomes did juveniles expect when they were suspended and/or expelled for violating school discipline policies? (c) What are the perspectives of juveniles regarding the effectiveness of suspensions and/or expulsions from school? Responses to four related interview questions during individual interviews revealed a range of perspectives from participants who experienced several suspensions and/or expulsions from schools as well as involvement in the juvenile just system.

Major themes included; (a) the seemingly disregard on the part of administrators for students' requests for assistance with dilemmas they faced; (b) concerns about how suspensions impacted education and school records; (c) the realization that for some participants, suspensions had become the norm; and (d) the unfairness and ineffectiveness of school disciplinary policies.

Interpretations

According to results of the study, school officials disregarded efforts on the part of some participants to secure assistance with challenges they faced. Suspensions, according to this group, were unfair practices, especially since they were expecting that someone in the school would listen to their concerns and assist with their dilemmas. According to two participants, failure to act on the part of administrators forced one participant to take "*matters into her own hands"*, and another participant to suggest that fighting was *"unavoidable."*

Disregarding students' requests for support coupled with suspending students for engaging in fights are examples of disciplinary actions that operate on an "individualized deficit theory" as conceptualized by Gottfredson, et al., (2004). This theory, according to Gottfredson, et al., (2004), operates on the assumption that the student has a problem instead of taking into consideration any role that the school may have played in the student's behavior. Thus, the student suffers the consequences. This type of reasoning could be the reason suspensions were the norm for 50% of the participants who expected exclusions from schools in response to their behaviors; thus, confirming the individualized deficit theory.

If, as reported by participants, administrators were not listening to them and not concerned about their accounts of events that lead to suspensions, environmental factors, such as school characteristics (e.g., no evidence of a shared vision where everyone understands his/her role in achieving the vision) may have played a significant role in how administrators responded to or did not respond to students' needs or concerns. In

addition, school characteristics may have played a significant role in how participants responded (e.g., fighting) when confronted with challenges void of administrative support. When thinking about the over-reliance on punitive disciplinary practices which could be the norm (i.e., the understood characteristic of the school), students who see suspensions as rewards, (e.g., behaviors that are motivated by environmental factors) would seize the opportunity to reap such a reward.

Participants also described the schools' practice of reacting to incidents of disruptive students' behaviors by suspending the students without considering any other options. This rigid form of reaction could significantly impact how students respond to challenges. As suggested in the literature, overreliance on exclusionary practices creates negative outcomes (Sprague et al., 2001) similar to those outcomes reported by participants; for example, the results of the suspensions, such as loss of instruction, interference with self-selected extracurricular activities, negative information recorded in their permanent school records, and lack of attention to repeat offenders could result in even more exclusions from schools.

As co-occurring themes in this study, the impact of suspensions and the disregard for students' dilemmas are counterintuitive. Knowing that suspensions negatively impact students' education, and then not taking the time to listen to students' accounts of environmental and other factors that may have contributed to their behaviors could place students in difficult decision-making situations. However, according to Dunlap & Fox (2011), conceptualizing challenging behaviors as functions or behaviors that are motivated by environmental factors (e.g., rewards, avoidance) may require responses that

are function-based (Dunlap & Fox, 2011). For example, Kim's overall experiences with out-of-school suspensions included an unwillingness on her part to avoid suspensions, especially when, according to Kim, she felt threatened and had no one in the school to assist with resolving the dilemmas that she faced. She eventually took matters into her "own hands" and was suspended. Mediation that included an administrator and the student who posed a threat may have revealed the function(s) of the student's threatening behaviors and informed best practices for assisting the student with addressing those behaviors.

