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The Experiences of Elementary School Counselors in Bullying Intervention and Prevention

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Abstract

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in Bullying Intervention and Prevention

By

Shannon Matthews

MA, Stephen F. Austin State University, 2000

BS, Stephen F. Austin State University, 1992

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

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Abstract

Bullying has become a focus in American society over the past several decades due to publicized bullying cases and the impact bullying has on victims. Researchers have conducted studies to determine the definitions, causes, and results of bullying. This phenomenological qualitative study examined the experiences of elementary school counselors (Pre-K–5th grade) who have implemented antibullying programs. Using distributive leadership theory as a lens, purposeful sampling was used to recruit 8 elementary school counselors from a targeted East Texas area of similar populations and enrollment numbers. Interview data was analyzed using NVivo software and thematic analysis, which revealed 5 major themes: differing bully definitions, available options for possible bully interventions, specific school policies for intervening in bullying incidents, the diversity of role of the school counselor, and suggested improvements needed. The emerging themes from this study highlight areas of importance to create a positive impact on change that will provide elementary school counselors and administrators insight to motivate increasing antibullying programs, and hence, lessen elementary school bullying.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the educators and counselors who are trying to light that bulb for each of their students. It is also dedicated to my mother, Charlotte Perritte, who provided constant encouragement, babysitting, editing, and sometimes the push to "keep on, keeping on." And to my daughter and pride, Elizabeth, who supported me with her endurance and modeling of being the best you can be, even through the tears. And to my boys, Rett and Jake, who provided the motivation to get through as time was ticking. Also, to my best friend, Regina Hawk, who offered the shoulder to cry on, the hand to help me up, and the foot to prod me forward. I appreciate all of their daily love, patience, encouragement, and support.

Acknowledgments

As I consider my educational journey at Walden University in the PhD degree program in Counselor Education and Supervision, I realize that the people around me share my accomplishments. My family has provided immeasurable patience and support through many hurdles and obstacles. My children have made many sacrifices to allow me to fulfill my dream. I hope that my perseverance will encourage them to reach their goals. My mother has played a vital role in my educational successes. She has demonstrated what an educator exemplifies and how a person becomes successful. She has always been my motivator, my rock, my confidante, and literally, my other half. She deserves my entire acknowledgment, as she has encouraged both me, and my children, throughout this and all endeavors.

My professors and cohort at Walden University also provided a great deal of time, energy, and support to direct my path on this journey. Specifically, Dr. Theodore Remley provided wisdom, patience, and encouragement each step of this long, long journey. Dr. Jennifer Gess provided the support and understanding to keep moving forward, and my URR provided feedback and direction. Their endeavors will allow me to use the skills I have gained to become the best counselor educator and supervisor I can be.

Most of all, I want to give the glory and credit to honor God. This journey was fraught with obstacles, diversions, and speed bumps. His constant presence and placements of those I needed when I needed them has allowed me to accomplish everything each step. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Bullying has become a focus in American society over the past several decades due to publicized bullying cases and the impact bullying has on victims (Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). Numerous studies (e.g., Buxton, Patel, & Bostic, 2013; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010) have been conducted on secondary education of bullying definitions, causes, and results. School counselors play a vital role in the atmosphere of a school setting (Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009; Duarte & Hatch, 2014-2015). However, research specifically investigating elementary school counselors' experiences in implementing antibullying programs is lacking in the professional literature. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of elementary school counselors (Pre-K–5th grade) who have implemented antibullying programs. Exploring the experiences of elementary school counselors who have implemented antibullying programs could highlight issues in anti-bully program implementation, assessment, and intervention. Distributive leadership theory framed the conceptual underpinnings for this study (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Seashore Louis, 2007). For this study, I interviewed eight school counselors. Chapter 1 includes the background, problem, purpose, framework, nature, definitions, assumptions, and limitations of this study.

Background of the Study

Casebeer (2012) hypothesized a relationship between school bullying and school shootings, student suicides, and poor academic performance. In recent years, school

events related to violence have affected education including (but not limited to) the shootings at Columbine High School in 1999, Buell Elementary School in 2000, Essex Elementary School in 2006, a public school in Rio de Janeiro in 2011, and Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. Together, these events have become a part of the social environment and background for all school-age children, impacting their education and view of the world (Hymel & Swearer, 2015).

Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), and McCabe, Miller, and Young (2010) provided evidence of long-term, devastating effects of bullying on children. Their studies summarized results of research studies conducted over the past 2 decades. In the early 1970s, the magnitude of the bullying issue prompted Dan Olweus (2003) to attempt to understand the motives of bullies. He then created a bully prevention and intervention program for schools to implement in the mid-1990s. Other researchers have also designed curriculum programs to aid schools in identifying and stopping bullying behaviors (Allen, 2010; Bully Prevention PBIS for Positive Choice, 2013; Committee for Children, 2013).

Over the last several decades, actions by federal and state lawmakers have specifically addressed bullying. In 2001, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA or No Child Left Behind) mandated that states pass laws requiring school districts to create safety plans and establish consequences for breaking student violence codes (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). State legislatures have passed laws to help support the efforts of schools combatting bullying. Specifically, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has implemented 16 regulations through education codes that require staff

development, curriculum, conduct, discipline, prevention, and reporting (TEA, 2017).

State legislatures have begun mandating that schools must address bullying by providing

reactions to occurrences, protection for victims, methods of decision-making, and

program enforcement (Hatzenbuehler, Schwab-Reese, Ranapurwala, Hertz, & Ramirez,

2015; Merrell, Guidner, Ross, & Isava, 2008).

      As schools began utilizing various programs, Cornell and Bradshaw (2015)

indicated that proper program training for school staff is provided. Power-Elliot and

Harris (2012) questioned delivery methods and emphasized the need for experienced staff

members to address bullying and provide programs. ASCA (2018b) supported the idea

that the school counselor is the most highly trained and logical leader in a school setting

and should be responsible for bullying prevention programs.   Cornell and Bradshaw

(2015) and Powers-Elliot and Harris (2012) agreed and suggested that the school

counselor should serve as the bully prevention and intervention provider. As the school

counselor became involved in program implementation, counselor roles in bullying

prevention became a focus of research (Bauman, Rigby, & Hoppa, 2008).

      To provide a framework for the work of school counselors, in 2003 the American

School Counselor Association (ASCA) created a comprehensive school-counseling

program known as the ASCA national model (ASCA, 2012). ASCA developed the

national model to help counselors address the needs of their schools. A portion of the

ASCA national model addresses bullying intervention and prevention. Currently, over 30

states have adopted a comprehensive school-counseling program (ASCA, 2018a).

According to Jacob and Coustasse (2008), though ASCA's guide is available for school

counseling programs, many other responsibilities within the school prevent school counselors from completely following it. Hence, the varying roles of counselors from school to school.

In 2008, Bauman investigated the elementary school counselor's role in reducing school bullying. In following this line of research, I investigated elementary school counselor's experiences in implementing antibullying programs to help fill a gap in the current literature currently present specific to antibullying programs at the elementary level. The results of this study could prove vital in efforts to deter bullying of children.

Problem Statement

As a result of the recent increases in bullying incidents, their links to violence, and their lasting effects, bullying is an acknowledged concern in American schools (Zirkel, 2013). Victimized children often have issues with low test scores and grades, increased absenteeism, low self-esteem, substance abuse, and violence (Valios, Kerr, & Huebner, 2012; Violence Prevention Works! Safer Schools, Safer communities, 2015b). The school atmosphere and the coping skills students learn during their time in school can promote positive or negative self-images. School children's self- images are often molded by their interpersonal relationships and incidents, which involve the child (Buxton, Patel, & Bostic, 2013). Therefore, schools continue to look for ways to incorporate successful bully intervention programs to decrease violence and bullying behaviors (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). If violence occurs because the school has not implemented a bullying intervention program as outlined by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), then the school could become liable

for the resulting damages (Olweus & Limber, (2011). Identifying and utilizing skilled professionals to direct or implement appropriate interventions remains the key to providing successful treatment and counseling for victims and perpetrators of bullying (Ragatz, Anderson, Fremouw, & Schwartz, 2011).

Gap in Literature

Available research focuses on the secondary school counselor's role in antibullying interventions because of the large number of secondary school violence incidences (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld & Gould, 2008). According to Olweus and Limber (2011), earlier intervention proves more effective. Hence, focusing on elementary counselors' experiences with anti-bully programs is the goal of this research project. This study filled a gap in the literature currently present specific to the implementation of antibullying programs at the elementary level. The results of this study could provide information to help counselors at this level intervene and deter bullying for children.

Purpose of the Study

The significant impact bullying behavior has on children and the entire community remains a concern for society. The direct impact on academic, social, and emotional health provides the need for schools to utilize appropriate and effective means to combat bullying. In this qualitative study, I investigated the practices of elementary school counselors in successfully implementing antibullying programs. Exploring the perceptions of counselors who have implemented antibullying programs in elementary schools highlighted areas in which counselor involvement could aid with bully

assessment and intervention, as well as identified areas of expertise counselors could provide in bully prevention. I aimed to provide information regarding the experiences of elementary school counselors who have implemented antibullying programs. Exploring elementary school counselors' perceptions can fill a gap in the literature.

Research Question

Research Question

What are the experiences of elementary school counselors in implementing antibullying programs?

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative researchers use theory to help explain the behaviors or phenomenon as described by participants (Moustakas, 1994). Using theory allows the researcher to follow a viewpoint or plan to interpret the data or the observations of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Theory can provide an explanation for a phenomenon, orient the researcher to the perspective of participants, describe a pattern for an explanation, or help provide an understanding of the problem (Moustakas, 1994).

I used distributive leadership theory as the conceptual framework for this study. Distributive leadership, born out of transformational leadership, is the sharing and distributing of leadership across members in an organization (Smylie et al., 2007). This does not include delegation. Instead, it stretches the roles over many individuals within an organization. Distributive leadership focuses on the goals of the group. Using collaboration, a consensus in identifying important problems, and positioning of expertise within the organization can help meet these goals (Smylie et al., 2007).

Janson, Stone, and Clark (2009) reported that distributed leadership provides for greater utilization of each member's knowledge and skills. They also suggested that the role of school counselors in student achievement is a general practice, but an investigation into their role in social justice may not be as prominent. As the school counselor role transforms to teaching, modeling, and researching, it will evolve into leadership and advocacy (McMahon, Mason, & Paisley, 2010).

Curry and DeVoss (2009) indicated that the professional school counselor's role transformed into a collaborative leadership role at the local, state, and national levels. This change agent role includes promotion of social justice. Distributive leadership theory provided a lens to help understand counselor involvement when it comes to antibullying program implementation.

Nature of the Study

This study was a phenomenological research project. A phenomenological design allows a researcher to acquire an understanding of life experiences through the viewpoints of individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon. The phenomenon is studied through the perceptions of several individuals who have shared the experience through their interviews or statements (Moustakas, 1994). Sumerlin and Littrel (2011) used a phenomenological approach to help understand the experience and transformation into the consciousness of passion as described by school counselors (Patton, 2015). They then created a theory around developing and maintaining passion as a school counselor (Sumerlin & Littrel, 2011).

Phenomenological research may use a theory as a perceptual framework or lens from which to view a phenomenon, but the theory can change as research progresses. Also, a researcher could purposefully choose not to include theory in the study (Moustakas, 1994). Using a phenomenological design with this research project, I explored a specific set of experiences that affects a large group (Moustakas, 1994), specifically the experiences of elementary school counselors who have implemented antibullying programs. This research project offered an understanding of the experiences of the counselors being interviewed. The information learned in this research project can provide insight into a structure for future elementary school antibullying programs.

Design

Using phenomenological design, I examined the research questions and experiences of elementary school counselors in implementing antibullying programs, specifically perceptions of elementary counselors related to bully intervention and prevention. Because I focused on the examination of these perceptions, a qualitative design was appropriate. I used open-ended interview questions to collect data, which I then coded for themes that provided an understanding of the perceptions of counselors concerning counselors' roles in bully interventions and prevention.

According to Boyatzis (1998), exploring themes and creating codes for those themes is the qualitative essence of a phenomenon. Thematic analysis is appropriate when the researcher aims to provide a summary of participant responses for the purpose of further examination (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this research study, I highlighted thematic content similarities and differences among counselors' experiences.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this specific study, words and phrases are defined as follows:

Academic Achievement. A student's performance on standardized tests and in academic areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Antibullying Programs. School wide interventions, classroom activities, and individual interventions provided to reduce bullying by changing the climate of the school and providing social norms (Olweus, & Limber, 2011).

Bully. A person who regularly inflicts harm to others (Undheim & Sund, 2010).

Bullying. Ongoing, uninvited, or unprovoked aggressive behaviors, which can be physical, verbal, relational, or reactive (Olweus & Limber, 2011) and cyberbullying. These actions would be repeated, purposeful, and cause an imbalance of power. Behaviors can include (but are not limited to) physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying (House Bill No. 283, 2005; Olweus, 1993).

Bully prevention. Bully prevention includes interventions or programs to lower or inhibit bully/victim behaviors in school (Olweus, 1993).

Cyberbullying. A person using technologies with the purpose of causing harm to others. These technologies can include (but are not limited to) emails, cell phones, or text messaging (O'Keeffe, 2016).

Distributive Leadership Theory. The sharing of leadership across members in an organization (Smylie et al., 2007).

Phenomenological Design. Design that allows a researcher to gain an understanding of life experiences by discovering the viewpoints of individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Physical Bullying. Physical bullying occurs when individuals cause bodily harm. These actions can include hitting, kicking, or shoving (Milsom & Gallo, 2006).

Professional School Counselor. "Certified/licensed professionals with a master's degree or higher in school counseling or the equivalent and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students. Professional school counselors deliver a comprehensive school counseling program encouraging all students' academic, career, and personal/social development and helping all students in maximizing student achievement" (American School Counselors Association National Model, ASCA, 2012).

Reactive Bullies. Reactive bullies are people who are often both a bully and a victim **(**Milsom & Gallo, 2006).

Relational Bullying. A means of excluding someone from a peer group often through verbal threats and spreading rumors (Milsom & Gallo, 2006).

School Climate: A school's atmosphere created by a school's leadership, goals, and organization (National School Climate Council-NSCC, 2012).

Theme. An idea that captures something important about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It relates it to the research question and can represent a pattern in responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Verbal Bullying/Aggression: The use of words to harm others, most often occurring through name-calling, insulting, making racist comments, or teasing (Milsom

& Gallo, 2006).

Methodology

In qualitative research, the methodology helps determine the sample size and the sampling strategy to be used (Moustakas, 1994). In this form of sampling, experiences are studied within a setting (Patton, 2015). I developed themes from the information provided to me during the interviews of eight elementary school counselors who met the criteria established for participants in this study. Interviewing continued until the data became saturated.

Participants included counselors identified in the Texas School Guide from the East Texas area. Requirements for participation included employment as an elementary school counselor with at least three years of experience working with antibullying programs. I emailed the invitation to potential participants directly at each elementary school and asked them to consider participating. If they accepted, I provided them with recruitment materials.

Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations

This study included data collected from eight elementary school counselors in East Texas from interviews that I conducted with the counselors from each school. Qualitative research findings cannot be generalized because they are not based on samples and controls (Niaz, 2017), but instead, provide important information about a phenomenon. This is an appropriate limitation in a phenomenological study because it involves interviews from a small population. This delimitation affected the data gathered

and is an appropriate delimitation in qualitative research in which a phenomenon is studied in depth.

Significance of the Study

This project was unique because I investigated elementary school counselors' experiences in implementing bully intervention and prevention programs. I examined themes that emerged from the school counselors' experiences that they related to me in interviews (Van Manen, 1990). Hopefully, schools, administrators, and school counselors will use the results of this study to provide a better understanding of school counselors' familiarity and use of antibullying programs. School counselors will find the results of this study potentially useful to understand how their perceptions and decision-making processes compare to other counselors as they described their involvement in bullying prevention programs. The results of this study have the potential of stimulating change in the structure of antibullying programs within schools, which could have wide-reaching benefits for schools, students, and communities in efforts to reduce bullying incidents.

Significance to Theory

This study can advance knowledge in distributive leadership theory. I specifically addressed school counselors' experiences in bully prevention and intervention. The use of distributive leadership in the implementation of antibullying programs in elementary schools revealed additional information about the tenants of distributive leadership theory.

Significance to Practice

The information obtained through the interviews in this study can provide awareness of current perceptions and highlight areas of discrepancy and similarity among elementary school counselors who have implemented antibullying programs. School counselors face issues of bullying to varying extents in all schools. Summarizing the experiences of the counselors in this study may provide valuable insight for other elementary school counselors who must address bullying problems in their schools. Farrington and Ttofi (2009) stated that the success of a prevention program depends on the intervention reaching three levels: management approaches, consistent disciplinary actions, and classroom management strategies. In today's American society, school age children spend a great percentage of their time in school settings, the possibilities for interventions are greatest during this time. Hence, targeting bullying through school climate, guidance lessons, and counseling can inhibit bullying. By using the results of this study, school counselors can learn more about the role of school counselors concerning bullying prevention and intervention.

