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Role of school counselors in deterring juvenile delinquency: a Mississippi pilot study

Wesley A. Hendrix

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ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN DETERRING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY:

A MISSISSIPPI PILOT STUDY

A Thesis

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Wesley Hendrix

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the world, juvenile crime remains a major part of the criminal justice system. Although crime has been on the downward trend for the past decade, there is still much research that has been done is this area and is on-going. Most research that has been done in this area has solely looked at the juveniles searching for reasons as to why they commit crime. This research looked at a different aspect of juvenile crime. School counselors have a direct role in shaping a youth's future life and have influences that others may not have. This qualitative research referenced two leading theories, social control theory and social learning theory. The research showed that counselors were in unique positions to deter at-risk and/or delinquent behavior in students, how they make those connections, and the resources available to them as well as what resources they need.

Keywords: Juvenile Delinquency, Social Control Theory, Social Learning Theory, School Counselors

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father, Darron, who always pushed

me to do my best and to never give up. Thank you and I love you.

Also, my wife, Anna Beth, who endured many nights of hardships

to achieve this endeavor.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Juvenile crimes have been around since crime started to be analyzed. They involved every aspect of crime but on a younger level. A juvenile is "a person who has not attained his eighteenth birthday", and juvenile delinquency is the "violation of a law of the United States committed by a person prior to his eighteenth birthday which would have been a crime if committed by an adult" *See* 18 U.S.C. § 5031 (Department of Justice, para. 1). A person over eighteen but under twenty-one years of age is also accorded juvenile treatment if the act of juvenile delinquency occurred prior to his eighteenth birthday. A simpler definition is: "Juvenile delinquency… is illegal behavior committed by someone before becoming an adult" (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, Hollis-Peel, & Lavenberg, 2013, p. 3).

Although juvenile crime was apparent across the nation, it has seemed to decrease. However, before the downward trend began, juvenile crime increased dramatically from 1973 to 1993 by a rate of 73 percent, and murder arrests increased by 177 percent (Levitt, 1998). Juvenile crime peaked in 1997 with 1.9 million cases reported and declined to about 900,000 in 2015 generating a 53 percent decrease (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2015). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) (2015) also reported that 72 percent of juvenile crime was committed by males and 43 percent of that population was white, followed by African American at 36 percent in 2015. Over the ten-year span provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015), probation was the most common disposition awarded to the delinquent at 60 percent, and placement (private or public

facilities such as jail, home, etc.) was at 26 percent.

Juvenile delinquency has been studied, analyzed, and theorized throughout the years. Among all studies, a delinquent past may be a predictor to a delinquent future, and if there was no guide to change the course, there was no change in behavior (May et al., 2014). The delinquent start could have begun in the home in early years. "Lack of self-control is established in early childhood in families in which a child's behaviour is not well monitored, deviant behaviour is not recognized when it occurs and such behaviour is not punished" (Nakhaie, Silverman, & Lagrange, 2000, p.37). Both May et al (2014) and Nakhaie et al. (2000) agreed that uncorrected delinquency could lead to a lifetime of criminality, whether it was uncorrected by the juvenile or adult figures. Inconsistent parental punishment and improper supervision were strongly correlated to juvenile delinquency (Munyo, 2015). Furthermore, Miller (2014) explained that "parents who supervise their children, recognize the child's misbehavior, and constructively punish and correct the unwanted conduct…" (p. 125) could create a sense of control in the children. As times change and focuses shift, there must be continual research to gain better understandings and to incorporate policies to help curve the threat that exists.

The following qualitative pilot study examined a different approach in relationship to juvenile delinquency. As previously mentioned, past studies examined juveniles and their actions. The research that follows showed the importance of high school counselors to deter delinquency. Given their unique position, they have had direct influence into a juvenile's life and could possibly have had the influence to change what could become a lifetime of exhibiting criminal behavior if not prevented. Two leading theories, social control theory and social learning theory, were synthesized with education practice to determine a high school counselors' ability to detect and deter juvenile delinquency as well as the ability of the counselors to access

available resources. There was a considerable gap in juvenile delinquency research and how counselors can help deter delinquent behavior. This study contributed to a body of knowledge of how to deter delinquency by using those in pivotal influential roles.

Definition of Terms

At-Risk Youth – a child committing delinquent acts in danger of becoming a lifetime criminal (Tidwell & Garrett, 1994)

Juvenile – a person under the age of eighteen *See* 18 U.S.C. § 5031 (Department of Justice)

Delinquency – "conduct that is out of accord with accepted behavior or the law (Delinquency, 2019)

School Counselor – "certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and social/emotional developmental needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success" (ASCA, 2018, p. 1)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the deterrent effect that high school counselors may have on juvenile delinquency. The research questions that guided this study were:

Research Questions:

1. How are school counselors positioned to influence at-risk youth?
2. How are school counselors able to connect with an at-risk youth to deter future delinquent acts?

3. What resources are available or would be beneficial to school counselors when dealing

    with at-risk youth?

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

From the first murder when Cain killed Abel in the Bible to the recent murder of AJ Freund, a 5-year-old, by his parents, all types of crime have manifested itself for centuries. Because of crime, not just murder, criminologists have been researching crime and creating theories in hopes to further understand why crime occurs and ways to curve it. From early the early theory of physical deformities to later theories of learned behavior to even more recent theories of genetics, theories have progressed both far and wide to understand crime.

The current study examined the possibility of deterring crime by using two prominent theories in criminology. Using school personnel, particularly high school counselors, the current study examined their abilities to influence at-risk and/or delinquent youth to deter them from future crime. The first chapter of this study will examine the theories associated with juvenile delinquency, the school setting and delinquency, and school personnel such as teachers and coaches as well as high school counselors.

Theories Associated with Juvenile Delinquency

The following section examined two prominent theories in criminal justice: social control theory and social learning theory. The two theories described delinquency and why it occurs or not. Although the theories were different in scope and reasoning, they were useful when analyzing at-risk juveniles and juvenile delinquency.

Social Control Theory

In 1969, Travis Hirschi produced a book titled *Causes of Delinquency* that illustrated his theory of social bond, later to be called social control theory. Hirschi's social control theory stated that "a person is free to commit delinquent acts because his ties to the conventional order have somehow been broken" (Hirschi, 1969, p.3). There were four elements associated with social control theory: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief.

According to Hirschi (1969), attachment was the connection an individual has with conventional society. Once the attachment has been disconnected or broken, a person is no longer held by the societal norms. Secondly, commitment to persons or institution that follow the social norms may have prevented the juvenile from deviating from those norms such as school, parents, or teachers. A person's commitment to societal norms helped achieve a degree of respect and education; that may have deterred deviant acts because of the fear of loss of the gained status. Involvement also negatively affected juvenile delinquency. If a juvenile was active in sports or any extracurricular activities, delinquency may have prevented that juvenile from being able to participate in such activities, limiting acts of delinquency. Finally, belief was referring to the belief in a system such as conventional norms.

Social Learning Theory

"Social learning is a general theory that offers an explanation of the acquisition, maintenance, and change in criminal and deviant behavior that embraces social, nonsocial, and cultural factors operating both to motivate and control criminal behavior and both to promote and undermine conformity" (Akers & Jensen, 2008, p. 2). The four major elements of the social

learning theory were: differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation.

Differential association was defined as interaction with others and their values, as well as indirect interaction with more distant groups and their values. The definitions were one's own values and how they associate them to society, and they were the foundation of future life for the individual. Differential reinforcement was the reward or punishment gained from committing an act which could be positive or negative. Imitation referred to acting like others by observing their actions in voluntary and involuntary relationships. "The best single predictor of the onset, continuance, and desistance of crime and delinquency is differential association with conforming and law-violating peers" (p. 23).

Behaviors are learned through interaction, but they do not have to be acted upon. The environment in which a youth lived and the friends and family that they may have had were a direct influence, according to the social learning theory. In a study about adolescent smoking, Ronald Akers and Gang Lee stated that a youth was more likely to smoke and to smoke more depending on the company they kept and the attitudes they had about smoking (Akers & Lee, 1996). Depending on the company an adolescent keeps, they would either be for or against deviant behavior, because of the direct influence of peers and relationships.

One element that has been consistently found to be determinant of juvenile delinquency was their relation to delinquent peers (Agnew, 1991). Based off the social learning theory, delinquent peers could have an instrumental role in making a non-delinquent resort to delinquency through imitation and differential association. Agnew (1991b) stated, quoting Akers, that "social behavior [including deviant behavior] is acquired through both direct conditioning and through imitation or modeling of others' behavior" (p. 50). The effect of friends

and the friends' activities have had boundless influences on a young person. They could either direct the youth on a path of following societal norms or on an alternate path of delinquency.

In Berten and Rossem's (2011) study, they gathered data on 11,872 students in a Belgium community with an even mix between males and females, 48.5 percent and 51.5 percent respectively. They found that boys scored higher on delinquency. They also found that:

> Students with low study commitment and students who repeat classes, who felt discriminated against at school, and who consider out-of-school friends to be more important than in-school friends are more likely to be engaged in sexual activity and school delinquency (Berten & Rossem, 2011, p. 193).

They found that best friends were more important than friends of friends when choosing to be delinquent. The study further revealed that peers had an instrumental effect on delinquency, and youth could choose to commit deviant acts based on their perception of receiving praise from their friends.