Repeat offenders represent students who perceive suspensions as rewards and they are classic examples of why schools need to address the functions of students' behaviors. Escaping a difficult assignment by violating a school rule, for example, ultimately allows a student to change his/her immediate circumstances, especially if avoiding the work is their immediate goal. As suggested by Ramnero & Torneke; (2011), the defining feature of operant conditioning is that it is a method of learning that involves rewards and punishments or learning by consequences. Maryland, the site of this study, framed the problem by reporting that:

> 74,594 students accounted for 131,629 out-of-school suspensions, and 5% received five or more suspensions. *Of these, according to the data, 38% received multiple suspensions.* In addition, 4,794 students had more than five suspensions during the school year. Thus, the multiple suspensions of students within a single school year resulting in missing multiple days of instruction and their resultant disengagement from education is the problem. At the other extreme, 239,700 days

> were lost in the equally unlikely event that all suspensions were for 10 days. This amount of lost instructional time *cannot* be recovered. (MSDE, 2015)

Framing the problem, as presented above, not only defines the problem; but also informs the decisions needed to correct the problem. Given that the literature has adequately identified behaviors that could influence repeat offending (e.g. escape, rewards, avoidance), it is now up to school officials, (especially those who are proficient in best practices for educating students) to implement programs and best practices for meeting the needs of all students. For example, a recent article in the Baltimore Sun Paper by Dr. Nancy Grasmick, (2016, p.1), former superintendent of schools in Maryland, captures this forward thinking pattern in the following statement: "Too many students see little relevance between their academic coursework and their prospects for the future" (p.1). She then goes on to emphasize that "too many of our students are tuning out and turning off."

To further emphasize how critical it is for schools to not only address behaviors that interfere with progress, it is equally important for schools to ascertain why students are misbehaving. Kim, for example, one of the participants who was bullied, took "matters into her own hands" by making the decision to fight back. Research; however, reports that victims of bullying normally respond as follows, according to NCES (2015):

> Victims of bullying were more likely to avoid certain areas of the school and certain activities out of fear of an attack. Specifically, bullied students were more likely than non-bullied students to report the following avoidance behaviors: avoiding the shortest route to school (six percent of bullied students vs. two

percent of non-bullied students); the entrance to the school (four percent vs. one percent); hallways or stairs (seven percent vs. one percent); and the school cafeteria (six percent vs. one percent) (appendix B, table 5). Bullied students were also more likely than non-bullied students to avoid restrooms (seven percent vs. two percent), the parking lot (five percent vs. one percent), and other places inside the school building (five percent vs. one percent) or other places on school grounds (six percent vs. one percent).

Even though only five participants reported that bullying contributed to their decisions to engage in fights or gave them no choice in the matter, addressing bullying on the part of administrators is key to meeting the needs of students who are bullied and those who bully. Thinking ahead and planning how to respond to problem behaviors, as proactive measures, could significantly reduce suspensions.

Even though participants in this study did not admit to engaging in behaviors for rewards (e.g., time off from school) or to avoid academic challenges, some participants referenced these behaviors in response to Interview Question # 4: Are suspensions and expulsions effective? Why or Why not? Participants referenced incidents where other students deliberately violated school policies "so they don't have to go to school period". One student referenced repeat offenders. These examples of students' behaviors suggested that environmental factors such as avoidance and rewards may have played a role in their behaviors. The findings in this study extend the body of knowledge that is related to an overreliance on punitive disciplinary practices (e.g., suspensions and/or expulsions).

Limitations of the Study

Although the sample population of 26 participants was small, extending the findings from this study to the larger population of juveniles who experienced exclusions from schools may not pass the test of generalizability, especially because the characteristics are limited to experiencing suspensions and/or expulsions from schools and involvement with juvenile agencies. Thus, the discussions in this study focused on themes elicited from the categories formed during the data analysis.

Participants' responses mirrored the data reported by the NCES and the OJJDP. For example participants cited occasions when administrators disregarded their requests for assistance which they equated as having "no one to listen" to them.

Recommendations

In 2014, the School Discipline Consensus Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged in School and Out of the Juvenile Justice System (Justice Center, The Council of State Governments) published a detailed document that captured advice from experts in the field (i.e., education, behavioral health, law enforcement, policy makers, juvenile justice, parents, youth, advocates, etc.) who engaged in conversations that resulted in a gamut of recommendations for improving how schools discipline their students. The focus was on reducing the number of school suspensions and on how best to provide safe and engaging school environments for all students.