Significance to Social Change

Elements of this study may be useful in a variety of school settings. Appropriate use of school counselors' abilities and knowledge can promote awareness of bullying behaviors and can assist in developing proactive responses to bullying situations. Students learning social skills taught in antibullying programs can use the learned social skills in society and within their families (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012). The results of this study might also positively affect school climate and social development

for students. Effective interventions can reduce bullying as a whole and teach students social skills, which they can carry over into all aspects of life. Healthy solutions that prevent bullying can prevent future issues in social, family, and workplace altercations (Ansary, Elias, Greene & Green, 2015).

Summary

Violent events across America provide evidence of the urgent need to evaluate bullying prevention and intervention in today's schools. My intent for this study was to investigate elementary school counselors' experiences in implementing anti-bully programs. Interviews with elementary school counselors provided the data for this study. The outcome of the investigation on the components of counselors' roles in antibullying programs could offer ideas for prevention and intervention. Chapter 2 will include a review of the literature. It will also include a brief history of bullying, distributive leadership theory, school program options, and school counselor roles, and a discussion of the need for school counselor intervention to prevent bullying.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

With recent increases in bullying incidents, bullying has become an acknowledged challenge in American schools (Blake, Lund, Zhou, Kwok, & Benz, 2012; Zirkel, 2013). Hymel and Swearer (2015) determined that bullying presents a nationwide public health concern for everyone. Victimized children, or those involved in school bullying, exhibit low-test scores and grades, increased absenteeism, low self-esteem, and incidents of substance abuse or violence (Valios, Kerr, & Huebner, 2012). Professional school counselors have an important role in developing student well-being and student success (ASCA, 2018a). However, responsibilities assigned by school administrators (clerical, administrative, and testing) often prevent school counselors from being effectively utilized in delivering counseling services (Astramovich, Hoskins, & Gutierrez, 2014; Pyne, 2011).

My extensive review of professional counseling literature has not revealed information regarding the elementary school counselor's experiences in implementing antibullying programs in schools. My review of the literature included studies related to school bullying to help understand the topic specific to the elementary school counselor's experiences with antibullying programs. This chapter will include definitions of bullying and other related topics, evidence of bullying prevalence and long-term effects of bullying, interventions and preventions available to schools, school counselor roles, and antibullying programs. This review includes literature about bullying across the United States.

Literature Search Strategy

Literature from scholarly journal articles, peer-reviewed journals, books, and websites form the majority of this review. I conducted this literature review using the Walden University Library and web searches using the following databases: Academic Search Premier, PsyArticles, EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest dissertations, and ProQuest Educational Journals. Google Scholar, an Internet search database, also offered many ideas for this literature review. Articles published within the last 5 years were the majority of the articles that I cited, but a few are older or use original theorists. The key terms used to search for the literature include the following: *antibullying programs, bullying, bully prevention, distributive theory, intervention, Olweus Bully Program, perceptions, school bullying programs, school counselor,* and *thematic analysis*. Google Scholar keyword searches (*bullying, elementary, intervention,* and *school counselors)* resulted in 1000s of articles located within the desired publication dates. However, few specifically addressed all of the topics together, which is the direction of this research project. Germane searches included using *bully, interventions,* and *school counselor* together.

Theoretical Foundation

For decades, researchers have extensively investigated diverse educational theories and have provided ideas related to leadership, learning, and school systems (Schein, 2016). Though studies support the school counselor's many options to address bullying in high school settings, (Charlton, 2009; ASCA, 2018b), research is lacking on

the elementary school counselor's experience utilizing antibullying programs. To explore this discrepancy, I used distributive leadership theory as the framework for this study.

Distributive leadership theory, the sharing and distributing of leadership roles across members in an organization, originated from transformational leadership (Bolden, 2011). It is defined as the sharing and distributing of leadership across members in an organization (Smylie et al., 2007). Smylie et al. (2007) explained distributive leadership not as a delegation of duties but a stretching of the roles among many individuals. A group uses distributive leadership to focus on meeting group goals through collaboration, collectively defining the important issues and then positioning members within their areas of expertise to solve problems (Copeland, 2013). Janson et al. (2009) found that using distributive leadership allows for a greater utilization of each individual's knowledge and skills. They suggested that the role of school counselors in student achievement is a general practice. As the school counselor role transforms to teaching, modeling, and researching, it will evolve into leadership and advocacy (McMahon et al., 2010).

The professional school counselor's role is transforming into a collaborative leadership role at local, state, and national levels (Curry & DeVoss, 2009). This change agent role included promotion of social justice. Distributive leadership theory provides a lens to help understand counselor involvement when it comes to antibullying program implementation and decisions for interventions, as the school counselor's role evolves.

Bullying

Bullying has many dimensions. First, the professional literature inconsistently defines bullying (Lund, Blake, Ewing, & Banks, 2012). Additionally, the incidents of school bullying and its effects are increasing pose a concern (National Center for Education, NCES, 2017). To define these issues, the various types of bullying must be acknowledged, and the effects must be understood.

Definitions

Understanding the definitions of bullying can help researchers and educators better prepare for dealing with the problem. The definition of bullying varies depending on the type and location (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). Bullying behaviors are direct or indirect, but both can be destructive and emotional (Olweus, 2011). Relational bullying involves exclusion from a peer group, which usually occurs by the use of verbal threats or spreading of rumors (Milsom & Gallo, 2006).

Bullying involves ongoing, uninvited, or unprovoked aggressive behaviors. These behaviors can be physical, emotional, or verbal (Olweus, 2011). According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (Stopbullying.com, (2014a), bullying is different from some aggressive behaviors because it occurs over an extended period and demonstrates a power struggle between a bully and a victim. Olweus (2011) has defined bullying as aggressive behaviors existing over a period of time that are repetitive, intentional, and include a real or perceived imbalance of power (Olweus, 2011). Grigg (2010) expanded this definition to include physical, verbal, social/relational, or cyber abuse.

The physical behaviors of bullying can include attacks such as hitting, kicking, punching, spitting, pinching, or biting, or non-physical attacks. Physical bullying hurts other people's bodies or removes their possessions (Olweus, 2003). Non-physical and verbal bullying includes threatening, excluding, name-calling, teasing, spreading rumors, saying mean things, or yelling obscenities or derogatory terms (Olweus, 2011). Social bullying or relational bullying affects reputation or relationships, which might include exclusion or embarrassment (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013).

A new form of bullying, cyber bullying, has become a leading problem. Cyber bullying can include verbal communications, online communications, emailing, or texting, hence eliminating the need for physical presence and can occur from anywhere to anywhere (O'Keeffe, 2016). Cyber bullying is growing in occurrences and affects about 80% of American teens (O'Keeffe, 2016). As the accessibility of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, and various forms of texting and messaging grows, bullies do not have to be in the vicinity of their victims and information can spread quickly. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2011), an estimated 4% to 15% of children engage in some form of cyber bullying. Twyman, Saylor, Taylor, and Comeaux (2010) found that 19% to 42% of children fall prey to cyber bullying during their school years.

Younger children participate in all forms of bullying while older children focus more on social bullying. The School Crime Report (The National Center for Education

Statistics, 2017) documented that most bullying occurs in middle school age children with verbal and relational bullying the most common forms.

Bullying affects the bully, the victim, and also the person who is both a bully and victim (Morin, Bradshaw, & Berg (2015). Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, and Sadek (2010) described the normal bully as one who demonstrates externalized behaviors and cognitions and is socially competent. Victims exhibit internalized symptoms and feelings, low self-esteem, and are often rejected or isolated by their peers. Davis and Nixon (2010) reported that students were often bullied for their looks, shape, and race. The third group is identified as individuals who are both a bully and a victim. They possess similar characteristics of both bullies and victims and often perform low in academics and are negatively influenced by peers. Cook et al. (2010) further stated that a negative environment, parenting, and atmosphere contribute to the characteristics of bullies and victims.

History of Bullying

Notar and Padgett (2013) determined that bullying was once considered a part of adolescence. Now, however, bullying research shows that bullying creates lifelong, problematic effects for victims and bullies. McCabe et al. (2010) studied the psychological and somatic aftermaths of bullying and teasing, which may continue into adulthood, while Lovegrove, Henry, and Slater (2012) provided examples of the escalation of bullying at all school levels.

Following three bullying-related suicide incidents in Norway in the early 1970s, Olweus commenced investigating bully prevalence. Olweus, known as the pioneer in

bully research, is a research professor of psychology (Olweus, 2003). He attempted to understand the motives of bullies in order to prevent bullying (Olweus, 2003). He created a prevention program called the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, which has since been refined and has been used in many countries (Olweus, 2011).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in the United States in 2002 attempted to define bullying and harassment as well as a school's responsibility for addressing and investigating bullying behaviors. This legislation sought to aide in increasing America's ability to compete globally while hoping to close the achievement gap among minority and disadvantaged students. NCLB generated large quantities of data related to student achievement, specifically in math and reading. It provided accountability for schools and required teachers to be *highly qualified*. Negative results from NCLB include its narrow focus, curriculum, and teaching through unrealistic expectations and little support or resources (Ladd, 2017). Following NCLB, Congress later passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as a replacement in 2015. Where NCLB increased the federal role in school accountability through student outcomes, ESSA attempts to pull the federal role back (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2016). The ESSA became fully effective during the 2017–2018 school year. It directs that states continue to create and submit their accountability plans in which states determine their own goals as long as they target test proficiency, English language proficiency, and graduation rates. These goals must be achievable for all groups and include interventions to meet the goals. ESSA also requires states to include data and address, intervene, and promote school

safety including bullying for which they have authorized funding to implement programs (National Association of School Psychologists, 2017).

Prevalence of Bullying

The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) found that 21% of elementary aged children reported bullying. NCES also found that about one-third of middle and high school aged children reported bullying. According to a national web source on bullying, NoBullying.com (2014), over 160,000 students daily are too scared to go to school because of threats of intimidation and that suicides from bullying rank as the third highest cause of death in children. With the advancements and availability of technology, cyber bullying is also on the rise (O'Keeffe, 2016). According to Lessne and Yanez, (2016), 15.5% of high school students are cyberbullied with 20.0% bullied at school, while 24% of middle school students are cyberbullied with 45% bullied at school. Russell, Sinclair, Poteat, and Koenig (2012) reported that 24.7 % of African Americans, 17% of Hispanic Americans, and 9% of Asian American students are bullied with 74.1% of LGBT students being victims of bullying (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Boesen, 2014). Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) and McCabe et al. (2010) provided evidence of bullying around the United States as having long-term, devastating effects on children. Because bullying affects victims, perpetrators, and witnesses, schools must implement and utilize bully preventions and interventions (Duncan, 2010; NCLB, 2002; U. S. Department of Education, 2012) to avoid loss of federal funds. Rivers (2004) focused on bullying incidents targeting sexual orientation and race. He found that bullying does discriminate based on these factors and that all victims suffer later as adults.

Effects of Bullying

Bullying affects the perpetrator, the victim, and the bystander (Olweus, 2003). Bullying, which includes the bully, the followers, supporters, onlookers, defenders, and victims (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009), affects performance, well-being, and social interactions. According to Wallace (2011), bullying deprives students of a safe school environment and can cause poor performance, skipping classes, and even dropping out of school.

The bully may get into fights often, be a vandal or thief, make poor grades, have anxiety about attending school, be truant, or have suicidal or homicidal thoughts and actions (Wallace, 2011). The victim of bullying can feel depressed, have low self-esteem, experience health problems, make poor grades, and have suicidal thoughts (Valois et al. 2012). Likewise, Farmer, Petrin, Brooks, Hamm, Lambert, and Gravelle (2012) found that bullying victims have school adjustment issues and often have emotional and behavioral issues (Inoko, Aoki, Kodaira, & Osawa, 2011). Bystanders or onlookers can experience fear, feel a lack of power or control, feel guilt, and be tempted to bully as well (Wang et al., 2009). Bullying events affect the entire school climate by creating a fearful or disrespectful environment, reducing learning, and creating feelings of dislike for school, teachers, and staff, resulting in a sense of fear (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). In their review of the literature, Notar and Padgett (2013) found that a large number of bullying victims become bullies themselves. They contribute this result to victims having lower self-esteem, increased emotional issues, and peer rejection, which make changing behavior much harder than preventing it from the beginning.

According to Benas, Uhrlass, and Gibb (2010), during early childhood, a child moves from familial environments in an attempt to receive support from other children their age. They may then become targets for bullies if they lack social abilities and problem solving skills. Hence, social humiliation can influence their ability to trust others, which halts their interpersonal relationship development (Morin et al., 2015). As children fail to develop interpersonal relationships, they begin to avoid social interactions. According to McCabe et al. (2010), fear of social interaction can create social phobias and anxiety. Later, as victims of bullying reach adulthood, the lack of social relationships inhibit their ability to establish intimate relationships and make career choices. Bullying victims often have memories of bullying which can create negative thoughts and even emotional responses with long-term negative effects. These factors can heighten the risks for anxiety, eating disorders, depression, and suicide (Klomek, Sourander, & Gould, 2010).

Negative thoughts and emotional responses contribute to psychological distress in adulthood. Victimization results in long-term effects socially, emotionally, and psychologically (Morin et al., 2015). Research has suggested that bully victimization contributes to an increase of psychological distress through anxiety, social phobias, eating disorders, loneliness, and depression. The risk factors influenced by childhood bullying are also seen as risk factors to suicidal behaviors (Klomek et al., 2010).

The prevalence of bullying became national news after several bullying victims committed suicide around the world in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Olweus, 2011). School shootings in the late 1990s and deaths resulting from bullying focused America's

attention on the bullying issue. The investigation of bullying continues as bully related suicides and homicides continue to rise in the 21st century (Duncan et al., 2010; US Department of Education, 2012). A study by Allison, Roeger, and Reinfeld-Kirkman (2009) sought to examine the relationship between childhood victimization and adult issues. The researchers studied 2,833 adults in Southern Australia who completed a self report of bullying and the Medical Outcome Study Short Form. They concluded that a correlational relationship existed between reported bullying experiences and current mental and physical health. The symptoms ranged from depression and social problems to physical symptoms of pains, illnesses, headaches, and stress.

In this section, I attempted to explain bullying. To try to solve the bullying problem, it is important that the definition of bullying be understood and consistent. To decrease incidents, awareness of the types and effects of bullying have provided clarification. In the next section, I review interventions to address bullying incidents and to prevent bullying.

Interventions and Prevention

Many states have instituted laws in an attempt to intervene and prevent bullying. Different types of interventions target various types of bullying. Most legislation and strategies suggest school interventions. This section reviews bullying legislation and provides an overview of major bullying interventions.

Laws Concerning Bullying

According to the Center for Disease Control (2011), for prevention to work effectively, it should include various levels of influence including the individual, group,

and community. Professionals from bullying organizations have created antibullying laws to define bullying, provide consistency, prevent bullying, and respond to it when it occurs (StopBullying.com, 2014b). Currently, several states have antibullying laws although no national laws exist partially due to the lack of a federal fundamental right to public education (Cornell & Limber, 2015). Some acts of bullying involve civil rights violations and are punishable under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Cornell & Limber, 2015). Some antibullying laws criminalize bullying while others allow families or schools to handle bullying situations. Antibullying laws include varying language but each statute focuses on reducing bullying with policies and training. Edmondson and Zeman (2011) found that 38 states have laws requiring bullying policies in schools. Half of these laws address bullying behavior at both primary and tertiary levels of education, while 10 states also included secondary education prevention. In 2011, only six states required all three school levels to implement bullying prevention programs; however, laws continue to change in response to bullying incidents and awareness (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011).

In 2002, the nation addressed bullying specifically in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Through this act, the federal legislature defined bullying and harassment, defined a school's responsibility for addressing and investigating bullying behaviors, and suggested training or interventions for these behaviors. The legislation did not specify role responsibilities or school counselor roles (NCLB, 2002). Though federal laws supported learning and accountability, limitations still exist regarding educators' time, funding, and resources (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009).

Merrell et al. (2008) explored antibullying state laws for schools. They found that schools are required to address bullying, react to occurrences, protect victims, and document their methods of decision-making and program enforcement. This correlates with Edmondson and Zeman (2011) findings that 38 of the 50 states have passed antibullying school statutes, which include bullying policies.

Approaches to Prevention

Tobin and Sugai (2005) categorized prevention into three levels. The primary level involves the whole school and community, or campus wide programs, while secondary levels (Tier 2) function at a classroom level with at risk or small group interventions. The tertiary level (Tier 3) works with individuals. Both Tier 2 and Tier 3 focus on developing social skills, providing mentoring, and either small group or individual interventions. Studies have shown that the most widely used primary prevention effort in schools is staff development (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011). Character education and curriculum lead in the secondary prevention realm and parent notification topped the tertiary prevention interventions (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011).