School Setting and Delinquency

This section reviewed research on the school setting as being a place where delinquency can occur. The nature of the school involved having youth in proximity, and bonds can be formed between the students. Given the relationship between peer relationships and delinquency, the school setting can be instrumental in the development of adolescent delinquency.

"Seventy percent of preteen crimes occur on a school day, and approximately 30 percent of such crimes occur at or near school…" (Miller, 2014, p. 123). The previous quote showed that delinquency can happen on school grounds; because of this, school personnel were in a unique position to deter the acts from happening. School counselors were placed in a unique position at

the school as well as in the juvenile's life. They could be instrumental in shaping a youth's mind at an early age. Students could develop a true connection with a counselor and visit them often. On the other hand, they could have been distant and choose not to visit a counselor or to visit them as little as possible. School counselors must have been proactive in dealing with delinquent students. Their proactiveness could have been a turning a point in the fight against delinquency. The two criminological theories, social control and social learning, examined why juveniles do not commit delinquency and why they do, respectively (Burgess & Akers, 1966; Hirschi, 1969). Since juvenile delinquency could occur at schools, the two theories were appropriate to use as a foundation to find ways to deter delinquency. People have tried programs in the past to deter delinquency with little success, such as Scared Straight programs (Petrosino et al., 2013). Instead of programs, individuals may have been the key to this problem, although there has been limited research in the past. The family or home was the site of the first instructions the youth would receive in life, followed by the school.

The responsibility of teaching youth appropriate behavior falls upon the school after the family (Jenkins, 1995). Patricia Jenkins mentioned that involvement in delinquent behavior could be an effect of school experiences. The school could strengthen the bond between students and the educational process, which could prevent delinquency. In Jenkin's analyzing of Hirschi's data and methods, she confirmed that school commitment has a strong inverse association with delinquency.

School failure was strongly correlated to delinquent behavior (Joseph, 1996). It could have been a result of lack of connection with school either through teachers, curriculum, counselor, or a combination of all three. Janice Joseph (1996), in her study of 272 African American youths, found that "attitudes toward school, involvement in school, and relevance of

curriculum" were significantly correlated to delinquency (p. 348). When distinguishing between male and female results, only involvement in school was significant to females. Among all variables and sex of participants, involvement in school was the strongest predictor of delinquency. Joseph established that experiences in school were related to delinquency and that people in position of power (i.e. teachers, counselors, etc.) are "vitally important to the experiences", and "the teacher who has the continuous contact with the child, and the relationship between the child and the teachers determines the child's attitude toward school" (p. 350). Joseph (1996) also noted that relationships between the student and teacher are needed to help strengthen the bonds to school.

In almost every study examining juvenile delinquency, school was somehow involved in the research. Most questionnaires were completed by students in a school setting and focused on their opinion of school. There was an overwhelming connection between social control and social learning theories and school. Future research should include a focus on personnel to see if there is a connection between them and delinquency. Agnew (1991) stated that attachment to teachers had not been extensively studied. Also, a youth could change their course if the youth was accepted for doing so (Simpson, 2000). It is evident, by prior studies on the two theories, school played an important function in delinquency. The relationship should be expanded further.

The school setting plays an important role as shown by prior research. Although the setting is important, the school personnel play a vital role as well. Teachers and coaches play in important role. They can be seen as role models and provide instructions that can be carried through life. School counselors can be vital as well. They can be pillars for struggling students

helping them overcome adversity and deal with daily struggles of life. They can also help with scheduling state tests or ACTs as well as provide transcripts and other school documentation.

Teachers and Coaches

Teachers and coaches could also be instrumental in a juvenile's life. Teachers provided educational teachings and interactions with the student. Coaches educated the juvenile on teamwork and respect for others and themselves. They could have a profound impact on the juvenile's life and could guide the juvenile to maintain a non-criminal life.

In a study involving student-teacher relationships, Back and Lee found that the higher the relationship, the better a student will adapt to school (Back & Lee, 2015). The study, which included 2,253 students (1,136 boys, 1,117 girls), found that the student-teacher relationship was "negatively associated with juvenile delinquency" (p. 52). The effect of negative association was stronger the higher the student-teacher relationship. They finished their report by saying that it was crucial for positive student-teacher relationships to emerge, and that teachers were a secure base and support system. Although the study was about teachers in particular, the same could be said for school counselors, as they were often who dealt with issues the student had and could form special bonds that would help the student through their schooling and possibly even outside of school.

In a study of 733 students in 8th-12th grade, 277 of which were from urban areas and 456 who were from rural, researchers found that all the delinquency indexes were negatively associated with delinquency save attachment to peers which had a slight positive effect (.05) (Gardner & Shoemaker, 1989). The five indexes were the original four elements of social control theory with an added index of "conventionality of significant others" (p. 486). They concluded

by stating that social control theory had better predictions in rural rather than urban areas, and that attachment to peers was positively associated to delinquency. The authors also stated that "attachment, *especially to teachers* (emphasis added), have more influence on delinquency" than the other elements (p. 492).

Using data from the Nation Youth Survey including 1,725 students, Agnew (1991a) argued that only current delinquency was affected by relations with parents and teachers, and as delinquent peers increased, so did delinquency. Additionally, as commitment to school increased, the inverse happened to delinquency. The study also suggested that commitment to school had a positive correlation to school attachment and a negative effect on delinquency. Parental attachment was also positively correlated to commitment, but school attachment had a small positive affect on delinquency.

In a study of 15 African-American males, Joseph Richardson found that sports, in this case basketball, kept students out of gangs and away from delinquency as a whole (Richardson, 2012). Coaches were in a unique spot to help the youths establish positive relationships in the communities and build a sense a trust among community members. "Coaches played a valuable role in deterring delinquency and violence" (p. 189). Richardson (2012) stated that in the case of an absent male role model, coaches filled that void in the youths' lives. Furthermore, the coaches created a safe haven for at-risk youth. By allowing youths to shoot around in gyms in evening hours, they kept the youths off the streets and corners and away from violence. Richardson also mentioned time as being very significant. Each week, coaches spent upwards of twenty to thirty hours with the youths.

High School Counselors

High school counselors are located in all schools, or there is a counselor assigned to a school district who travels among the schools. They are there for the students in help them in many ways such as emotional support, preparing for college, etc. They have multiple roles within the school, but their main function is directed towards the students and their needs.

According to the American School Counselors Association (ASCA), "school counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling which makes the uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and social/emotional development needs" (American School Counselors Assocation, 2018, para. 1). They also "serve in a vital role in maximizing student success" and help to provide a safe learning atmosphere and protect their individual rights (ASCA, n.d., para. 2). Counselors that spent an increased amount of time with students found a decrease in truancy, as well as decreased suspension rates (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). The upside to school counselors cannot be diminished. A program called 'All Hands on Deck' utilized and changed the counselor's role in the school. It called for counselors to be "more visible and present" and resulted in an increase in the graduation and college preparation rate (Salina, Girtz, & Eppinga, 2013, p. 69).

High school counselors are unique individuals that want to help students be the best they can be. Depending on the size of the school, there could be multiple counselors to keep the counselor and student ratio adequate, which was recommended to be one counselor for every 250 students (ASCA, 2018). The larger school in my study had three counselors because of student population, and the students were assigned to counselors based on alphabetical placement. Also, counselors have shown to influence multiple outcomes, such as lower suspension and disciplinary rates, increased attendance and graduation rates, and an increase in students taking

ACT and higher averages on the ACT (Carey & Harrington, 2010). In a study involving schools in Nebraska and Utah, Carey and Harrington (2010) found that "school counseling adds value to the education of students and enhances their engagement and performance" (p. 3). Schools needed a sufficient number of counselors to address the students' needs, and the researchers also found that the ratio was positively related to student outcomes. Schools must have hired enough counselors for the student body, supported their counselors in a program that is sufficient for all students, and determined which interventions already in place are effective.

Schools could serve as convenient locations for personnel to reach youths (Reback, 2010). Counselors engaged with students either in one-on-one sessions, small groups, or as an entire class depending on the needs of the school, teacher, and counselor. Reback (2010) also noted that most states required a school counselor to have earned a graduate degree in school counseling. In Mississippi, the counselor must have obtained a master's degree in counseling or related counseling field and must be at least 21 years old. *See* Miss. Code Ann. § 73-30-1 (West, 2018). The availability of counselors was also important, which emphasized the need to maintain a proper ratio between the students and counselor. "Counseling availability is strongly related to improvements in students' tendencies to externalize or internalize problem behaviors" (p. 711). In his study, pooling data from 30,000 public schools, the "availability of counselors positively affects student behavior" (p. 721) and the opposite would be understood to be true. He also found that the greater the availability, the greater the student learning.

Counselors must be able to work effectively in various areas of their job. The various areas include counseling techniques and interventions, enacting strategies that are uniquely formed for each juvenile offender. They must understand literature relating to delinquency that "supports and continues to influence efficacious treatment approaches" (Calhoun, Glaser, &

Bartolomucci, 2001, p. 79). The role of counselors is very broad, and the role is uniquely determined by the students in which they serve (Mau, Li, & Hoetmer, 2016). The multiple areas mentioned show the gap in education that is needed.