A recommendation for further research includes employing both qualitative and quantitative research measures to determine how recommendations from the experts (i.e., The Council of State Governments, et al.) impacted school discipline policies and

practices, especially because the concern was to reduce exclusions from schools and provide engaging and safe school environments that could keep students out of juvenile facilities. Keeping in mind that *The School Discipline Consensus Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged in School and Out of the Juvenile Justice System* was published in 2014 and as of 2016, schools in Baltimore City, Maryland, the research site, for example, are still struggling with low performing schools that are greatly impacted by behaviors that interfere with teaching and learning (MSDE, 2015).

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this phenomenological study indicated that schools could do a better job of determining the reasons students misbehave, including those who do so in order to avoid school work. Participants' responses implied that the inflexible reactions of school officials to repeated disruptions support avoidance behaviors. Participants in this study also talked about the loss of instruction they experienced while suspended and the concerns they had about their education.

These findings suggest the need to include students in decision-making processes, especially decisions related to disciplinary practices. Results from a qualitative study conducted by Noguera on the potential benefits of students' input in school decision making suggested that students' perspectives on their school experiences have implications for improving school discipline (Noguera, 2007). Responses to a survey in the study revealed that students felt that teachers should not allow the actions of students to interfere with learning (Noguera, 2007). Noguera concluded that this response and similar responses offered strategies for improving schools (2007). Students, according to

Noguera, (2007) also offered recommendations for improving school safety including consequences for problem behaviors, supporting teachers who have difficulty managing their classrooms, providing alternatives to suspensions, securing resources from their communities, and enlisting the input from students on disciplinary actions (Noguera, 2007).

Implications for social change are not only embedded in Noguera's (2007) account of strategies offered by students for improving how they are disciplined in schools; but the data, as reported in this study, capture common themes from participants' accounts of how they experienced disciplinary responses to their behaviors that could also change how students experience exclusions from school. For example, the second theme discovered in this study suggests that disciplinary practices are unfair and ineffective. The disproportionate assignment of suspensions to minorities and the unintended consequences of zero tolerance policies in the form of increased acts of delinquent behaviors, (Sprague, Walker, Stieber, Simonsen, & Nichioka, 2001), confirm this observation.

As stakeholders, students may have logical ideas for improving schools and reforming disciplinary practices (Felson et al., 1994; Noguera, 2007). Sander et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study to gain an understanding of school experiences that may have influenced juvenile delinquency from the perspectives of juveniles and their parents and concluded that schools' failure to support families, accept input from parents, and foster positive relationships between students and teachers were linked to zero tolerance policies, juvenile delinquency, and other factors including individual and familial

dynamics. Similar reflections were offered by participants in this study who reported that administrators failed to listen to their accounts of circumstances that led to behaviors that resulted in suspensions. Fifty percent of participants in this study expected that responses to their behaviors would result in suspensions and interpreted this as the norm.

So what does it all mean? It means that schools need to do a better job of keeping students in schools. Focusing more on preventing behaviors that result in exclusions from schools and less on punishing students has implications for changing how schools respond to behavioral problems. The educational system that is represented by individual schools throughout the United States is only one part of the sociocultural context that students navigate in their lifespan (Pasick & Burke, 2008). Pasick & Burke, (2008) define social context as "the social cultural forces that shape people's day-to-day experiences and that directly and indirectly affect behaviors. With the understanding that decisions made by school officials in response to students' behaviors may have impacted the sociocultural forces that participants in this study experienced in schools; for example, not having anyone to listen to their accounts of events that subjected them to exclusions from schools, the inconsistent applications of zero tolerance policies, interpreting suspensions as the norm, and the negative impact of suspensions on educational opportunities could be interpreted as the social cultural forces that not only shaped participants' experiences, but may have shaped the experiences of students throughout the United States who experienced exclusions from schools.