Because NCLB provided such vague language related to definitions and responsibilities, only 19 states included interventions which addressed primary and tertiary prevention. Ten states included only secondary preventions. Hence, the levels of bully intervention and prevention are broad. Texas amended legislation in 2005 to include tertiary preventions such as managing, disciplining, and preventing and intervening in discipline problems. The Texas law did not specify how these preventions or interventions would occur as long as schools followed a program to prevent and

educate students (H.B. No. 283, 2005), thus leaving schools to determine individual responses.

School Interventions

National Voices for Equality, Education, and Enlightenment (NVEEE, 2017) reported that 85% of bullying incidents do not receive interventions or efforts from school staff to stop or prevent violence. However, if an adult does intervene, bullying incidents usually stop within a few seconds over 50% of the time (USDHS, 2013). According to many articles, schools have a variety of proactive and reactive options for interventions and preventions. These options include curriculum programs, policies, school climate initiatives, and safe school programs (Allen, 2010; Blank et al., 2010). Cornell and Bradshaw (2015) emphasized proper program training for staff and limitations of benefits. Similarly, Power-Elliot and Harris (2012) questioned training delivery methods and emphasized the need for experienced staff. Blank et al. (2010) reviewed 32 articles which provided little evidence of the effectiveness of antibullying programs. Contrarily, 44 articles reviewed by Farrington and Ttofi (2009) suggested that bullying decreased during times of intervention but the long-term effects were not studied.

In 2009, federal grants were awarded to 64 elementary and secondary schools to implement comprehensive counseling programs for violence prevention. A case study by Duarte and Hatch (2014-2015) found one awarded school district in California had improved attendance, behavior, and academic achievement following program implementation. Reviews have demonstrated the need for ongoing training that teaches

responsibilities, identification, prevention, and intervention to maintain decreased levels of bullying. Both Ashurst et al. (2009) and Young, Hardy, Hamilton, Biermeser, Sun, and Niebergall (2010) found that a school wide program, which involves everyone actively participating in bully prevention and promoting positive behavior, can help address bullying problems.

As bullying incidents increase, it is important to provide protection to victims. The creation of laws and interventions has provided schools with options to utilize to intervene or attempt to prevent these incidents. As policy makers, school officials and program developers continue the debate regarding the successfulness of antibullying interventions and preventions, intervention and prevention programs continue raising awareness and targeting training for those involved in anti-bulling programs in schools.

Roles of School Personnel

Schools are a logical place for antibullying strategies to be employed. As school officials have tried to work on antibullying issues, they have discussed the roles of school personnel. School counselors serve many purposes within the school in regards to students, staff, and the community. The roles and ideas of school counselors pose possible solutions to the bullying problem.

Roles of School Counselors

Though standards of practice help specify school counselor duties, much diversity still exists in the roles (Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009; Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). The general function of the school counselor varies by school size and grade level as discussed by Astramovich et al. (2010) and Pyne (2011). School counselors often have

duties such as lunchroom supervision, bus duty, or car duties. Counselors have many other responsibilities including clerical, administrative, and testing duties that often prevent them from providing effective counseling services (Jacob & Coustasse, 2008)**.** Though ASCA (2018b) has specifically outlined suggested school counselor roles and percentage of time allocations, funding and staff size often override the suggestions.

An area currently receiving attention for school counselors lies in bully interventions and preventions. Though many different roles exist, counselors still feel effective in their bully prevention and intervention efforts. Charlton (2009) studied school counselors' self-efficacy in addressing bullying in elementary schools. The exploratory study of 126 elementary school counselors found that school counselors reported high overall self-efficacy in utilizing bully interventions.

Austin, Reynolds, and Barnes (2014) found that school counselors provide many options to help students identify bullying behaviors and help staff understand the needs of students. These methods include individual or group guidance, skills training, parent education training, and counseling. Supporting this idea, Bauman (2008) and Powers-Elliot and Harris (2012) identified school counselors as the most highly trained and greatest resource, and the logical leaders for dealing with all types of school violence.

Several studies have documented the legal and ethical responsibility of school counselors in violent situations (Austin et al., 2014; Powers-Elliott & Harris, 2012). Additionally, Austin et al. (2014) suggested that school counselors could address awareness and strategies with school personnel, students, and parents. Similarly, Young et al. (2009) and the ASCA (2012) stated that school counselors have the relationships

and training to work closely with administrators, students, parents, and the community to implement, train, and evaluate ongoing school wide antibullying programs.

School counselors can also provide counseling and support for both victims and bullies either individually or in group settings. Suggestions for interventions include skill-training, behavior monitoring, developing positive self-esteem in students, social problem solving, empathy, anger management, reinforcement, and prevention programs. Though evidence supports the benefits of counselor involvement in violence prevention, Jacobsen and Bauman (2007) found this role underrepresented in the literature. The positive results of studies by Young et al. (2009) and Goodman-Scott, Doyle, and Brott (2013) have demonstrated the effectiveness of school counselors in lowering bullying behaviors. In some cases, administrators have removed testing responsibilities to promote counselor antibullying interventions.

School Administrators

Griffin and Farris (2010) addressed the responsibility of school administrators to determine duties and positions within a school. School administrators' perceptions of the role of school counselors have a long-standing variable in school counseling programs. Zalaquett and Chatters' (2012) survey of 190 middle school principals in Florida, and Leuwurke, Walker, and Qi's (2009) study of 1,415 elementary principals in Iowa found principals believe that counselors can positively impact student academics and development. Research documents administrators' understanding of the contributions school counselors make in the school environment (Leurwerke et al., 2009), but decreasing budgets, increasing instruction tasks, and staff size also influence the

decisions related to time allocated to school counselors for implementation of antibullying programs.

Principals' tasks include hiring and assigning responsibilities to their staff. Leuwerke et al. (2009) found that more than 70% of the principals in their study had either little or no knowledge of the ASCA National Model. They also determined that knowledge of the model did impact principals' recommendations for school counselor roles by providing a guide to establish those roles.

While the school is the optimal environment for antibullying intervention and prevention, not all schools have established responsibility for intervention and prevention. As the leader of the school, the administrator or principal determines staff responsibilities. Evidence supports the qualifications of school counselors in responding to bullying, but they often take charge of other prioritized tasks. On the other hand, many schools have created programs to prevent bullying.

Bullying Intervention Program Options

Schools have several programs options to target bullying behaviors. Many programs work in a variety of formats for versatility, have diverse components, and provide a multitude of delivery options. Antibullying programs are available for schools to purchase. Some are reliable and research based options, while some other options do not have evidence that they are effective. Some programs send a company consultant to the school to provide training and instruction. Schools may select intervention, prevention, or curriculum-based programs. They all share a common goal of reducing bullying. Buxton et al. (2013) suggested multiple interventions which include the

involvement of school staff, parents, and clinicians. Duarte and Hatch (2014-2015) said school counselors should use research based interventions and programs to measure and provide evidence of their impact.

Implementation

McCarra and Forrester (2012) recommended that teachers should (1) maintain a positive environment, (2) teach anger control, (3) define bullying behaviors, and (4) teach conflict resolution to prevent bullying. Following these ideas, Seaman (2012) found that changing the approach to antibullying could change the bullying behaviors. He suggested pushing bully prevention could cause desensitizing, but that teaching compassion and student empathy can have better effects at eliminating bullying, as students understand the results of bullying. Supporting these ideas, Buxton et al. (2013) suggested focusing on teaching coping and social skills. The Second Step violence prevention classroom curriculum teaches these skills and improves beliefs and behaviors while decreasing aggression in students, which leads to less adult intervention (Committee for Children, 2015).

Young et al. (2010) studied 1,000 middle school students using a school wide bullying prevention program. They used cotaught lessons by counselors and teachers, and they found a significant decrease in bullying through creating a safe environment and empowering students with intervention strategies. Young et al. (2010) found that several factors contribute to the successful bully prevention and intervention approaches. They suggested using comprehensive training for all staff, conducting parenting workshops, empowering students through training, using a school wide approach, examining data,

and sharing the data with staff, community, students, and parents. According to Hatch (2014), these strategies are important for school counselors to gather support. Of the many program options available, curriculum-based programs were found by researchers to be implemented most often. The most popular programs are Olweus, Steps to Respect, and Positive Behavior Support, and non-curriculum based School wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports which are reviewed in the next section.

Olweus Program.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program created by Olweus in the 1980s in Sweden was adapted for American schools during the mid-1990s (Violence Prevention Works! Safer Schools, Safer Communities, 2015a). The Olweus program focuses on the student body by incorporating surveys, staff and community training, school wide rules, and a supervision system. It then focuses on classroom levels with rules, parent meetings, and class discussions with skill lessons. Next, it works with the individual with interventions and resolutions. The first program evaluation occurred in 18 middle schools in South Carolina in the mid-1900s (Violence Prevention Works! Safer Schools, Safer Communities, 2015a). Following the program's inception, reports of bullying and social isolation significantly decreased (Violence Prevention Works! Safer Schools, Safer Communities, 2015a). Twelve Philadelphia elementary schools used the program in 2010 and showed reductions in bullying, victimization, and observations of bullying. The program uses a comprehensive approach offering school wide and classroom interventions, as well as strategies for individuals and communities. The program strives for a safe and positive school climate to reduce and prevent bullying incidents in schools.

Because of the success in reducing bullying and raising the positive social climate, many countries and schools around the world now use the program (Violence Prevention Works! Safer Schools, Safer Communities, 2015b). Researchers have found that the expected results vary depending on the implementation, population, and staff commitment (Limber, 2011).

Steps to Respect Program.

Steps to Respect is a school wide social skill and bully prevention program created by the Committee for Children (1997). It utilizes training with all school staff, surveys to determine problem areas, and classroom lessons (Committee for Children, 2015). The program attempts to create a positive school climate with positive norms. Teachers and staff learn to create effective disciplinary policies, provide improved monitoring, and intervene more effectively with students involved in any bullying situation. Classroom curriculum also targets social skills and bullying behavior recognition. Brown, Low, Smith, and Haggerty (2011) studied 33 California elementary schools using Steps to Respect. They found that the program resulted in significant positive outcomes in student climate, less bullying, and less bullying issues in the schools.

Positive Behavior Support (PBIS) Program.

Goodman-Scott, Doyle, and Brott (2013) found bully prevention activities successful in 52 elementary schools using the Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support program created by California Technical Assistance Center (CalTac) (CalTACPBIS, n.d.). This curriculum-based, six-lesson program used in over 18,000

schools across the nation. This program focuses on school wide attention to safety, respect, and responsibility. Results include a safe school, reduction in bullying, improvement in academics, and a decline in dropout rates (Bully Prevention PBIS for Positive Choice, 2013).

School wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Program.

School wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) targets overall prevention through social learning, behavioral, and organizational ideas in a non-curricular approach. It attempts to create a safe school environment in all areas through training, teaching, and modeling (Wassdorp et al., 2012). In a study of 12,344 students over a four-year period, Wassdorp et al. (2012) found with the implementation of SWPBIS, fewer teachers reported bullying activity, and social rejection decreased.

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Design Choice

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Qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen to study the perceptions of school counselors who have implemented antibullying programs. This approach allows for an exploration of themes and patterns collected from interviews with school counselors through analyzing interviews of school counselors. In a thematic analysis, populations' views or perceptions answer research questions, which form themes found in the data (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). Spoken responses from interviews form the themes and categories. Yukhymenko, Brown, Lawless, Brodowinska, and Mullin (2014) used thematic analysis to investigate teachers' instructional practices and students' responses to such practices in middle school classrooms using a problem-based learning (PBL) environment. They found many specific instructional practices and teacher responses

that students might respond to during PBL instruction. Similarly, Lynass, Pykhtina, and Cooper (2012) used thematic analysis to investigate the effects of school-based counseling. They conducted semistructured student interviews and found three main themes that positively promoted school-based counseling. Kok (2013) conducted 11 interviews to investigate the secondary school counselor's role in Singapore. He then used thematic analysis to identify key themes from his data to find that school counselors' roles included collaboration and communication as well as classroom roles. Because each of these articles are similar to the present study and sought similar information, I chose to use thematic analysis in this phenomenological study to investigate the perceptions of elementary school counselors who have implemented antibullying programs.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature reviewed in this study was presented in five sections: (1) Distributive Leadership Theory, (2) Bullying, (3) Interventions and Preventions, (4) Roles, and (5) Program Options. This review revealed that bullying research continues to raise awareness and publicize efforts for prevention, intervention, and program development. Research and definitions provided by Olweus (1993) have provided a foundation for bullying intervention and prevention. Diverse laws and school policy create frameworks to approach bullying, but no clear direction presents itself. Schools are the likely activist in search of remedies (Allen, 2010; Blank et al., 2010).

Many researchers believe that the best approach to antibullying is improving mental health and responsibility for implementation lies in the hands of school counselors

(Farrington & Tfofi, 2009). It is possible that non-counseling duties performed by school counselors may prevent them from spending the time necessary to implement effective bullying prevention programs. Providing options for change can promote progress in efforts to prevent bullying. The school must utilize the skills and training of school counselors to implement antibullying programs. Investigating the perceptions of school counselors who have already implemented school antibullying programs will assist those school counselors who must implement such programs in the future and principals who assign duties to school counselors.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of the methodology and the research design for this qualitative study. This chapter details the introduction of the problem, an overview of the purpose of the study, criteria for participants, and a description of the interview questions that will be asked during data collection.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

School counselors' experiences with implementing antibullying programs were the focus of this phenomenological study. Phenomenology allowed me to explore themes related to the experiences of school counselors by interviewing them to collect information. I utilized thematic analysis, the process of categorizing data from populations' views, perceptions, and behaviors, to analyze the research question (Howitt & Cramer, 2008).

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research method of this qualitative phenomenological study as well as the procedures that were necessary to complete the research project and data analysis. This description of the study includes the design, the selection of participants, the selected instrumentation, the method of data collection, and the analysis of the data. This chapter concludes with details regarding the procedures used to defend the trustworthiness of the research study as well as the ethical procedures put in place to protect participants.

Research Question

The central question in the study was the following: What are the experiences of elementary school counselors in implementing antibullying programs?

The counselors chosen to participate in this study had experiences in implementing these types of programs. Questions for the participants included reflecting on their experiences of implementing an antibullying program as well as subquestions to deepen the interviews (Appendices A & B). The main question contributed to the direction of

the interview, but subquestions created depth and encouraged expansion of the information. I used subquestions to address the following general areas: years of experience, role in antibullying programs, use of ASCA's model, program knowledge, assessment measures, antibullying program purchases and decisions, experiences with programs, and concerns with implementing programs. Interview questions and subquestions are included in the interview protocol (Appendix A).

Research Design and Rationale

In this section I describe the research design and rationale for this study. It includes a description of a phenomenological design, reasoning for choosing this design, the data analysis method, the data gathering procedures, and the role of the researcher. Altogether, this information will inform the reader of the rationale for this design and methodology.

A phenomenological design allows a researcher to acquire an understanding of life experiences through the viewpoint of the individual (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews with several individuals with shared the experiences provide a basis for phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research may involve the use of a theory as a conceptual framework or as a lens from which to view a phenomenon, but the theory or framework can change as data is gathered, or a purposeful choice can be made by researchers not to include theory in the study well, (Moustakas, 1994). Sumerlin and Littrel (2011) conducted a phenomenological study of school counselors similar to the one I completed. In their study, the authors explored the passion school counselors have had for their jobs during the span of their careers. The authors

used a phenomenological approach to help understand the experience and transformation into consciousness the experience of the individuals they interviewed. Ultimately, the information from a phenomenological study can provide insight to help counselors structure their programs.

Data Analysis

A qualitative design using a thematic analysis provides a method to detail the phenomenological experiences and examines the research question pertinent to this study. Using thematic analysis facilitates the categorization in qualitative research when the goal is to gather meaning from a series of interviews and organize it into concise and presentable themes (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). By implementing thematic analysis, I categorized participants' responses pertaining to the implementation of antibullying programs into concise themes in order to glean information rich in detail. Data were collected using structured, open-ended interview questions and specific subquestions when they did not address them in their response. The interview also included a demographic questionnaire (Appendices A−B). After transcribing the interviews, I coded the counselors' responses to identify themes that may provide understanding of elementary school counselors' experiences who implement antibullying programs.

As suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2017), I focuses on the examination of the lived experiences of elementary school counselors and is not centered on specific variables, a qualitative design is appropriate. The quantitative design would not be appropriate for this particular study as the research project does not center on testing a hypothesis based on a theory or a framework. Heyvaert, Maes, and Onghena (2013)

suggested that rich and thick descriptions allowed for exploration of the perceptions of the counselors who participate as expressed in their own words

Boyatzis (1998) stated that thematic analysis involves encoding qualitative information with the purpose of creating a narrative representing perceptions or experiences expressed by the participants and organized by recurring themes. These themes develop from words or phrases existing in interview data and become labels for groups of data. Thematic analysis is appropriate when the researcher aims to provide a summary of participant recurring ideas for the purpose of describing a perception or phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this research study, I used thematic analysis to examine contrasting, similar, and repetitive themes from transcribed interviews with counselors regarding the counselor's role in antibullying interventions. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic coding technique identifies codes in the data and develops these codes into themes that summarize the whole of the participants' perceptions. Extraction of themes from the interview data accomplishes this aim. Themes develop when comparing and assessing data for underlying differences in meaning within counselor experiences in their role during bullying interventions. The procedures for these interventions are described, including whether they used the ASCA national model (ASCA, 2012).