According to Bersani, Gillham, & Napady (1977), when a problem arose in school, it has always been the counselor who handled the situations. In the study, 101 counselors were asked to complete a questionnaire, which 81 returned. They found that "time devoted to role behavior" was significant and had more correlation with low socioeconomic status (SES) areas than in high SES regions (p. 394). These findings were important because they showed that, in lower income areas, school counselors could have a more pivotal role in shaping a juvenile's life. In the higher SES areas, the researchers found not as high of a correlation, but they established that it may have been because the youth's parents had taken a more active role in their education by talking to teachers, counselors, and/or principles.

"Schools are the primary setting in which much of adolescent delinquency occurs and the most promising setting for the prevention of delinquency" (Lee & Smith-Adcock, 2005, p. 2). Citing recent studies, Lee & Smith-Adcock (2005) showed that only about 6-9% of students accounted for about half of delinquency, and school counselors were charged with finding solutions to these problems. Using longitudinal data on 3,870 females, the authors found that bonding to counselors at an early age decreased delinquency in high school years. From the study, Lee & Smith-Adcock (2005) found that reputation was the highest indicator of delinquency in girls and increasing the bond to school could negatively affect delinquency. They also stated that "counselors can help create an atmosphere that fosters positive student-teacher relationships" (p. 11). To decrease the occurrence of future misconduct, school counselors could create positive relationships with teachers and other personnel including students. Lee and

Smith-Adcock (2005) established that counselors were center figures in education and in building positive relationships.

In a study involving only young African American males, Pérez-Gualdrón and associates found that "school counselors have the opportunity to facilitate students' cultural empowerment and critical consciousness" (Pérez-Gualdrón, Yeh, & Russell, 2016, p. 3). They noted that young males often did not seek counseling services because of "gender role stigmas, unfamiliarity about services, and lack of culturally competent counselors and educators" (p. 4). Citing past research, the researchers found if a youth felt they were supported, it correlated to positive ethnic identities, school engagements, and career development. School counselors were found to be "critical protective factors" that helped with academic engagement and success (p. 7). The study examined young African American males; however, the study could very well cross borders and be effective regardless of race.

The first establishment of learning is the home. Past research has shown that 30 to 40 percent of what a child learns was "acquired in interactions with siblings and parents in the home" (Omoniyi, 2011, p. 3). In understanding delinquency, "families tend to be low SES, unemployed, and divorced" and the youth tended to be "uninvolved in school and exhibited low verbal ability, poor academic records and serious reading problems" (p. 3). Negative behavior may have received a negative response from teachers; on the other hand, positive behavior could have been rewarded, which could dictate the performance of the youth in school. Counselors should have used the unique history and circumstances of the juvenile delinquent to try to better understand approaches that may have worked. They should have counseled the youth on how to resist negative peer pressure as well as evaluated progress of the youth in school adjustment, vocational opportunities, and leisure time. One favorable approach to changing a delinquent's

perception of life was to provide wholesome recreation opportunities in order to prevent delinquent leisure activities as well as to provide the youth with peers that can help to deter delinquency (Omoniyi, 2011).

In a study of 760 school counselors, researchers found that in ranking helping students, post-secondary education was the most important factor, followed by improvement in high school and personal growth and development, and lastly work roles after high school (Mau et al., 2016, p. 87). Specifically, researchers found that approximately 80% of the counselors spent less than 20% of their work hours on "school/personal problems" and almost 65% spent less than 10% of their work hours on "other counseling activities" (delinquency was not specifically noted on the table) (p. 88). They also found that counselors had high expectations and had positive attitudes towards the students they served. From the study, if delinquency was included in school/personal problems or other counseling activities, counselors spent the least amount of time on delinquency and focused on other areas. Since counselors could not drop everything to focus on a potentially small group of students over the majority, they had to be willing to sacrifice their time to devote to these areas in order to have a meaningful and direct impact on a student's current and future life.

Summary and Next Steps

Teachers, coaches, and counselors interacted with students at different levels of the education process. Teachers could be replaced depending upon the grade of the student as they advance, and coaches may have changed depending upon ability level of the student (i.e. junior varsity or varsity). Counselors, on the other hand, stayed in a relatively stable position. A student may have been assigned a different counselor than another student because of their last name, but the student will have had that counselor throughout their high school years. Teachers and

coaches could influence the student but could be replaced as the student progresses. Counselors had several years of relationship with the student. Counselors were educated to do what is best for the student and to help them, whereas teachers were taught to teach and coaches to coach. As stated, counselors' positions could allow them to understand a youth better and potentially deter them from delinquent acts.

The previous literature review showed how juvenile delinquency was deterred through multiple peoples' influence. Teachers could intervene and deter delinquency as well as coaches. In the school setting, any adult could influence the youth depending on their role at the school. However, there were virtually no studies done on how school counselors could fit in this role. The previous literature review showed the expanding role of school counselors, including what they are required to do in a school setting. With all the past research that is available, there was an apparent gap. School counselors were unique in their role. The current study expanded on the previous body of literature to include high school counselors and their possible role in deterring juvenile delinquency.

This chapter has provided an overview of the relevant literature to the study. The research cited showed that there is a connection between school and delinquency. The research also provided evidence that school personnel can be very influential in a youth's life. The research questions derived from the literature review are: (1) How are school counselors positioned to influence at-risk youth? (2) How are school counselors able to connect with an at-risk youth to deter future delinquent acts? (3) What resources are available or would be beneficial to school counselors when dealing with at-risk youth?

Chapter Three will provide an overview of the research design and methodology for the proposed study. The methodological design of the study will be explained in relation to the

research questions. The sampling method and data collection methods will be described, as well as the data analysis tools used for the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This pilot study was designed to be qualitative. The study incorporated inductive

reasoning as well as grounded theory. Inductive reasoning was of great interest for this study, as

it allowed for data to be collected and analyzed in order to compare and contrast the data to

create a potential theory (Klauer & Phye, 2008). Grounded theory worked along with inductive

reasoning. Grounded theory allowed for the creation of a theory based on the data collection.

Specifically, grounded theory was designed "to identify, develop, and integrate concepts"

gathered from participants rather than the participants themselves (Corbin, 2017, p. 301). In

combination, the qualitative data gathered allowed for analyzation and discoveries of trends that

existed.

Population and Sample

The current study conducted interviews with school counselors. In order to select a more

representative sample of counselors, this study used a stratified random sampling approach to

select counselors for recruitment. There are 1,107 high schools encompassed in 165 school

districts in the state of Mississippi (Edweek.org, 2018). Of the 1,107 high schools, 267 schools

were selected as the target population due to having a sports program, which allowed for further

breakdown by school size. This was further limited to the northeast region of the state for the

purpose of this study. The schools were placed in groups according to size using the Mississippi

High School Activities Associations (MHSAA) criteria (MHSAA, 2016). MHSAA organized the

schools into 6A-1A grouping for sports competitions based on population size, with 6A being the largest (1892-1051, 1038-734, 723-475, 462-283, 279-202, and 200-53 population sizes, respectively). They were separated in this fashion because larger schools may or may not have had more counselors, and larger schools had more students, which may or may not have increased delinquency rates and involvement of counselors in delinquency interventions. A stratified random sampling approach was used to select schools from each grouping to ensure that there was equal representation across the northeast region of the state of Mississippi.

One benefit to the stratified random sampling approach is that it ensured there was equal representation across all groups (Black, 1999). In Mississippi, there are many schools across multiple divisions. Using stratified random sampling, the schools were mostly represented. A disadvantage to stratified random sampling was the difficulty in applying the sample (Black, 1999). For this study, the schools had to be grouped and then analyzed using a random number generator to select the school. Stratified random sampling increased the level of difficulty as well as increased the amount of time required to properly set up the sample (Black, 1999). The targeted 4A school was not able to be contacted to establish possible recruitment. The following table showed the representation of the schools.

Table 1

School Breakdown for Stratified Random Sampling

Classification	Number of Schools in Population	Number of Schools Selected
6A	3	1
5A	4	1
4A	9	0
3A	12	1
2A	8	1
1A	12	1
Total	48	5

Data Collection and Interview Questionnaire

Once the 5 schools were selected, the principle, assistant principle, or headmaster was contacted to seek permission from them to speak with the high school counselor. Permission Letters (see Appendix A) were signed and retrieved prior to contact with the counselor. After contacting the counselor to see if they were interested in participating in the research study, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was sent to them through email and read over prior to the interview beginning. Once it was signed and returned, a time was set up that best suited the counselor. The scheduled interview was completed in a private setting, either in the counselor's office or a similar setting. The location was of the counselor's choosing to make them feel more comfortable during the interview process. In almost every location, the only people in the room were the counselor and the researcher, which promoted a sense of confidentiality and lessening the possible fear of negative consequences. If the counselor wished to have another person in the room at the time of the interview, their request was granted which happened twice. During the

interview process, interview protocol was broken twice. Each time was unexpected as the researcher was expecting to interview only one counselor when two were present. These two interviews were noted in this thesis.

Approval for this study was granted through the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board. Ethical concerns did arise and were discussed as follows. Due to the collection of personal information from the participants, informed consent was emailed to them before agreeing to participate. Informed consent was also read before the interview started and was signed. A copy was given to the participants if they desired to have one. The participants were not rewarded in any way for their participation. Their information was kept confidential, and the data collected was cataloged and only identifiable by use of pseudonyms. Access to the information was open to key research personnel. Personal information was gathered, such as name and institution, for purpose of differentiating the institutions and is not disclosed. The information gathered will be secured at the University of Mississippi for five years. Also, the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) exam was completed prior gathering data.