Therefore, suggestions for changing how students experience suspensions and/or expulsions from schools include:

1. Discontinuing practices associated with zero tolerance, an ineffective practice that has resulted in disproportionate assignments of suspensions and/or expulsions to minorities and has not significantly reduced exclusions from schools.
2. Embracing input from students who experienced exclusionary discipline practices.
3. Soliciting support from other community stakeholders including parents, community leaders, and those who are directly or indirectly impacted by zero tolerance policies.
4. Exploring best practices in schools and school districts that have successfully implemented alternatives to exclusions; for example, Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support.
5. Exploring answers to the following questions:
    a) Who is managing the data related to disciplinary practices in schools and how is it being used?
    b) How many schools actually use proactive measures to prevent suspensions? In schools where proactive measures are used, what are those measures and how effective are those measures?
    c) What role does state and federal education agencies play in matters that involve disciplinary practices in schools?

Answers to the questions listed above and findings from this study could initiate steps needed to change how schools discipline students. Knowing that the cost to educate

one student in public schools is approximately $11,000 yearly (NCES, 2015) compared to approximately $48,000 yearly, (NCES, 2015) to educate and house a juvenile in a juvenile facility coupled with the impact that exclusions from schools may have on a students' education and other potential outcomes are reasons to rethink how schools discipline students. Any efforts to change exclusionary practices should include key stakeholders, especially those who experienced both exclusionary practices and involvement with juvenile agencies.

Conclusion

This study has provided data retrieved from participants who experienced suspensions and/or expulsions from schools and involvement with juvenile agencies. It is important to note that they are the experts. Since researchers have the capability of exploring their experiences further, it is a venture worth pursuing, however, it is a venture that should not be explored without the students who actually experienced the phenomenon presented in this study.

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Appendix A: Community Research Stakeholders and Partners

My community partner, the manager of a local fast food restaurant, has agreed to assist with recruiting participants for the proposed study by distributing flyers about the research to employees who are at least 18-years-old and not older than 19-years-old. Since the community partner will only recruit participants, a letter of cooperation will not be needed.

Appendix B: Consent Form for Research

My name is Vera V. Holley and I am conducting research to gain an understanding of how you experienced exclusions from school. I am inviting you to participate in this study titled: A Qualitative Study of How Students Experienced Exclusionary Discipline Practices. I am asking you to participate in this study. If you agree to participate, I will ask you to sign a consent form.

Who Am I?

I am a doctoral student at Walden University.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how students experienced exclusions from school.

Participation

Potential participants who are at least 18-years-old and not older than 19 years old, are invited to participate in the study. Participation in this study is voluntary and will include a meeting with me, the researcher, to allow you to get additional information about the research and to participate in an interview session where you will be asked to respond to four interview questions. The interview could last up to one hour. A summary of the results will be mailed to you.

During the interview, you will be asked to respond to four research questions. A sample question includes:

Were you ever suspended from school? If so, explain that experience.

I will transcribe/write down and audio record your responses. Your responses will be secured in a locked file cabinet and only I will have access to the files. The interviews should not exceed one hour.

It's Your Choice

If you decide now to participate in this research project, you can still change your mind later. If you want to stop the interview at any time, you can. Participating in this project might make you uncomfortable about discussing your experiences, however, the risks are not greater than those that you may encounter ordinarily in daily life.

Benefits

Participation in this study will provide an opportunity for you to share your experiences with exclusions from schools and your perspective on school discipline policies.

Compensations

As a way of thanking you for your time, I will provide you with a ten dollar gift card for lunch or dinner.

Privacy

Everything that you tell me during the interview will be kept confidential. That means that no one else will know your name or the answers you give. However, information that you share with me during the interview will not be disclosed to others unless the information is related to abuse/neglect or could result in harm to you or others. If there is a threat of harm to you or others, I am obligated to notify police and/or seek hospital treatment. In addition, in the state of Maryland, it is mandatory for researchers to report information disclosed about unreported illegal activity.

Asking Questions

You can ask questions at any time. If you think of a question later, you can reach me at XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you would like to ask the university a question (e.g., questions about your rights or any other questions) you can call Walden University at 1-800-925-3368**,** ext. 3121210.

I will give you a copy of this form.