Methodology

Role of the Researcher

I was serving my 5th year as a school counselor at a junior high school in East Texas at the time I completed this study. Prior to this, I served 18 years as an elementary

school counselor in the same school district. Overall, I believe my longevity in school counseling will prove valuable as will my involvement in bullying interventions. My experiences as a school counselor have allowed me to conduct counseling sessions involving weekly bully guidance lessons (i.e. skill lessons in a classroom setting), to provide isolated bully interventions, and provide bully prevention in group settings. My professional experiences helped me as I completed this research project because I have had some history with the topic. By bracketing my biases, I ensured the accuracy of all information gathered from the interviews and not the influence of my preconceived beliefs. I monitored for bias by consulting with my chair and peer reviewer throughout the study and maintain notes of my biases for reference during data analysis. To obtain accurate themes across participants, I adhered to the interview protocol.

Because I have been an elementary counselor in the past, and I have implemented bullying prevention programs in elementary schools, I expected my participants to relate to me. I listed my biases to create self-awareness that kept my beliefs in check as I listened carefully to my participants. I believed participants would tell me that finding time to do any prevention program in an elementary school is difficult. Some of the responses I believed I would find include problems with finding time to implement guidance, lists of other responsibilities, financial issues, issues with program options, problems with carrying over year-to-year, and role changes. By setting forth what I expected participants to tell me, I was hopefully fully open to hearing things from my participants that I did not expect to hear. My goal was to obtain accurate, valid, and new information about this topic. To do this, I maintained objectivity and worked closely

with my peer reviewer.

To protect all participants, I informed them that participation was strictly voluntary; participants' rights were fully explained verbally and in writing. The data gathering process occurred in a mutually agreed upon neutral location. Participants knew they could exit the study at any point without explanation.

Population

As most research on bully intervention and prevention has taken place at the secondary level, this study focused on the elementary level (Pre-K–5th grade) (Buxton, Patel, & Bostic, 2013; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010). Elementary school counselors who have an active role in bullying intervention were the participants in this study. Hence, the study population consisted of purposefully selected elementary counselors in the East Texas area of whom none were my previous colleagues. Purposeful selection was necessary to gather participants who met the inclusion criteria of the study. Approximately 90 elementary counselors meet the selection criteria within the targeted geographic region.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

The targeted elementary school campuses each consisted of similar populations and enrollment numbers. Following the suggestions of Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon (2015), I gathered a relevant, purposeful sample, which was useful when intending to select individuals and sites based on their relevance to the topic and ability to inform an understanding of the study focus I continued to interview elementary school counselors until I had saturated the data. I used purposeful selection as the method of

identifying the participants of this study. Participants were counselors identified in the Texas School Guide from the East Texas area. Once superintendents granted permission for their counselors to participate and after my application was approved by the Walden University IRB, dissemination of participant solicitation materials began. To do this, I emailed the invitation to the potential participants directly at each elementary school and asked them to consider participating. I then provided them with recruitment materials (Appendix C-E). These materials included a description of the study, informed consent materials for review, and my contact information (i.e., telephone number and email address) should they choose to participate.

Those who chose to participate contacted me through their method of choice (i.e., either via telephone or email) and then scheduled their interviews. Ideally, the participating district would consist of at least one school counselor from each campus so that each school has one representative participant, though more were sought until the necessary minimum number of participants were gathered. I reviewed the informed consent form before the interview at a mutually agreed upon time and place. This review of the consent material ensured participants understood their role in the research project and had a chance to ask questions before providing consent. To garner consent, counselors signed the informed consent form before the interview began.

Because the population of interest included elementary school counselors who were engaged in antibullying interventions, the primary inclusion criteria dictated the participants were elementary counselors in the designated research area with experience implementing antibullying programs. To ensure the participants had sufficient

experience with the study topic, the participants also met the criterion of at least three years of experience in this role. Exclusion criteria included having a role outside of elementary counselor, having less than three years of experience as an elementary school counselor, or not having had experience implementing antibullying interventions in their schools.

Sample Size

In qualitative samples, sizes should be suitably large enough to achieve the concept of saturation. Saturation occurs when the incorporation of additional participants' reports no longer offers novel perspectives (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This idea is not limited to original themes but also extends to the interrelationships among the identified themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As such, sample sizes must be substantial enough to elicit experiences that cover all or most of the spectrum of perceptions. However, researchers vary in their practical recommendations for determining sample size in a qualitative study design (Creswell, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

For studies using the qualitative approach, Creswell (2013) endorsed a sample size of five to 25. Fusch and Ness (2015) maintained that saturation is key and examined several studies to find that average saturation occurred around $n = 12$, though a study may need to go beyond that to formalize saturation.

I believed that a sample size of 8 to 10 would provide suitable information to achieve saturation in this qualitative research study. In alignment with these suggestions, 8 to 10 participants furnished useful data with 8 being the minimum number of participants. Based on the guidance of Francis et al. (2010), I considered the data

saturated when a minimum of three consecutive interviews failed to contribute novel themes to the analysis. I concluded the interview process, data collection, and reached saturation when the information from the last participant interviewed failed to provide new data. According to Patton (2015), qualitative sample size is determined by the study objectives, time allotted, and resources available. Hence, when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research, there are no specific rules.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Texas Region 7's administrative directory included a listing of potential participants. I attempted to find diversity among participants in terms of type of population served in particular schools and participants' gender, age, number of years of experience, and race. Walden University's approval number for this study is 5-31-18-0191534. Before conducting this study, and after receiving Walden University's IRB approval, I obtained permission of superintendents from the schools where potential participants acted as counselors. I provided the superintendents with an explanation of the nature and scope of the study and were given copies of participation forms. After superintendents provided consent to use their schools in the study, counselors at each of the targeted schools received recruitment materials (Appendix C-E). The recruitment materials included a description of the study procedures, an informed consent form for review, and my contact information. Those who chose to participate contacted me directly using their method of choice (i.e., telephone or email).

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and no compensation was promised or granted to participants. All participants had the ability to withdraw from the

study at any time. Participant information during the study remained confidential, and

the use of pseudonyms ensured privacy and the confidentiality of all participants.

Interviews did not begin until participants signed the informed consent form. Interviews

occurred in private settings, in either their office, classrooms or over the telephone, and

lasted approximately 30−75 minutes.

Instrumentation

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) explained the use of interviews in qualitative

research was "to co-create meaning with interviewees by reconstructing perceptions of

events and experiences" (p. 316). Using predetermined, semistructured, open-ended

interview questions as the interview protocol prepared me to conduct interviews that

focused on collecting relevant data. This allowed me to target the meaning behind

participants' perceptions and experiences while still accepting some degree of flexibility

to the protocol due to the semistructured nature. The flexibility of the semistructured

interviews allowed me the ability to seek further detail on any subject matter that

emerged as significant during the interview process.

Before use in data collection, I reviewed the interview protocol by my dissertation

chair and methodologist, who reviewed the protocol for clarity and focus on the research

problem as well as ensure that biases were not apparent within the protocol. Feedback

from this panel allowed me to take any suggested amendments into account and correct to

ensure that I conducted the interviews in a clear, straightforward, and ethical manner.

Data Collection

The data collection instrument for this study was a semistructured interview protocol (Appendix A). Jamshed (2014) described semistructured interviews as following an overall structure with questions but allowing the researcher to prompt and probe for more meaning as required. The open ended interviews in this study elicited detailed and comprehensive responses. I made sure my participants addressed some areas including their experiences implementing bullying programs in their elementary school, any barriers to implementation they may have experienced, and the results of implementation. I expected that my participants to talk about these things, but I also expected to find new information to make the study worth reviewing. Interviews began with a scripted introduction of: "You have been invited to participate in this study because you have implemented an antibullying program in your school. What are the experiences of elementary school counselors in implementing antibullying programs?"

I then let them talk and only interjected with open ended questions to probe for more information when necessary. Interviews followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) that I developed, but deviations from this protocol occurred when I needed further clarification or additional detail.

This study utilized face-to-face, and telephone calls interviews to gather data. The interviews lasted 30–75 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded with an iPad and a tape recorder with the participant's permission. Once data collection was complete, I transcribed each interview. All interview data are textual so that information was organized using the qualitative analytical software NVivo version 12. In the procedures

that followed, I searched for themes within the interview transcripts myself. During the study, securing the data in a password protected computer promoted confidentiality. At the conclusion of the required 5–year data retention period following the study's completion, data will be disposed of properly and permanently.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis Plan**</div>

Throughout my data analysis, I worked with a peer reviewer who assisted me in bracketing my biases and analyzing the data I collected thoroughly. My peer reviewer was a fellow researcher who was familiar with qualitative research methods, willing to review the data I collected, and monitored the procedures I used in developing themes from the data.

Using thematic analysis, I reviewed the data, made notes, and sorted the information into categories. Thematic analysis allowed me to identify patterns expressed through groups of similar categories identified to convey meanings as suggested by Howitt and Cramer (2008). I adhered to the following steps to analyze data:

1. transcribe the interview data into text

2. read for emerging themes

3. code the data

4. sort items into themes

5. define the examined themes

6. report each theme

Following transcription, I entered the textual form of the participant responses into NVivo version 12 for organization and ease of data management. Thematic analysis

allows a researcher to demonstrate how concepts in data work together as themes become evident from the data and not from the researcher (Howitt & Cramer, 2008).

Responses were aggregated into a pool of counselor responses. The interview question formed the organization of this pool in order to examine each interview question's corresponding list of responses among the entire data collected. I performed thematic coding on these data in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of analysis, which includes generating initial codes and organizing these codes into themes. During data analysis, I organized emergent themes relevant to the research question and generate initial codes.

Generating Initial Codes

Responses were first read and re-read to acquire a general understanding of the overall responses. Although at this point in the analysis, I was not able to fully address the research question, I extracted key words and phrases from the transcript or interview notes (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This process entailed the creation of notes from the compiled material, and these notes became the initial coding of the qualitative data with blocks of text extracted and coded from the material. During subsequent readings, I outlined units of meaning for each interview, and reduce each experience to an initial code or unit of meaning. This proved useful as Boyatzis (1998) identified these initial codes as "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (p. 63). Following the generation of initial codes, I organized resulting units of data into themes.

Organizing Initial Codes into Themes

Data was deidentified to protect the privacy of the participants. Once the general units of meaning were defined, the sets of codes were compared to the participant responses during the interviews. I noted all units of meaning, which addressed the central research question, as relevant to the study. Units of meaning with no relevance to the central research question were not reported (Braun & Clarke, 2006; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). After organizing relevant units, any themes, which proved redundant were removed or combined; however, since the repetition of meanings may prove very important to the study, this was done with consideration of the weight participants place on themes, and the tone used during the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I noted these impressions during the post-interview notes and ensure that meaning was accurate.

During this phase of analysis, I began with a list of each of the codes relevant to a research question and begin to consider the various ways in which they can combine to form overarching themes. Not only may different sets of initial codes be organized into a theme, but also different codes and themes may be linked, and the relationships among themes may present still more findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding data involves reading every two to three lines and identifying key words and concepts (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). Codes become theme foundations and must have the following features: (a) a descriptive name; (b) a definition; (c) recognizing features; (d) known exclusions; and (e) an example. According to Howitt and Cramer (2008), codes should be validated or reviewed for interpretation by more than one person, so my methodologist assisted me in this process.

At the close of this phase of coding, I had a final set of themes which reflected a summative expression of the data regarding how these themes corresponded and interacted to form broader concepts. After delineating these themes, I presented them using excerpts from the data to provide a thick and rich description and to exemplify and support the findings from this study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To attempt to bracket my biases to the degree possible as suggested by Moustakas (1994), I provided information about myself and my thoughts about antibullying programs in elementary schools. In a qualitative study, the researcher becomes the instrument through which the data flows (Tracy, 2013). As such, it is the researcher's responsibility to collect, record, and analyze the information. Because I organized the information collected in this study, it is important that I am aware of biases, goals, thoughts, and interests, so the data interpretation occurs with my viewpoint set to the side to the degree that is humanly possible (Tracy, 2013). I ensured the accuracy of my data through consultation with my peer reviewer.

Due to the subjectivity of qualitative research, ensuring validity or trustworthiness is complex. According to Merriam (2009), in qualitative research, the internal validity translates into credibility, while external validity corresponds to transferability. Similarly, reliability is congruent to the concept of dependability, and objectivity is congruent to confirmability. To ensure that these areas are met, it is important to consider the audience, relationship between the researcher and the participants, quality, and reflexivity. In the sampling strategy, the researcher must be transparent and

respectful while being diligent in his or her record keeping, transcribing, and methods (Francis et al., 2010).

Due to the degree of which I am invested in the topic, it was necessary to control for bias. I monitored for bias by consulting with my peer reviewer throughout the study and maintain notes of my biases for reference during data analysis. Since the potential for my bias may influence the interpretation all of these experiences, I ensured that I was up front with the participants and that my experience did not overshadow the data.

Trustworthiness is an important aspect of qualitative research and the lens through which the validity of the study is assessed. I submitted the identified descriptions found during data analysis to the research participants to determine whether they fully explain the phenomenon of interest as the participant experienced it. In identifying themes, I also assessed for information that may be unexpected or may oppose my presuppositions.

Credibility

Credibility is how well the results reflect what the participants were attempting to convey (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Risks run by researchers that can affect the interpretation include reactivity and bias. Reactivity is the idea that the researcher has an effect on participants that alter the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because of my experiences in counseling, I maintained objectivity and not influence the study during data collection or analysis. Thus, to lessen the effect, I was aware of my actions and always considered how I may have influenced participants.

Member Checking

Had further detail been required after the interview process had ended, I would

have contacted the participant and either requested further detail or clarification. During the interview, I offered to send summaries back to the participants for clarification and schedule follow-up interviews to maintain data accuracy, but each participant declined.

Transferability

Merriam (2009) defined transferability as results that are generalizable across other individuals or settings. Some methods of ensuring transferability include having a thick description and as much variability across participants as possible. In addition, Shenton (2004) recommended including the following information: (a) "The number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based; (b) Any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data; (c) The number of participants involved in the fieldwork; (d) The data collection methods that were employed; (e) The number and length of the data collection sessions; (f) The time period over which the data were collected" (p. 70). Hence, I followed these suggestions in my data collection to ensure the transfer of data to a variety of populations.

It is important to interpret and understand the study in context. A best practice would replicate the study in similar settings to determine if the results remain consistent. Future researchers might continue this study in similar settings to resolve the question of consistency. Even if findings differ, the validity of the study should not lessen but may reflect different implementation experiences and reasons behind variations (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

Dependability is the capacity to display how, if given the same context, methods,

and participants, similar results would ensue (Shenton, 2004). In order to do this, I kept all steps and procedures documented in detail so another researcher could replicate the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that credibility and dependability intertwine. Thus, if a study is replicable, it aids in increasing the validity of the study results. Notes can include specific details and issues with research design and implementation, details of field occurrences, and personal reflections about the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a qualitative researcher's equivalent to the objectivity found in quantitative studies. Confirmability occurs "when credibility, transferability, and dependability has been established" (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 154). The results of the study must reflect the voices of the participants; their responses must inform the themes and subthemes that emerge during data analysis. Reflexivity is an essential requirement for confirmability. The researcher must place any preconceptions or biases to the side and focus on the lived experiences of the participants. To contribute to confirmability, I followed, rather than led, conversations during interviews. My role was to objectively gather as much detail as possible from the participants and to ask for clarification when necessary (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I included rich and thick transcript excerpts that supported each theme to maintain the participants' voices in the presentation of the findings. Later, I discussed these with my peer reviewer and participants in post interviews.

Ethical Concerns

In any type of research, it is important to retain ethical integrity by providing informed consent (ACA, Code of Ethics, 2014, Section G.2.a.). This includes correctly explaining the purpose and procedures of the study while identifying the risks. A research should disclose any benefits or inquiries while also describing limitations and confidentiality issues. This can be done during the initial discussion through both written and verbal disclosure to eliminate questions and discomforts. Accurate reporting of the results (ACA, Code of Ethics, 2014, Section G.4.a.) includes planning, conducting, and reporting the research project accurately.

Providing evidence of quality can allow research results to retain validity and reliability (Patton, 2015). In order to ensure these traits, researchers must be aware of quality, trustworthiness, and credibility in their research. Researchers must understand that all qualitative research is specifically vulnerable to validity issues (Creswell, 2011). Varying methods can help ensure validation of the research (Creswell, 2011). As researchers begin their collection procedures, they should focus on collecting detailed and rich data to withstand tests of dependability as they proceed into the assessment or auditing stages of the research (Creswell, 2011).