The interview schedule (see Appendix C) took anywhere from one hour to one and a half hours depending on the length of responses given by the counselors. The interview schedule included 11 open-ended questions designed in a semi-structured format. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to guide the interview as well as allow for follow-up, clarification, and elaboration on questions, which provided the participants the opportunity to expand on their answers. A disadvantage to this structure was that the participants could express their opinions, which could negatively affect their job (Newton, 2010). An example of the interview schedule is listed below.

1. How do you identify "at risk" or "delinquent" students? That is, how are they brought to your attention?

   a. When a student is identified as "at risk" or "delinquent" are they required to come see you?
      i. If so, how often?
      ii. If not, are there other protocols in place to work with these students?

2. What do you see as major causes of students becoming "at risk" or "delinquent"?

3. Where do you think problem behaviors come from? That is, how do students become "at risk" or "delinquent"?

The data was collected through a voice recorder. The tapes are stored at the University of Mississippi. In order to verify that the data was understood properly, member checking was enacted throughout the interview process. Member checking allowed for correct understanding of the responses as well as building rapport with participants (Iivari, 2018). Once the data was collected, it was converted into written words verbatim. Speech recognition software through Microsoft Word was used to convert the recordings into transcripts. Any missing words were manually added for completeness and all transcripts were reviewed for accuracy. Once converted to a word format, the data was analyzed using the program NVivo. Using this program allowed for the researcher to further analyze the data to discover any trends.

Analytic Strategy

A narrative analysis approach was taken by using comparative analysis and deducing patterns that emerged (CIRT, 2018). This approach allowed for each participant to have a voice in the study. It showed reemerging themes and gave the researcher an understanding of each participants' thoughts and actions when dealing with at-risk juveniles. Each counselor had unique or similar ways of handling at-risk students. These differences were more visible studying each response independently as well as within a group. Through analysis, major themes were

developed based upon the interview questionnaire. Minor themes were then created from the major themes that were targeted.

Summary

The purpose of the qualitative pilot study was to examine the impact high school counselors may have on deterring delinquency and preventing students from becoming at-risk. The study utilized interviews of the school counselors. Participants for the study were selected through stratified random sampling and permission was granted from the principal before contact was made with the counselors. Qualitative data was collected through interviews of the participants. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and obtained for the use in the proposed study. The transcriptions were analyzed for emerging themes that related to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative study to examine how high school counselors interact and deter at-risk behaviors and delinquency among students as well as the resources available to the counselors in this endeavor. This chapter presented the organization of data analysis, the presentation of the descriptive characteristics of participants, and the findings.

Organization of Data Analysis

To examine the capabilities and resources of the school counselors, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted using an interview guide (See Appendix D) so that each participant was asked a set of similar questions. The transcripts of these interviews were used in the current study to specifically examine the capabilities of deterring delinquency and at-risk actions and the resources for the counselors. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are school counselors positioned to influence at-risk youth?

2. How are school counselors able to connect with an at-risk youth to deter future delinquent acts?

3. What resources are available or would be beneficial to school counselors when dealing with at-risk youth?

These three questions were examined through a content analysis of the interview transcripts. In the process of unrestricted coding, or "open coding" (Strauss, 1990), the researcher sought to

identify patterns, themes, and common categories from the transcripts that related to the research questions. NVivo 12 Pro, a qualitative software program, was used to organize the content analysis. The researcher thoroughly read each transcript, line-by-line and word-by-word to discern significant patterns and themes. Once completed, the established patterns and themes were examined to understand the participants' perceptions and to answer the posed research questions.

Presentation of Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

The demographics of the 7 participating school counselors are reported in Table 2. These counselors were recruited in order to provide their perceptions of and actions toward the at-risk and delinquent youth of their respective institutions. The names being used in the table were pseudonyms assigned to each participant to maintain the anonymity of each individual.

Table 2

School Counselors and Years of Experience

Counselor	Total Years of Experience	Years of Experience at Current Location
Tonia	17	10
Becky	7	2
Glenda	7	3
Linda	6	6
Anna	11	11
Kayla	15	6
Hallie	2	2
Total	65	40
Average	9.29	5.71

Findings

The three research questions and their corresponding findings were presented

concurrently to facilitate comprehension. As stated previously, all three research questions generated qualitative data. The researcher utilized codes and themes to assist with developing a narrative description of findings. In analyzing the data, fifteen codes were created that were directly related to the interview questionnaire. The codes were the central ideas surrounding the questionnaire and each code had sub-codes to more adequately explain the information. In all, 106 codes were used to analyze the information. The major codes were analyzed.

Before the research questions were evaluated, the definitions of "at-risk" and "delinquency" needed to be explored, so counselors were asked about their definitions of at-risk and delinquent students. It was crucial to understand their definitions to fully understand and analyze their responses.

Only one counselor described an at-risk definition that included behavior problems. Hallie described behaviorally at-risk as:

> At-risk for behavior issues, a lot of times especially in the high school is, they're with the wrong, they're with the wrong group, they're with people that they don't need to be with that are kind of getting them off track. It's a little harder to get control of because I mean we can't control who they're friends with. Mom and daddy can't control who they're friends with a lot of the times, so they're at risk of getting to the delinquent stage, but they haven't fully gone over that line yet.

The remaining counselors, however, described at-risk students in a more academic setting. Linda described it as a student who is at a "higher risk of failing academically or who may be at severe risk of dropping out of school." The only counselor to have a behavior at-risk definition also had an educational at-risk definition. Hallie additionally described educational at-risk as "they're not doing what they need to do in the classroom. A lot of it's more they want the attention from other students, they're not really focusing on the schoolwork." Tonia also described absenteeism and falling behind as their definition of at-risk. She also had a broad definition as well. She described a mindset of at-risk students by saying "I mean just not have any kind of a goal, any kind of a

purpose, ending up in jail." Becky also described failing and absenteeism to define at-risk but also noted that "a student that have a troubled home life or maybe not the support that they need at home" as a catalyst for being at-risk. Glenda had a vague definition of "anything that prevents the child from leaving the school and being successful to me is at-risk which could go into several different areas." Anna referenced home life as an at-risk variable by stating that "they've already had someone in the family who maybe dropped out." Kayla explained her definition of at-risk with reference to learned behavior by saying that "Parents don't understand this, 'Oh my child just missed one day' this week. It's a pattern and it becomes a pattern, and you'll see it year after year after year." Most counselors had differences between at-risk and delinquency with no firm line to distinguish between the two. The counselors' description of the differences between at-risk and delinquency were generically determined by if the student was able to be saved.

Throughout the interviews, counselors were more willing to discuss at-risk students more so than delinquent. Hallie had an interesting take on delinquency. She stated that "delinquent, the word itself just to me sounds terrible, but to me they're, they're, they're far over the line to where I don't know what I can do." As an example, she described a student that is a senior… "he's doing what he wants, and he has that sense of nobody's gonna do anything, nobody can touch me, nobody can tell me what to do, so we've got others here involved in things that they shouldn't be."

These responses showed the variety of definitions from counselors. The variety of definitions also expressed the much-needed firm definition of an at-risk youth that can cross educational lines. An at-risk youth definition was needed that can be expressed to all occupations dealing with youth, so counselors, as well as teachers, administrators, coaches, etc., can understand what they are looking for.

Research Question 1: How are school counselors positioned to influence at-risk youth?

Figure 1

Major Theme #1 and Related Minor Themes
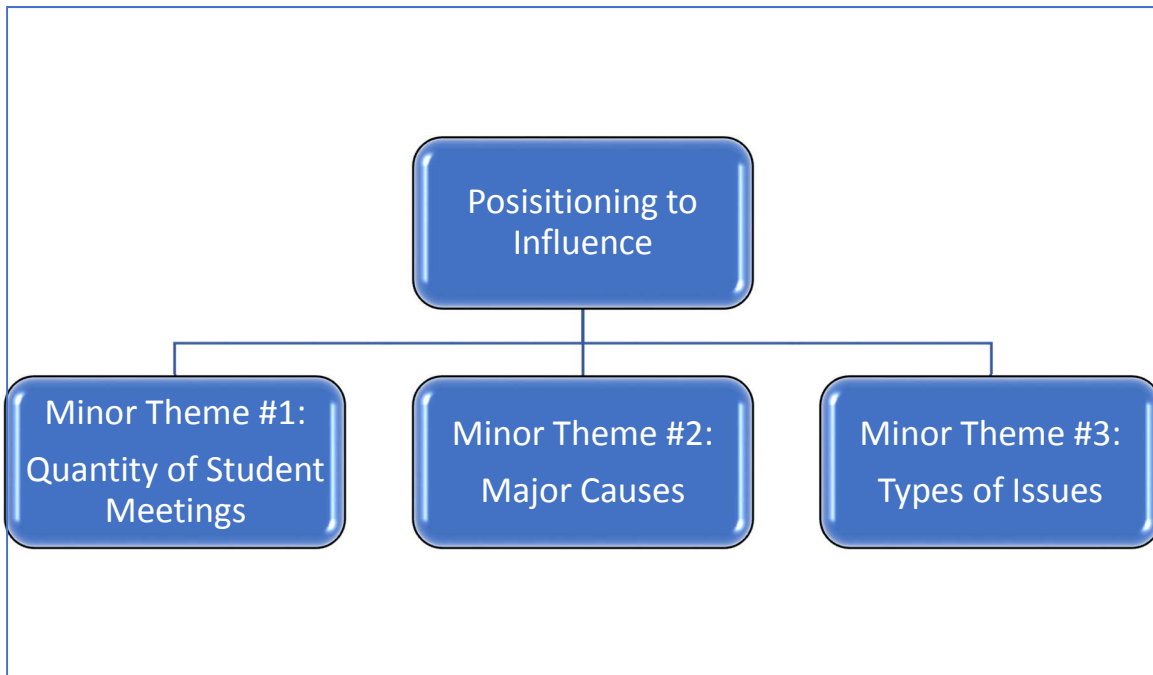
All participants were asked about their experience in dealing with at-risk and/or delinquent youth as well as to give examples without breaking confidentiality of the students (See Appendix D). The answers to these questions, as well as answers offered throughout the interview, provided insight into the way participants were positioned to connect with at-risk or delinquent youths. Based on the first major theme, three minor themes were established from the interviews (See Figure 1).