If you agree to participate in this research, please sign below.
Participant's Signature: _____

Date of Consent: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____
Date Signed: _____

Vera V. Holley

EDUCATION

Walden University

Minneapolis, Minnesota

PhD Student in General Psychology - Education Track Anticipated

Graduation Day: January 2017

Coppin State University

Baltimore, Maryland

Masters of Arts Degree in Special Education (1984)

Coppin State University

Baltimore, Maryland

Bachelors of Science Degree in Elementary Education (1976)/Cum Laude

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

- Maryland Administrator I Certification: Elementary-Middle School Principal/Supervisor
- Maryland Advanced Professional Certificate (APC): Elementary Education (1-6 and
- Middle School / Special Education K-12)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Currently, principal of two juvenile facilities under Juvenile Services Education/Maryland State Department of Education. Responsibilities include:

- Leading best practice activities designed to improve academic success for incarcerated youth.
- Leading school improvement efforts in two juvenile facilities.

General Education Teacher with Maryland State Department of Education: October 2012 to October 2013. Responsibilities included teaching mathematics, science, career development, and life skills to adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 who were residing in a juvenile placement center.

Mathematics Inclusion Teacher with Baltimore (Maryland) County Public Schools from 2007 to 2010. Responsibilities included ensuring that students with disabilities received appropriate educational experiences in classrooms and other environments with their nondisabled peers.

Principal of two middle schools in the Baltimore City Public School System from 1996 to 2006. Responsibilities included:

- Fostering school improvement by creating safe environments that improved teaching and learning.
- Ensuring academic success for all students.

Assistant Principal in the Baltimore City Public School System from 1991 to 1996. Responsibilities included:

- Fostering school improvement by creating safe environments that improved teaching and learning and promoted academic success for all students.
- Leading best practice activities designed to improve academic success for students with disabilities.
- Leading school improvement efforts.

Special educator and general educator in the Baltimore City Public School System from 1976 to 1991. Responsibilities included:

- Teaching, mentoring, and developing and implementing individual education plans for students with disabilities.
- In-school supervision designee of programs for emotionally disabled students.
- Initiated a Phasing-In Program for newly assigned emotionally disabled students to help students make effective adjustments in comprehensive school environments.
- In-school designee/contact person for head injury program.

Community Service and Awards

Founder of the Abstinence Project, a community project designed to prevent teenage pregnancies and promote effective speaking and writing skills as a means of improving decision-making skills (2011 to Present)

Advisor for Student Government Association - Holabird Middle School Baltimore County (Maryland) Public Schools (2007 – 2009)

Contributing participant/consultant in a documentary for the HBO series, The Wire (2005 – 2006)

Awarded PTA Educator of the Year-Maryland State Department of Education (1999)

On assignment to assist with special education compliance issues from 1994 to 1995, Winston Middle School, Baltimore City Public School System

PTA Outstanding Teacher Recognition Award-Baltimore City Public Schools (1991)

Co-Founder of Onyxx Boys to Men Club, a youth development organization designed to improve the quality of life for all participating students and their families in 1990

Served on the Grant Review Board for the Fund for Educational Excellence (1989)

Recipient of two state level Drug-Free Schools' grants and special recognition for site-specific programs (1988)

Founder of Chrystal Girls' Club, an organization for young ladies between the ages of seven and seventeen in an effort to prevent teenage pregnancies resulting in a Channel 13 Salute from a local television news station (1984).

Author

Come Back, Julia! – An account of my mother's life experiences that may have contributed to her struggles with dementia. There is much for readers to learn from the lived experiences of Julia, the main character in this book, including how to access resources that may prevent others from experiencing the abuse that Julia suffered (2012)

Bullet to the Heart of the Matter – As an advocate for children, I wrote this novel to bring to life the many problems that creep into the lives of children and adolescents. Sometimes the language used to describe their predicaments is harsh, however; it is needed to allow the reader to actually take a journey down those paths that many children cross as they get tangled in the webs woven by their parents. If after reading this novel, one father or one mother, whose story is told in *Bullet to the Heart of the Matter*, is able to prevent a child from carrying the heavy burdens that parents sometimes inadvertently place upon them, then this novel has served its purpose.

References: (3)

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Home: (410) 356-5565

Dr. Claudia Brown, PhD
Candidate for Texas District 54 Senate Seat

Former Principal: Baltimore City Public School System
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