I did not work in any of the schools where data collection occurred, therefore; I had the advantage of no differential in power between the participants and myself, as I was not directly involved with their programs or schools. I informed all participants they could exit the study at any point without explanation and reviewed informed consent materials with them to ensure that they fully understood their role in the research and all

protective measures.

To verify quality for qualitative study, I established authenticity by discussing evidence of past experiences. I investigated my biases about the topic and during the process of the interviews and interpretation. During the data collection process, I attempted to remain on target with my specified question and not be led into comments or other directions to ensure trustworthy data without researcher input. The interviews and questionnaire I included are open ended, but I avoided bias in their wording to ensure quality and trustworthiness. I described my credentials and role in the field, which helped establish my credibility with the readers and in the literature. I also use peer review articles to support my data and research project.

Ethical Procedures

When a researcher conducts a study that involves the use of human subjects, the protection of participants becomes a major responsibility for that researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In this study, I abided by the ethical and moral prescriptions set by the Institution Review Board (IRB) of Walden University and federal regulations. I kept all data collected in this study confidential to protect the identity of participants. Access to the raw and electronic data was limited to the research committee and me only. It was stored is a password protected computer. After storing the interview data for five years in line with IRB protocol, I will destroy the material.

First, I garnered approval to collect data from the research sites from each pertinent school superintendent. Next, I obtained institutional approval for the study through the IRB. Finally, I gathered informed consent from each participant before data

collection.   My method of data collection consisted of self-reported, open-ended spoken

responses to a series of questions included in the interview protocol (Appendix A).

The presentation of results did not include any identifying information, and I did

not have a supervisory relationship with any of the participants. As such, I expect that no

power differentials influenced the conduct of this study. I guaranteed participants that the

dissemination of the results will not include any identifying information. I asked

participants not to provide any identifying factors when responding to the interview

questions. I also wiped any identifying factors from the responses and exclude them

from the data analysis and subsequent report of results.

The sample size and small location could pose biases in the study. Each of these

factors could limit the study. To address these issues, I made conscious efforts to remove

personal biases and pull data from diverse size schools. I conducted interviews in a

mutually-agreed-upon location, in person or on the telephone. To manage my own bias, I

consulted with a peer reviewer throughout the data collection and transcription process.

Together, we met and go over findings as I coded data to keep me honest and ensure

trustworthiness and validity. We discussed the identified themes and also shared with the

reader anything that does not support the identified theme, or outlier themes.

Summary

Through this qualitative phenomenological study, I examined the experiences of

elementary school counselors in implementing antibullying programs. Using a

qualitative phenomenological research design and semistructured interviews, I

interviewed counselors from selected elementary schools who are relevant to the

population of interest. The results of this study may aid in determining best practice in education for counselors working with antibullying programs.

   Chapter 3 outlines the research design, the role of the researcher, the study sample, instruments, data collection, and data analysis procedures. I also explained issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations to ensure that the proposed study maintained validity and that participants are fully protected. Chapter 4 will include the results of the study and description of the final sample, with a detailed analysis and examination of specific responses from the interview process.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I summarize the results of the analysis of the interviews with eight study participants. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the experiences of elementary school counselors (Pre-K–5th grade) who have implemented antibullying programs.   In this chapter, I describe the data collection process including sample size, duration and timeline of data collection, and transcription. A thematic analysis research method allowed me to analyze the interviews and NVivo 12 by QSR was used to assist in determining codes and themes from the interviews. The themes that emerged from the research project derived from the research questions and are outlined in this chapter. In this chapter, I present the analysis of the data and the findings with verbatim responses from the participants, followed by a summary of the chapter.

Setting

Each interview was conducted in private offices or classrooms when school was not in session. Interruptions were kept to a minimum; however, one interview was disrupted by the public address system and another was interrupted by an administrator looking for test files. These interviews resumed after the disruptions. All of the other interviews were conducted in one sitting in their entirety. None of the interviews were disrupted due to technical disruptions.

Demographics

Participants began their interviews by filling out the school counselor

demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaire included questions about

their role in the school, years of experience as a school counselor, years of experience in

implementing an antibullying program, and gender. All participants were female

professional school counselors who were certified in the state of Texas and worked in

rural areas with elementary students. Seven of the eight participants stated they were

school counselors and one said that she was currently working as the guidance counselor.

In Table 1, I give the pseudonyms of the participants which were created to protect their

confidentiality, and both the years of school counselor experience and years of

experience implementing an antibullying program are given.

Table 1

Individual Participant Demographics

Participant Implementing	Years Experience as an Elementary School Counselor	Years Experience in Antibullying Program
SC01	10	3
SC02	13	0
SC03	4	3
SC04	13	13
SC05	4	4
SC06	5	3
SC07	3	1
SC08	3	3

Data Collection

Purposeful selection was used to recruit participants for this study. Participants were identified school counselors from the Texas School Guide from the East Texas area. Superintendents were contacted and granted permission for their counselors to participate in this study. At that point, school counselors were contacted individually with an invitational email at each elementary school. After they agreed to participate, a consent form was emailed and returned indicating their willingness to participate with the response, "I consent." Next, an email was sent to determine individual interview dates, times, and locations. Each interview was scheduled at the participant's convenience.

The data sources were the eight participants who were elementary school counselors who had implemented bullying intervention and prevention programs. Each of the 20 to 75-minute interviews was audio recorded with a Phillips Voice Tracer digital audio recorder and the names of the participants were kept confidential. After eight interviews, I stopped collecting data. I determined that the data had been saturated and the information I was being given was not substantially different from that provided by the other participants.

The process of data collection lasted approximately 6 weeks from August 12, 2018 through October 2, 2018. I transcribed each interview within 2 days of the interview to ensure accuracy and make sure there were no issues that needed clarifying from the participants. None of the participants accepted my invitation to review their transcripts, but each asked to receive a copy of the results of the study. The data from the

interviews were retained and stored in a locked file cabinet in my office that only I have access to. The data will remain secure for 5 years.

The interviews began with a welcome and a review of the signed consent, and completion of the demographic data (see Appendix B). To ensure that the information would explore the experiences of implementing antibullying programs, I used the main research question and clarified with several subquestions (Appendix A). The interview began following the interview protocol with the main research question of this study: "You have been invited to participate in this study because you have implemented an antibullying program in your school. What are the experiences of elementary school counselors in implementing antibullying programs?

The eight subquestions were as follows:

1. How do you define bullying?

2. How often do you investigate reported cases of bullying? What are the different types of bullying you report?

3. What are your policies for investigating bullying?

4. What do school counselors perceive as the role of a school counselor in bully intervention and prevention?

5. What interventions are utilized for bully interventions and prevention and are they impacting the individual, community, or society?

6. What improvements do counselors believe would deter bully situations?

7. What steps, if any, are administrators and counselors taking to evaluate the counselor's effectiveness and involvement in bully intervention and prevention?

8. Do you have anything to add about your role as a counselor in preventing bullying in schools?

Data Analysis from the Interviews

Participants of the study included eight elementary school counselors from three different school districts in Angelina County in Texas. I transcribed the participant's interviews verbatim and analyzed them using a qualitative thematic analysis method. The themes from responses were then noted and analyzed. I focused on the accurate interpretations of experiences of the school counselors. In the following section, the themes that occurred most are tagged as the major themes, while those with fewer occurrences are the minor themes.

Transcribing

Upon completion of data collection, I manually transcribed the interviews. I typed the audio recorded interviews and saved this document in a password protected file on a flash drive. I reviewed each transcription and compared them individually to the audio tape a minimum of three times to ensure accuracy in transcribing.

Coding

For this research project, I chose to use NVivo 12 software to provide a template for coding. No names were included in this research project to maintain confidentiality and privacy. Each participant's interview and transcription were identified by a number.

I used the NVivo software to separate each transcription into various nodes which became the themes. I identified common themes and distinguished them as major themes while also including minor themes in the data. As seen in Table 2, the major themes identified include bully definition, interventions available, policies for intervening, role of the counselor, and improvements needed. Table 3 will identify the minor themes which include types of bullying observed, and steps to evaluate their programs.

Study Results

Table 2

Major Themes and Descriptions

Themes	Descriptions
Discrepancies exist in defining bullying	Participants defined bullying as sometimes being purposeful and/or repetitive. Other times it was using power over someone else, playing, or just not getting along.
A variety of interventions used	Participants described not having specific interventions. Some felt they responded to bullying after the fact, while others felt they targeted prevention. Lastly, some felt that they didn't have an intervention program at all.

TABLE 2 (Continued).

Diverse school policies	Participants stated that their principal or assistant principal investigated bullying incidents, while others described anonymous online reporting. Other counselors reported that they provided counseling to the victim and/or bully.
Undefined School Counselor Role	Participants felt that they spent time administrating testing and academic programs or performing clerical duties. Some counselors reported providing responsive or preventative counseling.
Improvements Suggested	Participants felt that increasing the counseling role, removing the testing role, and creating time for program implementation through campus-wide activities could improve their programs.

Table 3

Minor Themes and Descriptions

Themes	Descriptions
Evaluation of their antibullying program	Participants state they have none currently, or that it is changing.
Different types of bullying	Bullying can be social, emotional, cyber, or physical.

Major Themes

During the course of this research project, five themes dominated the interviews. These five themes include bullying definition, intervention used, school policies, counselor's role, and improvement suggestions. A detailed description of each is included in the following section.

Bullying Definition

School counselor's views of bullying influences their definitions of bullying. The actual definition of bullying has been the topic of debate for the past several years and is often influenced by a person's experiences and feelings. Most of the participants in this study believed that they had a firm grasp on identifying bullying. They highlighted the intended purpose of the action, repeated actions, exuding powering over someone else, horse playing, and just being mean as examples of bullying.

SC01 stated,

I think that bullying is when is it's different than just kids not agreeing or just horse-playing. It's when someone is purposefully trying to make another person feel bad about themselves or embarrass them in front of other people and just don't stop.

In fact, six of the eight school counselors interviewed believed that a major component of the definition of bullying includes that it is purposeful. In agreement SC06 shared, "Bullying is when somebody just is always bothering somebody or picking on somebody here or trying to hurt their feelings or make themselves feel more important."

Several school counselors felt that bullying reoccurring was important in defining

bullying. SC02 believed:

Bullying to me is anything that another child does to someone that is harmful

either physically or emotionally. You know that causes them harm and it doesn't

have to be physically, it can be calling names time after time. It's

more than a one-time incident, it's something that reoccurs.

This was emphasized by SC04:

Well I probably define it differently than we were supposed to, but like I said a

while ago I think kids are just being mean. To me, bullying is not necessarily a

progression but a consistent thing over time. I understand the definition now is

going to be a one-time thing, but to me that's not bullying. To me that's just being

mean but that doesn't mean that it shouldn't be addressed, because it should. But I

think it's just a play on words to me bullying is somebody who is either mean one

time or one significant time.

Participant SC07 agreed that bullying reoccurs, "To me, bullying is when it's

something repeatedly happening." Another recurring descriptor of bullying included the

use of power. SC03 shared:

We teach the kids that bullying is not just somebody being mean, although that's

Unacceptable, but that it is something that has to do with power. I'm going to use

my power to dominate you in some way. It's repetitive. It happens a lot…is not

just one time. And then there's something else I haven't reviewed in my lessons

but I will tell you. That's not something I was doing initially, but I try to

distinguish especially since we are dealing with little ones.

Similarly, SC08 reported, "Just getting them to do what you want them to do but

using that intimidation factor of 'if you don't do this, I won't be your friend' kind of at the

elementary level."

Less frequently, school counselors felt that what some consider bullying is really

just playing around or being mean. To emphasize this, SC06 commented, "Bullying is

when somebody just is always bothering somebody or picking on somebody here or

trying to hurt their feelings or make themselves feel more important." SC05 agreed:

> I think that's doing something that is mean or hurtful or that is embarrassing. Or
>
> for the older kids and then also to include consistent over time. If it's something
>
> every time you get on the bus, they're talking about you or they're embarrassing
>
> you or they're being mean to you or making you do something that you don't want
>
> to do. And it could be peer-to-peer or adult to a child, or it could be an adult to an
>
> adult. So, I guess that's my definition of bullying.

These examples demonstrate that perhaps children themselves do not understand

the definition of bullying and what is considered normal childhood behaviors or actual

bullying. Until school counselors follow a specific definition, the definitions used will

vary.

According to the Texas antibullying laws and regulations Chapter 37 Section

37.0832V (TEA, 2017), bullying and cyberbullying are defined as:

"Bullying":

(A) means a single significant act or a pattern of acts by one or more students directed at another student that exploits an imbalance of power and involves engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means, or physical conduct that satisfies the applicability requirements provided by Subsection (a-1), and that:

> (i) has the effect or will have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property;
>
> (ii) is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student;
>
> (iii) materially and substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of a classroom or school; or
>
> (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; and

 (B) includes cyberbullying.

> "Cyberbullying" means bullying that is done through the use of any electronic communication device, including through the use of a cellular or other type of telephone, a computer, a camera, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, a social media application, an Internet website, or any other Internet-based communication tool.

Due to the fact that this study was conducted in Texas, the state guidelines for defining bullying for public schools is outlined above. This definition states that bullying

can be a single event, must cause damage to person or property or fear of damage, changes the environment for the student, or disrupts the educational environment. Many of these actual descriptors were not found in the participants' responses during this study. Most participants defined bullying as being reoccurring, which directly conflicts with the published definition. Another misconception of the participants includes that bullying includes real or feared damage or change to the learning environment. None of the participants discussed the effect of bullying on learning, but their responses focused more on physical and emotional issues.

Types of Interventions Used

To combat bullying, the options for current antibullying programs available seem to grow daily. Antibullying programs range from a curriculum specific program to targeted skill activities. The school and school counselor determine which format they will choose to address anti-bully prevention and intervention. In this study, most of the school counselors stated that they did not have a specific program. Some stated they intervened only in response to a situation, while others did occasional prevention. Unfortunately, some stated that they did not use an intervention to combat bullying at all.

Of the choices for antibullying interventions, five of the eight interviewed in this study stated that they did not follow a specific intervention program, but instead pulled together materials as needed or deemed important. SC03 said:

I don't have an official program. I've pieced together some different things. We talk about the official definition because I'm working with kindergarten through 4th grade, and we read story books. I have found videos for the older ones for

third and fourth grade. I have some really cool videos that I have found that talk about being a bystander and how to step up and just begin to teach the kids themselves how to try to intervene in that situation.

Similarly, SC04 reported, that she just created her own lessons based on what she thought they needed to learn:

Really, what I did was just sort of, on my own, one thing that I did every year about September was getting to know kids. In October what I usually did was lessons once a month that are for every class on our campus and I did what I called my bubble lesson. I really had to try to do something to connect with the kids so since it was fun to keep their attention so for that lesson I did hula hoop and bubbles and personal space. I talked about how you have the hula hoop and it's like a bubble around you and have your own personal space. And everybody has a bubble around them and that's their personal space and no one has permission to get involved in that space unless you tell him it's okay. I'll give examples. And it sort of evolved into a personal space focus and I'd cover issues like pushing in line or sitting on the rug. Not play with somebody's hair, not kicking them, or keep your hands to yourself and being respectful of other people's space and also about someone doing something by accident and something on purpose or trying to hurt somebody. Also, I would emphasize them learning how to use their words. If someone is always bullying, I'd put them in front of me and I'd put them in a chair and I would pretend like I was in the line and going to cafeteria and you're the line leader and so show me what a line

leader is. And then I would do different examples of things to show them, like poking on them and what to do and how to use their words to explain how they feel about it, or the response to it to give them power, to empower them to make the choices or to change what's going on with them. And I teach them what to do with as far as when I was doing something on purpose and stand in line with them in and then I would, react with and where... I would tell him when I would do something that they didn't like, they tell me that they didn't like it, I would say "Oh, thank you for reminding me, you're helping me out there, helping me to help control." If you teach kids to use their words and they know they can do that, you're empowering them to talk to themselves and then they can transfer them and use them to teach people how to treat each other. So, the TV shows how to treat you and then you can stand up. Somebody tells them "hey stop" and a lot of kids don't want to talk. They just want to be sure to do it. So, I'm trying to teach them to do it so that they can use their words.

In agreement, SC06 stated, "I don't really have like a program. I just kind of pull together some stuff and I don't really, I don't have like classes that I really do it in."

Several of the interviewed school counselors reported that they take a more responsive position on intervening with bullying. SC02 shared that at the elementary level, "I feel like at this level, I think that we do a good job of intervening when it happens." Some stated that each situation is different and having the ability to respond to the specifics, or even the bully and victim, allows them to target the problem area. They feel that this allows them to be more accurate and focused in their interventions.

Two of the eight school counselors stated that they utilized guidance to implement bully prevention and intervention. SC07 described the guidance program and skills she brings in:

In the fall I see every class four times and they come in for different guidance lessons. A lot of them are geared towards bullying when we talk about respect and respecting others and empathy and just different skills that go along with bully prevention. We also have a character word we call *BID*, but we have a character word each month and I feel like it's also building character so that kids see how to treat people and we have that too.