Initially, school counselors were asked "How many students do you meet with each week/per day? How long does each meeting typically last?" (See Appendix D). When specifically asked about the number of meetings with at-risk and delinquent students, the counselors answered with reference to at-risk more so than delinquent. Linda stated that "If we're

talking about you know at risk for dropping out, a good many. Um, if we're talking about at risk for you know trouble with the law that kind of thing, not as many." Tonia mentioned that they have about 30 out of 500 juniors that are failing with a possibility of dropping out, but "I don't see that many every day." Hallie stated that "I would say when we talk about the four or five a day, the majority of those are at-risk." Glenda mentioned a program that they incorporate for at-risk students. "TST (teacher support team), we have a group of teachers and administrators that go in, and we meet with students who are at-risk of failing or could be once again behavioral issues." She mentioned that they see about 15-20 students on those days, but they are only held twice a month. Anna and Kayla agreed that they see about ten students that they considered at-risk, but as far as delinquency, Anna stated that "at-risk would probably be a larger number than the actual delinquent." Out of the seven participants, six counselors gave an estimated amount of at-risk and delinquent students that they meet with. The length of the time varied among all counselors, but the reason given was similar among them. Linda explained the reason clearly when she said, "Depending on the reason that they're in here, I'll say I've had kids at the longest the whole period and our periods last about 50 minutes and probably at the shortest, maybe about 20 minutes."

The first minor theme identified during the coding process was the idea of the major causes that trigger a youth to enter the at-risk stage or become delinquent. All the counselors gave different opinions on the subject with many overlapping characteristics. When asked "What do you see as major causes of students becoming 'at risk' or 'delinquent'?", the counselors had a great deal to say. The major causes are important to not only understand why youth become at-risk or delinquent, but it showed that school counselors are aware of situations. Their understanding helped them to acknowledge an issue and try to help the best that they can. Not all

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situations were preventable, but the counselors still understood and tried to help. The two most mentioned causes were home life and parental involvement.

Six of the seven counselors mentioned "home life" as a major cause. Linda mentioned the home life as having a negative result at school saying that "as far as their home life is not as good, so of course school is not a priority." The same counselor also said "We have a lot of kids that live with grandma" which references the lack a parental support at home. Tonia also described a similar situation with "another thing is their home environment. It's um some of these kids are on their own. You know parents may be a single parent or either they are, the parents working all the time." Glenda mentions that "Um in some kids I think at-risk don't have the support at home, and sometimes all they have is here." Anna explains how crucial home life can be. She stated "if they're not getting help at home with any of their homework, they get discouraged. If they don't know where they're putting their head down at night, then they're not going to do their homework." Home life was the most re-occurring theme among the counselors as far as major causes. They agreed that if the home life is disrupted, school would fall to the wayside. The basic needs of a youth must have been met. If they were not, nothing else mattered. Referencing the Hierarchy of Needs by Maslow, Kayla mentioned that "we keep some extra food, so sometimes they'll come in and say you know I don't have a snack today, and we will give them a snack." She went on to say that if the kids were hungry, they were not going to be focused on school.

Five of the seven counselors stated that parental involvement was instrumental in separating at-risk and delinquent students from non-delinquent or at-risk students. Linda stated that "those are the kids whose parents are probably never seen coming to the school or they're not calling, or you know they're not really concerned about their child's academic needs." Hallie mentioned that

it doesn't necessarily have to be a parent… "I mean doesn't have to be a parent, it could be a grandparent, aunt, uncle, somebody outside of the school system that holds them accountable for their actions and makes them come to school, makes them mind." Glenda simply stated that "the lack of parental support" is a factor. Anna stated that "typically, where they're raised, of course, has a huge impact in parental involvement on their, as far as their risk for, delinquent or anything." Kayla mentioned that just overall "Some kids need, a lot of kids I would think would need more background support at home, and they're not getting it."

The lack of parental support at home directly influenced the behavior at school, according to the responses. If a student had a parent that was not interested in their academics, the student would reflect that in their own interests academically. The mentality could cause a decrease in academic performance, an increase in absenteeism, and/or an acceleration towards possibly dropping out. The parental involvement was a big factor in the success or failure of a student. Not only did it affect performance, it also affected the students' at-risk or delinquency status. If a parental figure was absent on education, the student could act out in class or cause disruptions because there were not any repercussions at the home, and as mentioned, school repercussions were not a priority to them because they were not interested in the school setting.

The third minor theme identified was the type of issues that counselors are made aware of when dealing with at-risk and/or delinquent youth. The counselors, in order to connect with the student, talked with the students to determine any underlying causes as to why they were acting the way they were. Once a counselor determined the underlying issue, they could have reported back to the teacher or administrator explaining the behavior or made recommendations for further evaluation depending up each unique situation. The counselors dealt with a wide variety of issues. During the interview process, nine distinct issues were brought up, ranging from home

to bullying to conflict among students and teachers. The top two most mentioned themes were discussed in this chapter. Home life was once again at the top of the list and mental health issues followed.

Six out of seven counselors agreed that the home was the basis for everything. If the home situation was not adequate, students would start to fail, not necessarily academically but in several different aspects. Linda described a situation where the student must have taken on additional roles. She stated that she has some students who had "severe home issues whether it may be absent parent or them having to take on roles as adults, so they may be working a lot, so academic starts to fail." Conflict at home was also a re-occurring theme. Kayla mentioned that students could be pre-occupied by events of the previous night. "Mom and dad were fighting last night, and they didn't get a lot asleep, mom didn't come home last night I'm not really sure where she went." Issues such as this could cause a student to be absent minded at school because of what happened. If they were not focused on the subject or test, they could be subject to academic failure, which could put them in the at-risk category. Behaviorally, situations at home can have a negative impact in the school setting. Anna mentioned that "they're having to be the adult at home, and it affects them here dealing with anger because they if they're being the adult at home; sometimes, they don't like to be told exactly what to do." Students could have the mentality that they were grown and did not have to abide by certain rules or listen to authority because they were the grownup at home. The home had the ability to start the students' day off on a good note or a bad one. The situations that result from home life can create at-risk or delinquent youth even if not intentional.

Five out of seven counselors discussed mental health as an issue they were dealing with. For clarification purposes, this section is not referring to mental retardation or similar types of

medical disabilities. The counselors referred to suicidal ideations and depression from the students as another one of their top issues that they were dealing with. Although not elaborate on the topic, the counselors mentioned mental health as being a real and pressing issue among students. Several counselors causally mentioned depression among students, as well as defiant disorders and ADHD. With specific reference to ADHD, Kayla mentioned that "they are engaged in what's going on in the classroom. They can answer the questions. They know what's going on, but their activity is a disruption, disruption to the other students and a distraction." She also mentioned that they gave the students quiet fidget gadgets, so the student could fidget quietly and not be a distraction. Hallie mentioned that suicidal ideations were growing among students. She stated that "I've had a lot more of suicidal ideations and attempts than last year and that's is only 2 years of experience, but this year I've had a lot more of that than last year especially at the high school." She did give a possible reason for the increase. She stated that may be because it was more mainstreamed now and not taboo, that is, that people were talking about it more.

Overall, the counselors dealt with several different issues among students, and every situation was unique. Although possibly the same situation, the circumstances were rarely the same. Because the counselors dealt with so many different aspects of a student's life, they were in a unique position to be available to them. They may not necessarily have had all the answers or been able to intervene in a positive way, but they were there for comfort and had resources available to them for further intervention.

Research question #2: How are school counselors able to connect with an at-risk youth to deter future delinquent acts?