Likewise, SC05 reported that she is able to focus all year on guidance and that her role is specific to guidance. But during the year, she targets bullying only for about a month and then targets character traits. SC08 described her campus plan for prevention:

In our program, we partner with some organizations in our community. We partner with ADAC and they come in and do presentations for us at the elementary level. It's tied to bullying as well as drugs and alcohol awareness at that age and they put it in the elementary age mindset. How it is damaging to your health and things like that. And then they kind of focus on speaking up when you see people who are I guess antagonizing others, or putting down others, or just kind of focus there. That's one way. And also we do …I've done a lot of guidance lessons in the classroom on friendship and respecting courage. Tying all of those back to what does that look like? Not necessarily throwing out the word bullying, but kind of putting out the word bullying but what does it look like to be

a good friend…show your peers respect? It takes courage to stand up for others

or for yourself sometimes. Also, I've done several small groups over friendship,

especially with the third grade age group. I've done it from a girl's perspective, a

group of mixed-gender group…things like that and then obviously individual

work with mainly learning how to speak up for yourself and a lot of "I don't like

when it makes me feel…" kind of statements. Organizing like I said that drugfree

All-Stars and ADAC connections. Something we're doing on our campus this

year in the fall semester, we're doing a *Be You* campaign and basically kind of

using that in classroom guidance and small group to focus on being unique.

We're all individuals, we all have talents, we all have strengths. Trying to get

kids in that

frame of mind set that it's ok if someone is different, and they don't look like me.

So, like we have posters hanging up that talk about *Be You*. We have bracelets

that are handed out to students, and we've given them another bracelet and

telling them, "You pick someone who is an individual that is different than you.

Don't pick your best friend" and kind of letting it trickle out. And then the

librarians on board. She's passing out bookmarks that say, "What Makes You

Different," and different phrases. We're trying to change the campus I guess, the

culture of what it means to be an individual and that it's okay to be different from

others. And then in the spring semester, we're going to do a kindness culture and

just pushing that like the random acts of kindness. I have different curriculum,

you could say, that I can pull out to use, but I'm not real familiar with it, but that's

two of the ideas that we were brainstorming this summer.

Of the eight school counselors interviewed, only SC01 reported that she had used a specific curriculum program at her school a couple of years ago:

> We used the Trevor Romain program. I feel like it builds each year, so they have the same basic format as far as their characters and the development of the issues. It doesn't matter what grade level they are in, they can still go through that curriculum, and they are familiar enough with it that even the next year you can just refer back to a situation from the previous year's curriculum and the kids know what you're talking about.

School Policies to Investigate Bully Incidents

School districts establish their individual school policies related to how they want to run their school in accordance to state guidelines. Though the state specifies that bullying must be addressed, it is up to school districts to determine how they will do that. In this research project, it was reported that the schools where the school counselors who were interviewed work have a variety of school policies for handling bullying. Specifically, some participants mentioned that the principal or assistant principal investigates bullying incidents. Several schools offer anonymous online reporting, which is then investigated by the principal or assistant principal. A few reported that the school counselor investigated bullying incidents, but that the school counselor often counseled with the bully and/or the victim after the fact.

Seven of the eight school counselors interviewed acknowledged that when bullying incidents are reported, the principal or assistant principal investigates. SC01 described her experience with investigating bullying:

Anytime a bullying report is made, we automatically send it to the principal and then he has to investigate it. My administrator last year felt like I should handle all the bullying and it should be taken care of in my department. I had a problem with that because I don't feel like I should be the disciplinarian for the people who are bullying other people. My principal this year feels like it is a team effort and that each of us have a different role. He does the investigating, talks to the kids, and handles the discipline. My role would be more in the counseling and helping come up with better ideas or ways to communicate and build relationships with the kids.

SC03 responded, "If I was to have incidences where someone comes and reports to me, then it would be my obligation to then send that report to administration. Then just be available for any questions or clarification if I have any knowledge about the incident or incidences."

SC05 explained her bullying investigation experiences as varying:

In the upper grades, we had a report online that parents, or whoever, could do that. If that was the case, then we had to do something, and you had to investigate it to make sure that it was bullying first. We probably had maybe two or three a year. Not a lot at all, but I think that's part of where we are. Maybe some of it be could be that some kids don't report, but I usually went over in my lessons. Last

year, I did lessons differently. I just saw kids once every two weeks. It was a process. The report would go the assistant principal, and he would share it with me. Between the two of us, we would have to find out whether or not it was bullying, and then they get eight weeks of bullying counseling. The victim would get a series [of counseling sessions] and talk about using a voice, their power, and things like that. You did want to address the victim, as much as, if not more than, the bully. A lot of times, the programs focus on the bully and they don't address… The victim gets overlooked and all the attention is on the bully when the victim is the one who's been hurt. So, you do have to remember that because… be conscious of that.

Three of the interviewed school counselors said that the investigation depended on who bullying was reported to or if discipline was needed, to determine what steps were taken. SC08 stated, "It gets investigated or the student is brought into the office. As a counselor, we try to work it out, and if a discipline meeting needs to be, the administration would be involved with that." Similarly, SC01 agreed that after the investigation was done, "if my services are needed after that, then I'm involved with that."

One school counselor (SC07) indicated that both she and the principal were involved from the beginning:

A lot of time, students will come to me or one of the principals and just depending on who they come to, they tell me about it. I talk to the student and then if it's something physical, they got pushed or got into a fight or something, I usually

take that to the principal because they're over the discipline. I talk to the

principals and they deal with the situation or whatever it may be and then maybe,

depending on where it was at, maybe the bully will have a consequence.

Three of the school counselors went on to share that they either investigated or

counseled with students when a bullying report was made. SC 02 stated:

Normally it's either a teacher will let me know that bullying is happening, or she

said something in the classroom, or I'll have parents call because their kid has told

them somebody is bullying them. I will pull that student in and I will talk to them

and then try to get to the bottom of it. If I need to, I'll pull a small group in and

we'll do some group work to try to resolve what's going on.

Similarly, SC06 reported:

If somebody comes to me and said that they were being bullied, I just talked to

him. Sometimes kids are just being mean and when they're just being mean, you

just talk to them and try to show them not to be mean. Sometimes maybe their

friends are wanting to make people feel bad but, I don't, I don't really investigate

bullying.

While SC 07 said that:

For my part as counselor, I always check with the student, the bully, and try to

figure out what are the underlying issues. Usually, there is one. Then, I check

with the bully and the victim of the bullying afterwards, just to make sure that it's

not happening secretly or anything like that. But really, we do we talk to the bully

and the student, just try to figure out where all the pieces fit into it and address it how we need to.

The fourth school counselor was less clear about the policies for her campus because she felt that she hadn't had many cases of bullying. "Bullying, is not as prevalent in the lower levels." Because she has not had many experiences dealing with bully reporting, she was unsure about an anonymous report and stated, "I don't know if the district has an online report." Perhaps, this participant's responses are due to her earlier definition of bullying and that many of her students are sometimes just mean to each other.

Role of the School Counselor

As with many other roles in a school setting, the role of the school counselor also seems unclear. There appears to be a grave distinction between what is thought to be a school counselor's role and what a school counselor's role actually is. Several of the school counselors interviewed discussed discrepancies in what they wanted their role to be in bully intervention and prevention and what it actually was. The school counselor role can be different from district to district and even from campus to campus. In this research project, the school counselor participants identified several roles they execute: testing and academic programs, clerical duties, responsive interventions, counseling interventions, and preventative measures.

Although most college counseling programs target only psychological testing in their training, five of the eight school counselors interviewed reported that a majority of their time is consumed with academic testing and special programs. SC01 felt that her

job is focused on testing, scheduling, academic interventions, and special programs with all of the meetings that each entail. She stated, "We do little bullying interventions or preventions curriculum related to that." SC02 shared:

 I am the intervention person who takes care of a student who fails at the nine weeks. Then we have to fill out paperwork, and I have to set up meetings. We have to meet with parents, and that's very time-consuming because a big part of my job is intervention. I would say the majority of my job involves the academic side. I 'm also the testing coordinator who does the STAAR testing. I do all STAAR testing and TELPAS testing. I coordinate all that. I'm in charge of doing the paperwork and getting it ready for the teachers. So yes, I also do at-risk where I look at the at-risk and have to figure out who's at-risk and code those, so it's a lot of roles.

SC04 stated, "You're always going to be doing the at-risk boys and doing the testing. It's just kind of what counselors do and so that makes it hard to work with the kids on just the counseling things that they need. Another thing is duty. I had morning duty and I had afternoon duty." Following that same idea, SC07 responded, "When spring comes, we have GT and TELPAS and all that stuff, and I am still doing the testing."

Perhaps another overlapping role described by participants was clerical duties. SC02 described her diverse roles:

I don't have a lot of time to do preventive stuff because of all of the other things that I'm doing as the counselor, like clerical things. Well, my role as a school

counselor is: I am the 504 coordinator, which I did all the paperwork for and I set

up all the meetings for that. I'm also the ESL coordinator and I set up LPACs, do

those meetings and do all the paperwork for that."

According to SC04, "Depending on the principal or the makeup of the school or

just different roles, but mostly you are always going to be doing the meetings and doing

the paperwork." SC05 also confirmed, "It really was busy, and it was too busy because

last year I was the registrar person. I had to enroll students and put in all the information

that was expected of me and my role. It's just hard for me and I had no conference.

When it comes to bullying, many counselors felt that they were mostly involved

after the incident occurred. Oftentimes, the school counselor may become involved in

bullying intervention by responding to a situation and providing counseling. According

to SC01, "My role would be more in the counseling and helping come up with better

ideas or ways to communicate and build relationships with the kids." Following that

idea, SC02 stated, "I have a more responsive role in bullying. If there's a situation where

someone is being bullied, they'll come see me or their parents will call. We will

investigate it try to get to the bottom of it and try to resolve it. Mine is more responsive."

SC05 felt that her role is more responsive, and she counsels with students who have

experienced bullying:

> I talked to a girl this week, and I told her that if it happened again to come and
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> talk to me because that's just unacceptable to me. I will tell little kids that your
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> behavior is unacceptable. You have to come and talk to me, and I will make sure
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> that it stops. The only way that I'm going to know is if you come and tell me. If

you don't come and tell me, I can't help you.

SC07 stated:

Intervention-wise, like I said earlier, I have found that when someone is bullying, there's always something going on at home. Either at home or the student that is bullying has been bullied before, or honestly, they just don't know how to cope with their anger or their sadness or whatever it is. I think that, for me, working with the intervention and working with a bully and/or the student that's been hurt, it doesn't really hurt, but it happened. Help work through that.

Several school counselors reported that they have certain opportunities when they can devote specific times to bully prevention and intervention. SC02 reported that her school has a separate teacher for social skills to help prevent bullying:

I feel like at this level, I think that we do a good job of intervening when it happens. We also have a person that is able to teach those social skills in a rotation type class, and I think that's very beneficial. She teaches those kids how to get along and what to do when you get angry, what to do when a friend bothers you, and how to make friends. I think that is very important and a big part of why we don't have a whole lot of bullying at this level.

Similarly, SC06 stated:

I think my role is more after I talk to the kids. I try to teach them to be nice to each other, to get along, and not to be mean. I think my role is to be there for the kids when the situations come up and try to do something, like activities or lessons that will not let them be bullies or show them not to be bullies.

Adding more explanation, SC07 shared:

Every morning we all meet in the gym, and I do a character lesson and a lot of

times bullying comes up. I feel like, as the school counselor, my job is to prevent

bullying. I try to help prevent bullying through creating an environment of kids

feeling safe and teaching kids what it means to respect other people by their

words and their actions. I feel like that that's my job as a counselor. Through my

guidance lessons in the fall, and then I see each class about four times. We've got

about 32 classes here, and I'll see about four times, which I feel is good. I build a

relationship with them, and they know that they can come to me. Then, I still

continue to do teaching, like our character words, and that kind of stuff, we do

every day, but they don't come to me in the spring.

For this year, SC08 stated:

I've been doing a lot more guidance classes, like I do two or three classes a day

where they come in, and that's helped tremendously, even with our discipline

problems. I feel like in the fall, as long as I build a relationship with them and

they know that they can come and we've learned a lot of skills. I'm just glad to

be able to do it at all because I know a lot of counselors…they don't get to do any

guidance.

As depicted in this section, the role of the school counselor remains cloudy.

Trying to describe their role exactly is difficult, as it appears to change often. This

research project highlighted four specific roles school counselors correlated to their

current position: testing and academic programs, clerical duties, responsive and

counseling interventions, and preventative measures. The next section will focus on improvements school counselors suggested for bullying programs during their interviews.

Improvements

As with many other jobs, the interviewed school counselors felt that the school counselor's role could benefit through implementing improvements. Almost all felt that the school counselor's role should be more centralized to what school counselors were trained to do. Due to the school's priorities resting on testing, the school counselor has become heavily involved in that process. School counselors felt that antibullying prevention and intervention could be improved by restructuring the counselor's role, removing the testing role, creating time specifically for counseling, and creating a campus-wide approach.

Because of the ambiguousness of the school counselor's role, every one of the participants had a general idea of what they would like their school counselor role to be. SC01 shared:

My ideal role would be that I wouldn't be doing clerical. I wouldn't be doing testing. I wouldn't be doing scheduling or intervention, academic intervention meetings, special education meetings, 504, or at-risk. Any of those extra hats that we wear. I would be focusing on the mental health side, where I could work with kids, I would be able to be in the classrooms to do more guidance and provide them with the skills hopefully to prevent some of the issues that become discipline problems. At this point, that's not reality. It's talked about, but until there's four or five counselors or jobs are distributed among other people or

someone else takes the clerical, testing, scheduling, meeting role, that's what we're

stuck doing. So, we do very little bullying interventions or preventions

curriculum related to that.

Many agreed to the idea that a counselor should be just a counselor. SC02

repeated this idea and said, "I would like to see counselors be able to do more counseling,

more on the emotional and mental health side of it, than what the roles are now. Less

clerical type, testing administrator; all that kind of stuff." While SC03 shared:

I really believe it all has to do with trying, in an effort to influence students, to be

all they can be. Be the best version of you. Understanding that character is the

most important thing, and all of these things that make up our character are things

that we continually have to work on and striving for that.

In support of this idea, SC04 said, "So, I feel like if counselors were able to

counsel, and were able to help kids to be able to deal with all of the stuff that they have to

deal with. To live their little lives and also to encourage them and implement things in

the classroom." Understanding the inconsistency, SC05 stated, "Well, one thing that

counselors could do, but it's out of their control to do, is to be able to counsel." While

SC06 reported:

I think that it was important for counselors to be counselors and to be available

for kids to talk, to talk to the kids and to be able to listen to the kids because I

think that a lot of times kids just don't have anybody to talk to. What they think is

bullying is just kids being mean sometimes, and if they had better awareness of

themselves or a self-concept, then they wouldn't be so upset and take things, everything, personal.

Corroborating the other ideas of the school counselor role, SC07 said:

Usually, kids that do bully, I feel like there is an underlying issue. Something is going on. I think if we could target those students, and I'm trying to think of a way that you can do that so those things don't happen. But I know you can't always do that. I know that there were kids last year that would bully, and I talked to them, and we've worked through that. But this year, I knew from the beginning, this student, they had a history of a bullying, and so I approached them at the beginning of the year and tried to encourage them and talk to them about behaviors. I feel like just trying to seek out those students, maybe their home life is not so good. Address students and try to encourage them.

SC08 shared, **"**Unfortunately there is paperwork and testing and things like that, so there's always room for improvement. We could be doing more for sure."

This area of the interview led to the discussion of removing testing. SC04 had a very strong opinion about the school counselor's role in testing as she reflected:

I hate the testing. I mean, I would say you could just about hire anybody with an educational degree to do any testing and do the testing coordinator. I don't understand why all these years it's always been put on the counselor. I mean, that's not even the same side of the brain as counseling.

In agreement, SC05 felt that school counselors should "Not have to do all the extra. I have to do all the testing, the 504, the LPACs, all the paperwork, all that stuff."

While SC08 felt that school counselors try to manipulate their schedule around testing by, "We get the guidance in the fall, but as testing comes, well, that goes away in the spring."

The wish list for the school counselor role went on to list improving the antibullying program by creating time specifically for counseling. SC02 stated:

I would love to see more of that, more of the preventive, and more time to teach those skills. I think that's going to be the key in preventing bullying in the future and teaching those skills to them. If they don't have those skills, we're going to see the number of bullying incidents just continue to rise. So, I would like to have more time to do that.