Figure 2

Major Theme #2 and Minor Themes
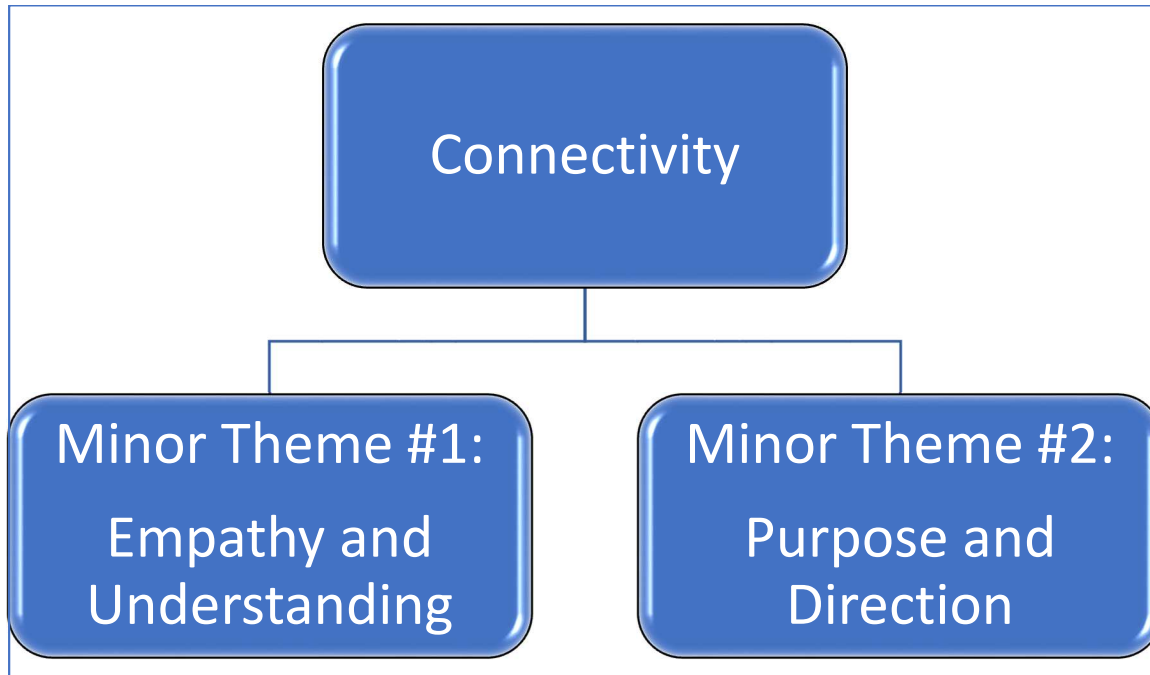
The major theme that was established when seeking to answer the second research

question was how the counselors connected with the students that were brought to them. To

answer this research question, a different approach was taken. Instead of asking about programs

or policies to understand how counselors connected with youth, counselors were asked about

how they see their role in dealing with at-risk and delinquent youth. Their responses were similar

in nature. All the counselors described connecting to the youth and trying to build relationships

to promote a sense of security. Linda described a feeling that summarized all the counselors'

responses. She stated that "they're more likely to want to be here, to want to work and do

something if I believe them, maybe they can believe in themselves just a little bit." Hallie

described a similar scenario by stating "I try to be that person that they feel comfortable enough

to come too say what's going on without them being scared of getting in trouble or you know

saying something that's offensive." Based on the second major theme; two minor themes were presented (See Figure 2).

The first minor theme that emerged was the idea of empathy and understanding. Of the seven participants, four counselors described a sense of just being there for the student during their times of need. Linda described her role as trying to "find out why kids aren't coming to school or what's going on at home and how can I help and is there something that I can do." The same counselor mentioned that she used previous examples of at-risk youth when trying to show what was possible for the struggling youth. Hallie described herself as a liaison between teachers and administration. "I try to be that person that they feel comfortable enough to come to say what's going on without them being scared of getting in trouble or you know saying something that's offensive to somebody else." She described it as just being there for the students to comfort them and allow them to express themselves. This allowed her to connect with the student to gain an understanding of what was going wrong in their life.

The second minor them that arose was giving the student a sense of purpose or direction in life. Three of the seven school counselors described this type of connection among their students. Tonia described her role as:

> The goal is to then go beyond that. I still feel like my whole goal would be to give them sense of purpose and direction, light in the tunnel, and get out of that rut, change some habits, learn from their mistakes, try not to make the same mistakes twice, that kind of... Just to be that encourager to get on track.

Giving the students a sense of purpose and direction allowed the student to have a good relationship with the counselor. It opened doors for conversation and even friendship. Becky said that a student came in crying one day and just sat there and called her mom. On the phone, she told her mom that the counselor was her best friend. She described her role as being the caring adult that tried to show how important the student was even if they did not see it. Kayla
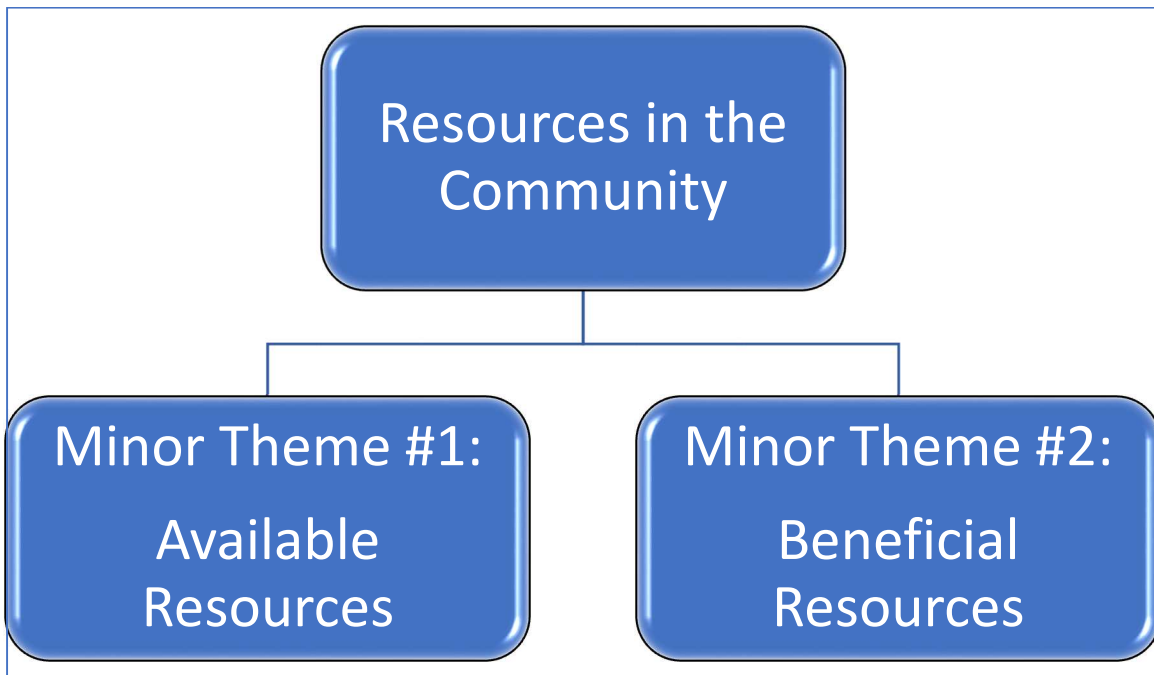
described her role as "Someone that is safe. Someone that's trustworthy. Someone that it's a constant you know we are here, and you know and we're genuine."

Each of the counselor described different ways in which they connect to an at-risk youth. Their ways were different in small aspects, but each was genuine and productive. Sometimes all a student needed was someone to hear them out. Sometimes they may have needed more help than what the counselor could give. If that arose, the counselor usually had resources that were available to them.

Research question #3: What resources are available or would be beneficial to school counselors when dealing with at-risk youth?

Figure 3

Major Theme #3 and Minor Themes

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   Resources in the  │
                    │      Community      │
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
           ┌───────────────────┴───────────────────┐
  ┌────────────────────┐                 ┌────────────────────┐
  │  Minor Theme #1:   │                 │  Minor Theme #2:   │
  │     Available      │                 │     Beneficial     │
  │     Resources      │                 │     Resources      │
  └────────────────────┘                 └────────────────────┘
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The third major theme that emerged from the interviews was the describing of resources available to the counselors and the resources they believed would be beneficial to them. The ability of school counselors to do their job relied on the resources that were available to them. A

counselor could only do so much on their own, and when they needed help, the resources may or may not have been available to them. The counselors were asked about the available resources in their area as well as what they thought would be helpful to them. The location of the school seemed to play the largest role in resource availability. Linda described a dire situation. She stated that "Honestly, I don't think we have a whole lot of resources, and I guess mainly because you know we're such a small town, small community." Tonia mentioned that "There may be some, but it is not always. We can't leave sometimes. We can't leave our job to go to some of these trainings." Working for the largest school in this sample, she still expressed that availability to attend workshops is still a problem that counselors face. Based on the third major theme, two minor themes were established (See Figure 3).

The first minor theme that arose was that of the resources available to the school counselors in dealing with at-risk and/or delinquent youth. Five of the seven school counselors elaborated on the subject explaining their resources. Linda mentioned that since the school was in a small town, they didn't have many resources at their disposal. She mentioned that they do have "a lot of resources when it comes to home life type of things such as you know if you're homeless or if you need case management services or family resource center." Several of the counselors mentioned Lifecore as a resource available to them. According to the Lifecore website, "The goal at LIFECORE Health Group is to establish an accessible, comprehensive, integrated healthcare system for individuals who suffer from a behavioral health disorder, have a developmental disability, or suffer from a chemical dependency" (Lifecore, 2014). Although Lifecore was used in cases of mental health disorders and exceeded the scope of this research, it was still a viable resource for counselors to refer to.

Hallie had an interesting resource that no other school had. She mentioned that they had three retired coaches that "their sole job is to come in and meet with guys and girls who are pretty much already in the at-risk stage and try and just talk to him, figure out what they're missing, what they need." She mentioned that the coaches would take the kids out to lunch or just hang out with them. All the counselor had to do was just text or call the coach to let them know about a student. The use of coaches to connect with the students was an intriguing idea. The coaches were no longer part of the school system, so students may have felt more comfortable with them and explained what is going on in their lives. The coaches then would refer to the counselor to let her know what was going on so the counselor could intervene if necessary.