Agreeing with this idea, SC04 believed, "Time to counsel, yeah, that's one reason I want to help kids, and I stay at the lower level so long, because of the testing." While SC06 went into more detail describing scheduling more time:

I really think the counselors should just be counselors not all this other stuff that we're doing, not trying to do all this paperwork. I spend 90% of my time doing paperwork, and I keep scheduling and writing everything down. I look at it, and a lot of my time is not spent on counseling. My principal says that anytime I'm talking to somebody I can call that counseling, but a lot of times when I'm talking to somebody it's like they can't find their shoe, or they are lost, don't know where their classes are, they lost their schedule, or they want to change their schedule. It's not like it's counseling stuff. As far as like bullying prevention stuff, I wish we had more time to do that. I wish that counselors could actually have a class, or go into classrooms, or work with kids or do campus-wide things, but the teachers

don't want to give up their class time. They're responsible for that, and then the counselors are too busy doing so many other things that they don't have time to do that either.

Similarly, SC07 said, "Honestly, I wish I had more time to do that. I feel like we have so many other tasks and duties that we have to do, but I would love to be able to do that. I don't have as much time as I would like to do that for sure."

Another idea to improve antibullying prevention and intervention is to create a campus-wide approach. In this study, school counselors described the difficulties that they felt with the lack of carryover or consistency with their antibullying efforts and the rest of the campus, district, and even the community. SC01 reported:

I think that it would be good if the teachers were involved with some of our guidance so that when we left the rooms after 20 minute lessons or 30 minute lessons, the teachers could then utilize the information that they were given so that it becomes a classroom idea where they can then refer back to things that we talked about. By the same token, it would be good if the campus would do that, and then you have your bus riders, your cafeteria, and all those different places. If everybody has kind of the same language that they are working with, then I think that would make it easier on the kids. You could say one key word regardless of where you are, and it would trigger the response that you need from that kid.

When discussing a campus-wide approach, problems were discussed around a lack of communication. SC03 reported:

One of my T-Tess goals last year was to communicate with the teachers and let them know what topics we were discussing in here so that they could be reinforced and know some of the specific definitions so that the same language can be used. Talking about it so that the same language could be used so that hopefully it became more of a cohesive teaching, because I know they're dealing with conflicts. I would like to see what I'm doing, concentrating on these concepts, not just on our campus, but it stops in 4th grade. They're getting this and we're hammering it in from kindergarten through 4th grade, but then at 5th grade they are out and then they don't, they're not hearing that on any kind of regular basis. I would love to see something like this being implemented in the upper grades as well, so that when they really start hitting those hard peer pressure years in junior high and high school that this is not just a distant memory of elementary school.

Following this idea, SC04 said:

Administration has to understand the value of communication that the counselor can teach and utilize. They don't know how to utilize them to their advantage. If administrators knew how, even if they knew what to ask or what to expect of their counselors, I think they can change the dynamics of their campus. Usually, a principal has been a teacher and or coach and then a principal. They're usually not very many counselors who become principal, so they know the counselors are there to take care of that kid crying. That kid just goes to the counselor to talk to them, but they don't really know what I do or whatever our strengths are. They

need to be interviewed at the beginning of the year, 'What are your strengths?

What are you good at?' because I was new, and I wasn't good at group

counseling.

SC05 struggles with communication and stated:

I was trying to think in the past probably four or five years ago there was

someone, the district counselor, which this was very frustrating for me, that they

would have a meeting about a student, and then she would have assigned

whatever, and she would never consult with me. Sometimes the teacher never

consulted with me, and I didn't even know there was an issue. It was almost like

we were in there talking about a student on my campus, and I don't know

anything about it.

In contrast, SC07 reported:

Our superintendent is aware of just how many duties that I had here and knew that

it was too much. He wanted to, eventually, time-wise, the school will be able to

take some of those things away so that I could counsel more, do small groups and

individual counseling, and things like that. And then, thankfully, I'm not in

charge of 504 anymore, and I'm sure you know that is a huge task.

While SC08 shared:

This year, we are holding a parent night and going to address bullying in that

parent night. It's not going to be focused completely on that, it's going to be

school safety, but we have different sessions that parents can choose and laying

out our school's policy. So, I think if we call awareness to it and also have

parents on board. That kind of gets thrown around a lot, but that's where the trickle-down into more serious issues, and that is what we're trying to work on. At the beginning of the year, we did a campus needs assessment. It wasn't strictly based on bullying, but we had teachers, and well, it's kind of difficult to have all students complete it. We had some students, but they will come back at the end of the year to see how does this look? Has it made a difference? But we failed to do that, but I guess we could do that at the parent night, come back and do it at the end as well.

In this section I described, explained, and provided examples of the five major themes that were identified during data analysis. I included verbatim comments from the participants explaining the importance of each theme. While these were most prominent, three other themes also emerged during the interviews which I will discuss in the next section.

<div align="center">Minor Themes</div>

During the course of this research project, two other themes emerged. These were minor themes, but still repeated enough to mention. These two themes include program evaluation and types of bullying. A brief description of each merit's discussion.

Program Evaluation

In order to determine the effectiveness of a program, it is important to evaluate it regularly. In Texas schools, school counselors are evaluated annually on job performance. In the interviews, there were some discrepancy, specifically related to anti-bully program evaluation. Some do not feel that their programs were evaluated at all, and

others describe a changing system. The following section discusses anti-bully program evaluation in more detail. SC01 shared, **"**I don't know that we are taking any steps right now to discuss it or evaluate effectiveness of our program. Our program this last year has been kind of lax because it was just more situational." Equally, SC03 reported, "I know I'm being observed as a teacher, my lessons are in, I have an observation that, but it's not always necessarily on bullying but is whatever I was teaching." In supporting these statements, SC04 thought, "I don't ever really know of evaluation because they did evaluations of me, and they always came in and I invited them to come in to come in and watch." While SC07 stated, "We don't really have anything like that or a system to evaluate that specifically. I don't know what I'm sure other schools have, but I don't know of anything to really target that."

Some school counselors felt that their evaluation process is changing. SC06 believed**:**

> I guess I do like the principal does an evaluation of me every year and with that they kind of come in and sit in on one of my lessons, and they just listen. To be honest with you my evaluations have been really good, but a lot of the things that are on there are not at all things that. I mean, it's like these things that they want me to be doing, but I just don't have time to do. Like, they wanted me to do a parent night then and do a parent meeting thing, and I have to come up with lessons for that. They want me to do a bunch of staff development things for the teachers and do lessons for that, but it just doesn't seem like… Every time I'm trying to focus on, maybe put it on something like that or putting it together, then

there's all these other things that I'm doing, like paperwork, like getting ready for

snapshot in October, and scheduling, and schedule changes, and interventions,

and at-risk, and LPACs, and all that stuff just takes time. There are certain times

that I can do them or restrictions or deadlines so I don't really know that we're

doing anything as far as effective or evaluating it. I really don't feel like I'm doing

much specific to the bullying in any way.

Types of Bullying

Another topic that warrants discussion in this research project report is the variety

of types of bullying. Counselors reported that the type of bullying varied from students

being mean to physical, social, and cyberbullying. SC01 stated that she is involved with

bullying that is "mostly drama related where one person is talking bad about another

person or calling them names in front of their group of friends, and it just starts up a

whole group of kids." While SC02 reported:

Probably at this level it would be more emotional at the elementary level we don't

have a lot of it though. We don't have a lot of physical bullying and touching,

hitting, and all of that. But we do have name calling and things that are hurtful to

kids over and over again. Emotionally, it hurts them, so that's what I see mostly

at this level.

Similarly, SC07 shared:

I feel like that word is overused a lot, but it may just be that they were being mean

to him. I would probably say, somebody that's truly bullying, I would say

probably once or twice a month. I mean, that somebody is really aggressively

saying things to the kid with their words or with their actions. Now, I do have

kids that tattletale and stuff like that, but to me that's not truly bullying, so now I

deal with that on a daily basis.

SC08 discussed their bully types and also how they are targeting intervention:

 I would say sometimes we get bullying we often think it is physical. Other than

that, I think that things we are going to focus on is our parent night and it's about

cyber-safety and just kind of adjusting that through the way that others, especially

kids, move up and get older and they have more freedom with technology. We

have filters on our campus, but that's not to say that a child at home does. So, I

think that in our day and age, it's hard to investigate. It's definitely something that

you have to consider. Unfortunately, it's not just verbal or physical anymore.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As discussed in Chapter 3, to maintain trustworthiness in this study, I bracketed

my biases to the degree possible as suggested by Moustakas (1994). I provided

information about myself and my thoughts about antibullying programs in elementary

schools. In a qualitative study, the researcher becomes the instrument through which the

data flows (Tracy, 2013), and it is the researcher's responsibility to collect, record, and

analyze the information. Because I organized the information collected in this study, it

was important that I am aware of biases, goals, thoughts, and interests, so the data

interpretation occurs with my viewpoint set to the side to the degree that is humanly

possible (Tracy, 2013). I clearly created steps and procedures to increase the

trustworthiness of this study. I ensured the accuracy of my data through consultation

with my peer reviewer and the opportunity for participant review and providing the opportunity for post interviews along with sections on credibility, researcher bias, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility

During this study, I regularly took notes about my concerns and ensured that I transcribed the interviews verbatim within two days of the interview and went back through the recorded interview and the transcriptions several times to ensure accuracy. I offered the participants the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy, and they declined. Credibility is how well the results reflect what the participants were attempting to convey (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data in this study was rich and extensive. The data developed into several major themes and a few minor themes to provide the experiences of elementary school counselors involved with antibullying programs.

Researcher Bias

It is important to disclose any personal or professional information related to the study to reduce researcher bias. I worked as an elementary school counselor for 18 years. My experience in this setting led me to believe that there was a need for this study. I listed my biases of my experiences in Chapter 3 and feel that some of the findings reflect what I expected, while new information surfaced. By using reflection and peer reviewing, I was able to obtain accurate, valid and new information about this topic.

Transferability

The results of this study include a description of the demographics of the sample population, hence providing transparency for transferability. Merriam (2009) defined

transferability as results that are generalizable across other individuals or settings. I ensured transferability by (a) including three organizations to take part in the study, which were based in the targeted settings; (b) ensuring that the participants met the criteria of the study; (c) ensuring the number of participants involved met the criteria; (d) employing data collection methods; (e) meeting the number and length of the data collection sessions; and (f) ensuring the time period over which the data were collected was small with transcription time appropriate. I also provided thick and rich descriptions by using verbatim responses across the participants.

Dependability

Dependability was maintained by keeping all steps and procedures documented in detail so another researcher could replicate the study. I kept a detailed log during the study. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached. I interviewed each participant one time. I invited nine school districts to participate in this study. Three school districts readily accepted, and from that, eight participants were interviewed. Each interview was between 20 to 75 minutes long totaling a combined total of 245 minutes. I audio recorded all interviews with a digital audio recorder with the names of the participants kept confidential. The process of data collection lasted approximately six weeks. This time period allowed sufficient time for each interview, the ability to reclarify any answers, the opportunity for transcription review, and the clarification of understanding. Each transcription was checked against the audio recording at least twice and then reread two more times to ensure accuracy. The interviews followed the interview protocol to ensure the data collected answered the research questions.

Confirmability

The results of the study reflected the voices of the participants; their responses informed the themes and subthemes that emerged during data analysis. Preconceptions or biases were discussed and removed to focus on the actual lived experiences of the participants. I included rich and thick transcript excerpts that support each theme to maintain the participants' voices in the presentation of the findings.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the eight participants, the methods for research including data collection and analysis, and provided statements from the participants that emerged as themes. Primarily, I focused on the major themes that developed with thematic analysis, which included the definitions of bullying, interventions used school policies for investigating, the role of the school counselor, and the improvements suggested. Two other topics arose during the study which include program evaluation and the varied types of bullying. As the topics were discussed in great detail, the major themes identified the experiences of these elementary school counselors as they implemented antibullying programs. Chapter 5 will provide the interpretation, review of the limitations, recommendations for future research, implications for change, and the summary and conclusion for this research project.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Approximately 21% of elementary-aged children have reported bullying (NCES, 2017). NCES also found that about one-third of middle and high school-aged children have experienced bullying. This problem is defined even further with a national web source on bullying, which reported that over 160,000 students are too scared to go to school daily because of threats of intimidation and that suicides related to bullying currently rank as the third highest cause of death in children (NoBullying.com, 2014). There have been existing investigations into bully prevention which have targeted middle and high school students, but not elementary students. Potential gaps are perceived in the professional literature regarding experiences of elementary school counselors related to bully interventions and preventions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of elementary school counselors with implementing an antibullying program. The findings of this study could contribute to consistency and awareness of antibullying programs in elementary schools.

I identified five themes from the research question of this study. I discovered that several participants felt there were barriers which prevented them from consistently implementing antibullying programs in their elementary schools. Specifically, the school counselor's role in the school and in bully intervention and prevention demonstrated areas that need to be addressed. The participants believed that communication with other school personnel could alleviate some of the discrepancies in implementation, and that clarification of roles or duties of elementary school counselor could lead to improvement.

In this chapter, I discuss the results of the literature and theory utilized in this study. I also provide recommendations and implications of the results of the study. Finally, I present the conclusions of the study.

Interpretation of Findings

Five key themes emerged during a thematic analysis of data. These themes were pertinent to the main research question which asked participants to describe their experiences as elementary school counselors in implementing antibullying programs. The themes that emerged were the following: (a) definitions of bullying, (b) interventions used, (c) school policies, (d) role of the school counselors, and (e) suggested improvements. Each of the five emergent themes will be discussed in detail in this section.

Definitions of Bullying

Participants provided an array of interpretations and meanings as they elaborated on their definitions of bullying. For example, participants did not quote directly from a source but explained what bullying meant to them, or how they identified it. Their definitions of bullying provided some suggestions of consensus and some sense of differences. Specifically, some participants felt that bullying can be purposeful or intended to bring harm. This descriptor is supported in the literature in House Bill No. 283 (2005) where bullying was defined as purposeful actions. Olweus further supported this element in his definition indicating that bullying is intentional (2011). Six of the eight participants used either purposeful or intentional in their definitions of bullying.

Another frequently used descriptor of bullying was repetitive. Of the eight participants, four defined bullying as repeated behaviors. Olweus (2011) elaborated on his definition of bullying and indicated that it is repetitive. The Texas Legislature included the word repetitive in the definition of bullying as well (House Bill No. 283).

When defining bullying, three of the participants also stated that a bully uses power over someone else. Wang et al. (2009) noted that the imbalance of power can be felt by the victim, or even by bystanders and onlookers. Hymel and Swearer (2015) further explained the issue of power affects the entire school climate by creating a fearful or disrespectful environment, which reduces learning and creates feelings of dislike for the school, teachers, and staff. Hence, the inclusion of the descriptor of power over someone else is an appropriate element in defining bullying.

Lesser mentioned descriptors in the definitions of bullying provided by participants were horse playing and just being mean. Two participants included these words in their definitions. Each could relate instances of observing these behaviors but did not give academic reasons for their definitions. Horse playing and just being mean are not described in the literature in definitions of bullying. The identification of these terms by two participants seems to indicate that bullying is being misidentified by incorrect definitions by some school counselors.

Interventions

A key theme identified in this study was the types of intervention participants were using in their antibullying programs. As the array of antibullying program options grows endless, school counselors have the ability to investigate and choose various

interventions. A portion of the ASCA national model (2012) addresses bullying

intervention and prevention. Researchers have designed curriculum-based antibullying

programs to aid schools in identifying and stopping bullying behaviors (Bully Prevention

PBIS for Positive Choice, 2013; Committee for Children, 2013). Though there are

specific antibullying program options available, five of the eight participants stated that

they did not utilize specific programs but pulled together activities from a variety of

sources. This allowed them to mesh a diverse variety of presentation methods and topics,

as well as schedule lessons as needed. The list of lesson ideas stemmed from books,

movies, the Internet, and materials from other professionals. The participants stated that

antibullying was a part of a larger guidance program and that usually was focused on for

about a month and then mentioned again in later lessons. Two of the participants

reflected that they had utilized a specific antibullying curriculum program at some point

during a school year. They stated that they incorporated a specific antibullying

curriculum into their guidance programs and that it served as their attempt to present

bullying.

Four of the eight participants stated that they did not have an antibullying

program at all, but they said that instead they responded to bullying issues as needed.

They described their interventions as counseling sessions or group interventions that did

not have a set time or date but were implemented after the bullying behavior had

occurred. They said that they were not doing anything preventative but were being

responsive. The said that their responses to bullying incidents created an awareness of

bullying issues and hopefully prevented future bullying episodes and provided counseling to both the bully and the victim.

School Policies

As the issue of school bullying is becoming more publicized, states are creating laws that require schools to implement policies to address bullying behavior (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011). Specifically, the No Child Left Behind federal legislation of 2002 outlined a school's specific responsibilities for addressing and investigating bullying behaviors. This act also stated that training was needed to implement the interventions. Though this legislation started the antibullying ball rolling across the nation, it did not specify roles, time, funding, or resources to implement such programs (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). Four of the eight school counselors who participated in this study stated that their schools utilized an anonymous online bully reporting system as their main line of communication. Because the reports are anonymous, anyone with knowledge of bullying could file the report. This report is then sent to administrators for investigation. With seven out of the eight participants stating that the principal or assistant principal investigated the allegations, the school counselors did not become actively involved in investigating. In fact, only two counselors reported that they were regularly included in the reporting or investigating stages and were sometimes then called in to counsel with the bully or the victim after the fact. The participants felt that the policies did not specifically include school counselors in the responsibilities because reporting or investigating activities involved discipline, which usually are not the role of school counselors.