Tonia mentioned that her school did not have many resources for at-risk students. She mentioned cost and location of training as well. "Cost is a factor too. Some of these, there are phenomenal workshops and conferences and stuff and all that, but it takes a lot of money to go." She also had another interesting take on the available resources. She mentioned that "I think the resources are out there, not necessarily in North Mississippi." Becky and Glenda had a similar view. They mentioned the Boys and Girls Club as an amazing resource in their community, but it focused on younger kids such as Elementary and Junior High. Glenda stated that "With our high school kids, it is just not there." Kayla stated that "We need more. I was gonna say we are limited because we're rural. Um we are very limited on our resources." She mentioned that the local church provided tutoring in the past. The church also provided meals for students to take home on the weekend so they can have something to eat. She stated "that's been a great resource for it for our students as far as the food goes, and when they did the academic tutoring, that was great. We just don't have enough of it."

The second minor theme that emerged was additional resources that counselors thought would be beneficial to them. Six of the seven counselors enlightened on the subject. Linda mentioned "more community support." She also wished for an alternative to detention or alternative school. "I wish we had an alternative school where kids could go and get more job training or take more classes that were solely for the workforce" because some kids dd not believe they will use algebra or chemistry, so it was not important for them to learn. Hallie also believed in more community support. She mentioned that "not just the schools backing you, the whole town's backing you a little bit. That might help a little bit with those who do have some problem behaviors." She also mentioned that an additional counselor would be helpful because of the workload.

Tonia referenced workshops again:

Like I said if something was closer, local like at Ole Miss during the summer where you know counselors could attend half a day even that way, you're not out a whole day that kind of thing. And not costing anything. But and to give you more of realistic. I mean you can read textbook stuff all day, but when it comes down to the nuts and bolts, I mean you got to have realistic in how to deal with it. I mean this is a hard population.

Glenda recommended additional programs that are available to high school students such as Big Brother, Big Sister. She said that "some of these kids just need a person, and a person that can come in and they can meet with, they can lunch with them, they can talk with them." She mentioned that some type of mentor program would be beneficial to the students.

Anna stated that increased funding would be extremely helpful. Also, online programs would be very beneficial to students who were behind. "If we had a program that's designated like some other school districts, that is specifically to get them caught up or to maybe even graduate before expectation, that would be useful." She did state that she did not want it to be

abused such as a GED program. She said that some students would abuse the GED program just to get out of school.

Summary

In this chapter, the findings of the qualitative study were reported by presenting the responses related to each of the research questions concurrently. Three major themes were identified, and seven minor themes were identified. The first major theme was related to the first research question, and it stated that counselors were in a unique position to have a direct influence and possibly deter at-risk and delinquent students from future acts. Three minor themes were identified related to the first major theme. These minor themes were (a) the quantity of at-risk and delinquent students seen by the counselor weekly, (b) the major themes that they saw as reasons for becoming at-risk and/or delinquent, and (c) the types of issues that the counselors dealt with in at-risk and/or delinquent youth.

The second major theme was related to the second research question, and it stated that the counselor connected with students in a variety of different ways, each unique to the situation and student. Two minor themes were identified related to this second major theme. The two minor themes were (a) having empathy and understanding of the unique situations and (b) giving a sense of purpose and direction.

The third major theme was related to the third research questions and it stated that counselors had very limited resources at their disposal and wished for more beneficial resources in their community. Two minor themes were identified related to this third major theme. The two minor themes were (a) although some schools had great resources, most counselors determined they did not have enough and (b) more resources in the community were very beneficial in dealing with at-risk and delinquent students.

In Chapter Five, the conclusions drawn from the preceding findings were presented. The discussion of the conclusions included references to the two leading criminological theories presented earlier. After presenting the conclusions, the implications for future research and practice were detailed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the findings detailed in the previous chapter. These conclusions were discussed relative to the existing research provided in Chapter Two. Implications for future research were also presented.

The counselors in this study all tried to connect with their students. They tried to help them see the possibility of a bright future, and they bonded with them and helped them to understand their struggles. They created a sense of belief in the student to help them succeed and to stay positive. Counselors also had a positive outlook on the students, which can rub off onto the students, and counselors could be mentors and give the student a role model to look up to and model themselves after. The study is important to understand the ability of counselors to potentially deter at-risk and/or delinquent behavior. The purpose of this study was to examine the deterrent effect that high school counselors may have on juvenile delinquency. Toward this end, the findings of this study lead to three major conclusions.

First, the counselors mentioned the home and parental involvement as major factors toward at-risk behaviors. If students felt disconnected from their home or parents, the four elements of the social bond theory were broken. They were no longer attached to their parents, committed to school, involved in the school process, or believing that school is relevant. Secondly, the counselors repeatedly discussed the disruptions in class, alternative school, absenteeism, failing, etc. as direct repercussions from a negative home life or parent involvement. Finally, several

counselors mentioned that the negative activity was learned from observing other students. Students imitated other students that they saw get away with disruption. Peer influences have been shown to have a negative effect on youth (Agnew, 1991). Aside from peer influences, family practice could have a negative influence on behavior. If parents kept the child home because they pretended to be sick, the child could learn that every day they were "sick", they could just stay home.

Research question #1 asked about the position of counselors in influencing youth. From the interviews, the counselors were in a prime position to encounter at-risk and/or delinquent youth. They saw several students a day that would qualify as at-risk or delinquent. They mentioned the many issues that they were involved in such as absenteeism, mental health, negative home life, behavior issues, etc. Counselors were involved with so many different aspects of a student's high school career and not all of it was bad. They also deal with test scores, ACT scores, and collegiate planning. The multi-faceted job that counselors are required to do places many students in their path. Because of this, they were in a unique position to influence the lives of students either directly or indirectly. One counselor mentioned that she would just see students in the hall and lock eyes with the student, letting them know that they are being noticed. A simple gesture such as that could deter a student from negative behavior.

Research question #2 involved how counselors connected to the student. Most of the counselors took a caring approach. They wanted to be the person that the student could confide in and not worry about the repercussions of doing so. They wanted to be a guide, a liaison. The counselors wanted to be empathic toward the student and build solid relationships of trust and understanding. Several counselors described a change in the student once they realized that the counselor believed in them. They mentioned that the student would bend over backwards for

them. Because the counselors are not teachers or administration, they did not hand out punishment, detention, etc. Students saw them as a middle person and that mindset opened the door for conversation and allowed for connections to be made. Counselors could be seen as best friends. Since friends could influence behavior, counselors in these types of roles could possibly influence behavior in a positive way.

Research question #3 asked about resources at the disposal of the school counselor. The question was designed to learn about what happened when the school counselor had done all they could do for the youth. Unfortunately, the counselors agreed that in North Mississippi, the resources were minimum or non-existent. Most of the resources that were available for the counselors were school based with exceptions being Lifecore, Big Brother and Big Sister, and the one church. Lifecore was a mental health resource for the people of Mississippi; however, if you were not on a state welfare type of insurance, it was an out-of-pocket expense, which some people could not afford. The use of retired coaches acting as mentors was a spectacular idea, but people must be onboard with the idea for it to flourish. One community had a church that contributed food for students to take home when they did not have food at home or could not cook the food that was there.

All the counselors gave great insight as to what resources were needed to help them out. Money was important because it was critical to have funds in order to start programs and maintain them. Also, money was needed to go to workshops whether they were local or states away. The workshops offered also need to incorporate real-life situations to better prepare the counselors, as well as any school personnel, of the potential threats that were possible. The recommendation of online programs, in which some of the schools had participated, were either praised as a great resource or recommended as much needed. Every counselor mentioned the

need for more community support. They all agreed that if the community was behind the school and students, there would be fewer at-risk or delinquent youths. If the community supported them, they would excel.

Counselors were at a disadvantage. Resources were slim in most of the communities with most resources being community support. The financial means were poor in some of the smaller districts. The largest school in this study said that money was also an issue. The job requirements, as well as additional roles placed on school counselors by administration, could be overwhelming. Larger schools had multiple counselors, but most of the schools only had one counselor for an entire high school. Based on this study and the interviews, counselors were a luxury that schools can ill afford to lose.

Limitations and Assumptions

The following study was a pilot study. Being a pilot study, limitations do exist. There were no previous studies of this nature on which to base the design. One 5A school never returned a phone call or replied to an email. Two private schools declined to participate in the study. One counselor, although willing, declined to participate in the study due to lack of time available. The other private school declined to participate because they felt they did not have the type of students at their facility that would be beneficial to my research. The 6A school, largest classification in Mississippi, had four counselors, one for each grade as well as an alternative school counselor and only one, 11th grade, could be contacted to participate in the study. The 4A school was also not included in the data. Communication could never be established between the researcher and counselor to establish a time for an interview. The only school in Mississippi that was designed for delinquent students also could not be reached. Initial contact was made, but there were no successful attempts after. The overall response rate was 70% with 7 out of 10 counselors contacted

able to participate in the research study. Future studies should expand upon this research to establish validity.

The schools were limited to the Northeast region of Mississippi. This imposes a limitation. Additionally, the study included a small percentage of the total school sample. There are several hundred counselors across the state of Mississippi and a small percentage were used for this study. While there is the potential that participants were not forthright in their interviews, it can be assumed that the responses gathered are truthful.