The Role of School Counselors

Standards of practice help delineate school counselors' skills, but they do not

define their roles (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). The daily function of school counselors

is determined by local administrators and school dynamics (Pyne, 2011). The roles of

school counselors often are determined by campus needs, and school counselors' non-

counseling activities range from lunch duty to administration. Two participants reported

that their role changes each year depending on their direct administrator. Hence, as new

people move into leadership roles in schools, their ideas and goals determine positioning

and duties assigned to their employees, including school counselors.

When discussing their roles as elementary school counselors, five of the eight

participants reported that they spend a great deal of their days in activities related to

testing, scheduling, assessments, meetings, and clerical duties. The participants

described an array of programs and tasks they maintain yearly. These activities included

special program testing, academic testing, and state testing. They also said that they

collect information for referrals, assess emotional and academic needs, and then

disseminate the information in parent and staff meetings. The school counselors in this

study said that they train staff as needed for special programs and testing. They said that

school counselors directly schedule students' classes and maintain the current class

schedule. They then maintain the paperwork for all of the activities described above.

One participant stated that a considerable amount of her daily schedule does not involve

anything she was trained to do as a school counselor, but she said that she feels that

school counselors have become the "dumping ground" for many tasks. As discussed in

Chapter 1, in distributive leadership, each person in a group has specific roles that support each other and helps facilitate collaboration and success (Janson et al., 2009). This study introduced the discrepancies in the transforming school counselor role in collaborative leadership and being a social change agent that have been suggested by Curry and DeVoss (2009).

Four participants stated that they were usually able to provide responsive counseling to students when issues arose. They felt that students were able to come to see them when they needed counseling or guidance, individually or in small groups. These participants also stated that often their other duties did interfere with their ability to counsel. They felt that they were trained to counsel, and that is what they had hoped their role would be.

In discussing bullying prevention and intervention, three of the participants reported that they did implement specific formal antibullying prevention and intervention activities. Two reported that they tried to target interventions at least once in the fall because many other duties related to testing prohibited them from being available to do so in the spring. One stated that each year, she and her principal planned what they wanted to do for the following year, but that often changed when the time arrived because of other duties. Two participants described their role in antibullying as a team effort and said that they worked closely with their administrators and staff to benefit their campuses. They indicated that they felt that their campus professionals collaborated and decided which tasks each staff member would perform based on abilities and needs. This helped

reduce clerical tasks of these school counselors to an extent, but not completely eliminate clerical duties.

Suggested Improvements

In relation to bullying intervention and prevention, the benefits of counseling services have been documented. Powers-Elliot and Harris (2012) specifically named school counselors as the most highly trained, greatest resource, and the logical leaders for dealing with all types of school violence. Young et al. (2009) and the ASCA (2012) highlighted the fact that school counselors have the relationships, skills, and training not only to work with administrators, students, parents, and the community, but to implement, train, and evaluate ongoing school wide antibullying programs. School counseling degree programs emphasize the importance of counselors developing skills not only to provide counseling services, but to support all students in skills training, behavior monitoring, developing positive self-esteem, and social problem-solving.

Seven participants agreed with SC 04 that counselors should work in elementary schools as counselors are trained to work. They stated that they were trained to recognize and respond to someone's need for emotional help. Goodman-Scott et al. (2013) described the effectiveness of school counselors in lowering bullying behaviors and building a positive school climate. Similarly, Austin et al. (2014) found that school counselors provide many options to help students identify bullying behaviors and help staff understand the needs of students. Six of the participants stated that they felt they could be more productive if their testing responsibilities were reassigned. They felt that

the time allocated specifically to testing increases yearly which proportionately decreases the time they are able to devote specifically to counseling.

Five participants agreed that creating a campus-wide antibullying approach would greatly benefit the school climate. Many school wide programs have evolved in recent years and are providing significant positive outcomes in student climate and resulting in less bullying in schools (Violence Prevention Works! Safer Schools, Safer communities, 2015b). According to the participants of this study, this information is known, but their roles are slow in changing.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations in this study included the participation population, the method of inviting participants, and the data collection method. The first limitation in this study was the small geographical area from which the participants were selected. All of the eight participants of this study came from three small school districts. These were the only elementary counselors in their schools. The results of this study most likely reflect the antibullying experiences of elementary school counselors in small school districts in Texas. This created a data saturation after only eight interviews.

The second limitation relates to data collection method. In this study, I conducted interviews using a semistructured interview protocol. This provided a main research question and several clarifying questions. Six of the eight participants provided very short descriptions of their experiences implementing antibullying programs. Only two provided substantial details. The clarifying questions seemed to lead the interviews. All

participants answered the clarifying questions, but a few elaborated in detail. These responses formed the themes in the data.

Recommendations

The recommendations for action and for future research in this section were based on the results of this particular study. Antibullying programs in elementary schools can be improved so I have provided action recommendations. In addition, further research is needed to better understand bullying in elementary schools and methods for effectively intervening and preventing it.

Recommendations for Action

The findings and results of this qualitative, phenomenological, thematic analysis study provide school administrators, school counselors, and counselor educators with an opportunity to view and understand the experiences of elementary school counselors who have implemented anti-bulling programs. The results of this study can contribute to the awareness and promotion of this topic. Also, this study filled a gap in the literature by investigating the experiences specific to elementary school counselors and their implementation of antibullying programs.

A result that emerged from this study was the need for a school wide collaboration to combat bullying. Only one participant in this study stated that at her school they utilized a school wide approach. Several participants discussed using each staff members' strengths to benefit the campus, but they felt that other duties prevented this from occurring. The participants stated that when they taught antibullying lessons, there was no carry over into other classes or to the school climate. Perhaps other

elementary school counselors will begin moving towards a school wide antibullying program so that everyone can use the same vocabulary, identification, and interventions. When teams work together, they can reach their goals. With this idea, school administrators and school counselors need to work together to discuss their school's needs and select a school wide approach to target bullying.

After the completion of this study, the findings will be disseminated through emailed copies of the summary of this research project to the participants. The school superintendents will receive a hard copy and I will encourage them to share the study results with their school personnel. The results of this study could be useful in elementary antibullying program development.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on this topic, which could include a broader population base, is needed to focus on differences between urban and rural school counselor experiences. After reviewing this study and evaluating the study limitations, I have two recommendations for future studies. The first recommendation involves the participation population. Targeting larger school populations and interviewing only the school counselors who had successfully implemented antibullying programs could give insight into how successful antibullying programs have been implemented in elementary schools. In this study elementary school counselors in a small region of East Texas were interviewed. Another study should interview elementary school counselors in urban settings regarding their experiences in implementing antibullying programs.

Another recommendation would include removing the need for superintendent approval to participate in the study. This possibly hindered school counselor participation. The superintendents may not completely understand the process of the study, and therefore, some did not respond to their invitations to participate in the study. After discussing this topic in a variety of forums over the last couple of years, I found that many school counselors stated they would gladly share their experiences. If school counselors had the opportunity to participate, they probably would agree. In another similar study, school counselors who belong to ASCA or who are active in other professional associations could be invited to participate, rather than asking school districts to participate.

Implications for Social Change

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to examine the experiences of elementary school counselors (Pre-K–5th grade) who have implemented antibullying programs. At the time of this study, I could not find literature specifically related to the elementary school counselors' experiences. The results of this study will fill this gap in the literature. As school bullying is more widely discussed, methods of intervention and prevention can be investigated to determine their effectiveness.

Bullying in elementary schools impacts all aspects of student development. I hope that the findings from this study will provide a positive impact on change that will begin to encourage elementary school counselors and administrators to increase their antibullying programs, and hence, lessen elementary school bullying.

Future studies are needed to determine whether antibullying programs are being implemented in various school settings. Results of this study may provide support for school counselors and administrators to review the need for consistent and effective antibullying programs. This study suggested that there is a need for education on the definition, identification, and interventions related to bullying, as well as an awareness of the school counselor roles and the possibilities of using a school wide approach to mitigate the incidences of bullying.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of elementary school counselors in implementing antibullying programs. I conducted this study to fill a gap in the literature surrounding the experiences of elementary school counselors with antibullying interventions and prevention. Understanding these experiences was important to demonstrating the need for defining and addressing bullying in elementary schools.

I conducted this study by implementing a qualitative, phenomenological, thematic analysis methodology. I recruited eight elementary school counselors who worked with students struggling with bullying issues and who had implemented antibullying programs. I used a semistructured, qualitative interview process to collect data from the participants. I transcribed all interviews verbatim and included their responses accurately. I entered and coded their interviews using NVivo software. Data analysis resulted in the development of five major themes: (a) bully definition, (b) interventions available, (c) policies for intervening, (d) role of the counselor, and (e) improvements

needed and two minor themes: (a) types of bullying observed, and (b) steps to evaluate their program.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide the study's findings founded upon the existing scholarly literature on implementing antibullying programs and the experiences of school counselors, as well as the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 1. As I conducted this study, I have gained a better understanding of antibullying programs and other school counselors' experiences. Knowing my personal experiences and expectations were in the background, I ensured that I followed the interview protocol and supplied verbatim participant response in the interpretation (Yin, 2014). I acknowledged the limitations of this study and provided recommendations for future research. In conclusion, I summarized the implications for positive social change from the findings of this study. With bullying remaining an issue affecting our youth, information such as that provided in this study can highlight areas where change is needed.

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Appendix A: School Counselor Interview

Interview Question

You have been invited to participate in this study because you have implemented an antibullying program in your school. What are the experiences of elementary school counselors in implementing antibullying programs?

Sub-questions

1. How do you define bullying?

2. How often do you investigate reported cases of bullying? What are the different types of bullying you report?

3. What are your policies for investigating bullying?

4. What do school counselors perceive as the role of a school counselor in   bully intervention and prevention?

5. What interventions are utilized for bully interventions and prevention and are they impacting the individual, community, or society?

6. What improvements do counselors believe would deter bully situations?

7. What steps, if any, are administrators and counselors taking to evaluate the counselor's effectiveness and involvement in bully intervention and prevention?

8. Do you have anything to add about your role as a counselor in preventing bullying in schools?

Appendix B: School Counselor Demographics

Role in the School (Please highlight or place an X by your response or fill in a number.)

A. Guidance Counselor_____   B. School Counselor_____

1. How many years have you been an elementary counselor?

      _____ years

2. How many years have your professional duties included implanting an anti- bullying

      program?

      _____ years

Gender (Optional): _____

Appendix C: Cooperation Agreement

Letter of Cooperation from a Community Research Partner

----------Superintendent
----------School District

May 05, 2017

Dear------,

        My name is Shannon Matthews, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University and a junior high school counselor. I will be conducting a research project entitled; The Experiences of Elementary School Counselors in Bullying Intervention and Prevention. I would like to cordially invite your elementary school counselors to join me in an interview to talk about the issues of bullying. The purpose of this study is to ascertain school counselor's experiences in bully intervention and prevention. By gathering this data, school districts and school counselors will find it potentially useful to understand how these experiences, perceptions and decision-making processes compare to other counselors as they describe their involvement in bullying programs. There will be no monetary compensation for participation. Participants will remain anonymous and your identity will remain confidential. Furthermore, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you are willing to allow your elementary school counselor to participate in this study, please sign and email this consent form back to me.

Sincerely,
Shannon Matthews

        Based on my review of your research proposal information, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled The Experiences of Elementary School Counselors in Bullying Intervention and Prevention within the ------- School District. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct individual interviews with our district's elementary school counselors. Participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change. I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

---------Superintendent
---------School District

Appendix D: Sample Letter of Invitation: School Counselor

Date
Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear ………,

      My name is Shannon Matthews, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University and a junior high school counselor. I would like to cordially invite you to join me in an interview to talk about the issues of bullying. The purpose of this study is to ascertain school counselor's experiences bully intervention and prevention. By gathering this data, school counselors will find it potentially useful to understand how their experiences, perceptions and decision-making processes compare to other counselors as they describe their involvement in bullying prevention programs. Participants will remain anonymous and your identity will remain confidential. Furthermore, you may withdraw from the study at any time.

<div align="center">

Date/Time: Flexible with your schedule
Location: Location determined between you and I

</div>

The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and may be conducted on Skype or telephone. I will also conduct a follow up meeting with you, personally, for clarification. This follow-up meeting will last approximately 30-45 minutes in length. I will serve as moderator.

Thank you for considering being a part of this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (936-676-0904) or via email at (shannon.matthews@waldenu.edu.) If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott, via telephone at 1-800-925-3368 ext. 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 5-31-18-0191534 and it expires on May 30, 2019.

Sincerely,
Shannon Matthews
Walden University Doctoral Student

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement Form

THIS AGREEMENT is made as of _____, 2018, by_____, peer reviewer and Shannon Matthews, doctoral candidate at Walden University in Counselor Education and Supervision specializing in Trauma and Crisis, and having its principal place of study and research at 7622 US Hwy 69 N, Pollok, Texas, 75969.

A. The parties to this Agreement have developed or acquired technical and other proprietary information relating to the dissertation study entitled " The Experiences of Elementary School Counselors in Bullying Intervention and Prevention "(hereinafter referred to as "**Confidential Information**") and the parties wish to ensure that the information which may be disclosed to each other is treated in strictest confidence.

B. Each of the party's desire to receive such Confidential Information from the other for the limited purpose of evaluating the suitability of entering into a business relationship or sponsorship of research, and each party recognizes the importance of safeguarding such Confidential Information against unauthorized use or disclosure.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the disclosures made hereunder, and covenants entered into herewith, Shannon Matthews doctoral candidate and _____, peer reviewer agree as follows.

Shannon Matthews**,** doctoral candidate and _____, peer reviewer are willing to disclose such information to each other under the following conditions:

1. Each party's Confidential Information shall be supplied to the other party in written, graphic, photographic, recorded, prototype, sample, or in any other tangible form and shall be identified as being disclosed under this Agreement. Any Confidential Information, which is disclosed in oral form shall be identified as such at the time of disclosure and confirmed in written summary form within thirty (30) days after its disclosure to the receiving party.

2. As used in this Agreement, "Confidential Information" shall mean all data, samples, technical and economic information, commercialization, clinical and research strategies, trade secrets and know-how disclosed or provided by one party to the other in accordance with Paragraph 1, except such information which (a) can be shown by the receiving party to have been in its possession prior to disclosure to it by the other party; (b) at the time of disclosure hereunder is, or thereafter, becomes, through no fault of the receiving party, part of the public domain by publication or otherwise; (c) is furnished to the receiving party by a third party after the time of disclosure hereunder as a matter of right and

without restriction on its disclosure; (d) is independently developed by employees or agents of the receiving party who have not had access, direct or indirect, to the Confidential Information received from the other; (e) is furnished to others by the disclosing party without restriction on disclosure; or (f) is disclosed to a third party with the written approval of the disclosing party.

3. Each party agrees to limit its use of any Confidential Information received from the other party to the evaluation for the additional purpose of negotiating in good faith the terms and conditions of a licensing or research agreement between them, and for no other purpose unless the parties shall otherwise agree in writing. Each party agrees to not make, use, sell, offer for sale, or have made, any product or service based upon the Confidential Information provided to it without executing a licensing agreement. Each party further agrees not to reverse engineer or disassemble the technology disclosed to it.

4. Each party agrees to maintain in confidence and not to disclose any Confidential Information received from the other party other than to employees or agents who have a need to know the Confidential Information for the purpose described in Paragraph 3.

5. Each party agrees not to make any copies in whole or in part of Confidential Information or analyze samples of tangible materials included therein, which are not available on the open market or from other sources, for any purposes other than the purposes set forth in Paragraph 3, and will, upon request by the disclosing party, return all tangible materials furnished hereunder and any notes or memoranda of conversations relating thereto, including any copies thereof.

6. The party receiving Confidential Information under this Agreement shall be held to the same standard of care in protecting such information as the receiving party normally employs to preserve and safeguard its own Confidential Information of similar kind.

7. The obligation of the parties under this Agreement shall terminate on the fifth anniversary of the date of this Agreement.

8. No right or license under any patent application, patent or other proprietary right is granted hereunder by implication or otherwise.

9. This Agreement may not be changed or modified or released, discharged, abandoned, or otherwise terminated in whole or in part, except by an instrument in writing signed by a duly authorized officer of each of _____ transcriber and Shannon Matthews, doctoral candidate**.**

10. This Agreement shall be construed under the laws of the State of Texas.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have executed this Agreement the day and year first above written.

By: _____Date: _____

Title: Doctoral candidate at Walden University in Counselor Education and Supervision specializing in Trauma and Crisis.

By: _____ Date: _____

Title: Peer Reviewer for research study.