Conclusions

Drawing from previous research related to the school setting and delinquency, it has been established that the school setting can be a focal point of delinquent acts. Peer relationships can have an influence on whether or not delinquency occurs (Agnew, 1991; Akers & Lee, 1996; Berten & Rossem, 2011; Miller, 2014). Previous research has also shown that school personnel can have a negative effect on delinquency (Back & Lee, 2015; Carey & Harrington, 2010, Pérez-Gualdrón, Yeh, & Russell, 2016; Richardson, 2012).

The findings from the current study were consistent with prior research in several ways. First, school personnel, particulary school counselors, were found to be in a position to influence students and provide guidance to help them make the right decisions, whether it be future education or behavior. The quantity of students seen by the high school counselors was evidence of that. They saw multiple students a day with different issues ranging from behavior, academics, mental, etc. Second, school counselors connected with students depending upon their individual needs and did so through a variety of different methods. Third, the resource availability was a tremendous deciding factor in the school counselor's ability to help a struggling student.

Overall, the findings from this study indicated, from the perspective of the participants at

least, that school counselors were instrumental in the school setting. Specifically, school counselors formed bonds with students that allowed for unfiltered communication to understand the individual needs or difficulties that student faced. Community resource availbility was a must regardless of the size of the school. Counselors must be able to have additional resources when faced with issues that are possibly outside of their ability to work effectively. School counselors provided unparalleled support for students in regards to multiple aspects that students bring to their attention. These qualitative findings were consistent with the previous research on school personnel. Beyond contributing to the existing literature, these findings also provide many implications for future research and practice.

<div align="center">Implications for Future Research</div>

The pilot study conducted was the first study of this nature. When researching the topic, the researcher could not find any prior studies that resembled this approach and direction. There were limitations as mentioned. The study was limited to Mississippi and even further to Northeast Mississippi.

There are several ways in which future research could improve and expand upon the current study. One method used for ensuring validity in qualitative research is known as member checking. Member checking is when, "the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to member checking as "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Future research should expand upon this pilot study to validate the findings including a larger sample size and multiple locations (possibly multiple states).

Another strategy for ensuring validity is by using triangulation. Triangulation is when, "researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to

provide corroborating evidence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Quantitative studies are effective because they use objective methods to analyze data. Using a quantitative method could help validate the views being expressed through qualitative interviews with high school counselors. Triangulating methods would allow the findings from each method to support one another and would strengthen any findings from the study.

Summary

The problem addressed in this pilot study was the exploration of high school counselors and their ability to deter at-risk and juvenile delinquency. The review of relevant literature showed that school counselors were in a unique position within the school setting. They are not administration, nor are they teachers. They are the in-between personnel that students could communicate with without fear of retribution. The pilot study also looked at literature relating to social control theory and social learning theory. The two theories analyzed how and why youth become at-risk or participate in delinquent acts. As expressed in Chapter Four, the counselors expressed reasons as to why students become at-risk or delinquent using the main themes from each of the two leading criminological theories. This study did not provide insights as to if their method of connecting had an increase or decrease of the acts of delinquency. The findings from the present pilot study indicated that school counselors were important to the stability of students by connecting, understanding, and helping the students through times of need. The findings also presented a need for increased resources within the community to help counselors deter delinquency as well as to prevent students from becoming at-risk.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Permission Letter

Date:

Address:

Dear [insert name],

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your school. I am currently a Master of Criminal Justice student at the University of Mississippi and am in the process of writing my Master's Thesis. The study seeks to learn more about high school counselors and their role in deterring juvenile delinquency. My thesis research is supervised by Dr. Kimberly Kaiser, Assistant Professor of Legal Studies.

I seek your permission to allow me to speak with the school counselor to complete an interview which will involve general questions related to their counseling role and specific questions about their training and approaches to students at high risk of delinquent behaviors. The interview process should take approximately one to 1.5 hours, including providing information about the study and participants' rights. Participation of the counselors is completely voluntary and will be given a consent form to be signed.

Prior to conducting this study, approval will be received from the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board. If approval is granted, counselor participants will complete the survey in an office or similar private setting. The results of this study will remain completely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pseudonyms will be used for the counselors and individual schools will not be identified. No identifying information will be released. No costs will be incurred by either your school or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address: wahendri@go.olemiss.edu. Contacting me does not obligate you or your institution to participate in this study.

If you agree, kindly sign below and scan the signed form as an attachment to the email provided. Alternatively, if permission is granted, the signed forms can be mailed to me at the following address:

Wesley Hendrix

219 Rd 1151

Plantersville, MS 38862

Sincerely,

Wesley A. Hendrix

Approved by:

_____   _____   _____

Print your name and title here   Signature   Date

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear [insert name],

My name is Wesley Hendrix, and I am a graduate student in the Master of Criminal Justice program at the University of Mississippi. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about juvenile delinquency and high school counselors. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a high school counselor. I obtained your contact information from the Principal/Headmaster of your school.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview conducted by myself. The interview will take about one hour to complete. I would like to audio record your responses from the interview, and I will use the information to discovers trends that can be useful to future researchers in how high school counselors could help deter juvenile delinquency.

Remember, this is completely voluntary, and your information will be kept confidential. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate, please reply to this email. Or if you have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at wahendri@go.olemiss.edu or by phone at 662.315.5871.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Wesley Hendrix

Appendix C: Informed Consent

INFORMATION SHEET

Title: ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN DETERRING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY:
   A MISSISSIPPI STUDY

Investigator
Wesley A. Hendrix, B.S.
Department of Legal Studies
208 Odom Hall
University of Mississippi
University, MS 38677
(662) 315-5871
wahendri@go.olemiss.edu

Faculty Sponsor
Kimberly Kaiser, Ph.D.
 Department of Legal Studies
 217 Odom Hall
University of Mississippi
University, MS 38677
(662) 915-2517
kakaise1@olemiss.edu

Description
The purpose of this study is to learn how high school counselors deal with students that are considered delinquent or at risk of becoming delinquent

Cost and Payments
The structured interview will take approximately one.

Risks and Benefits
You may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions and can stop the interview at any time. No personal will be used in any way for this research and your information will be confidential and neither you nor the school will be named.

Incentives
There are no financial incentives to participating.

Confidentiality
The name of your school and personal information will be kept confidential. I will not share information about you or the school. Pseudonyms will be used for the schools and counselors to maintain confidentiality.

Right to Withdraw
You do not have to take part in this study, and you may stop participation at any time. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, all you must do is to tell the interviewer (myself). Whether or not you participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship at work, with the Department of Legal Studies, or with the University.

IRB Approval
This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have been given an unsigned copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I consent to participate in the study and verify that I am at least 18 years of age.

Furthermore, I also affirm that the experimenter explained the study to me and told me about the study's risks as well as my right to refuse to participate and to withdraw.

Appendix D: Questionnaire

School Counselor Interview Questionnaire

Name: _____   School: _____

I am going to ask you some questions about your experience, training, and role as a school counselor. Without breaking confidentiality with any individual students, I ask that you respond using generalities of your experiences and without revealing any individual student information.

1. Where did receive your training to be a school counselor? What is your degree in?

2. How many years have you worked as a school counselor? How many years at this current location?

3. How many students do you meet with each week/per day? How long does each meeting typically last?

4. What types of issues do you generally deal with as a school counselor? That is, what types of issues are normally brought to your attention?

5. How do you define "at risk" or "delinquent" students? That is, what does it mean to you for a student to be labeled "at risk" or "delinquent"?

6. How many of the students you meet with would you consider "at risk" or "delinquent"?

7. What do you see as major causes of students becoming "at risk" or "delinquent"?

    a. Where do you think problem behaviors comes from? That is, how do students become "at risk" or "delinquent"?

8. How do you identify "at risk" or "delinquent" students? That is, how are they brought to your attention?

    a. When a student is identified as "at risk" or "delinquent" are they required to come see you?
        i. If so, how often?
        ii. If not, are there other protocols in place to work with these students?

9. What do you see as your role when working with "at risk" or "delinquent" students?

10. <u>What do you think are good strategies to change problem behaviors of "at risk" or "delinquent" youth?</u>

11. <u>Have you received specific training on identifying youth that could pose a danger of (or has engaged in) violence or aggression either at the school or outside of school?</u>

    a. <u>If so, what kind of training have you received?</u>
        i. <u>Do you think your training has adequately prepared you to identify or intervene with these students? Why/How so?</u>

    b. <u>What is your role in identifying and/or intervening with these students?</u>

    c. <u>How do you feel about the available resources in your community to help or intervene with those youth?</u>

    d. <u>What resources would be beneficial to you?</u>

<h1 style="text-align:center">VITA</h1>

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

I'm very goal oriented with near perfect punctuality. I strive to succeed in life and obtain as much knowledge as possible to make myself more knowledgeable in many areas. Recent completion of masters degree. I plan to eventually get my doctorate in the Criminal Justice field.

SKILLS & ABILITIES

- Critical Thinking & Problem Solving
- Cross-cultural communications & Teamwork
- Problem Solving
- Writing
- Computer programs (including Blackboard and Canvas)
- Time Management

EXPERIENCE

BOARD COORDINATOR NORTH MISSISSIPPI MEDICAL CENTER TUPELO, MS
SEPTEMBER 2015 - PRESENT

- Use computers for various applications, such as increasing patient experience or word processing.
- Answer telephones and give information to callers, take messages, or transfer calls to appropriate individuals.
- Set up and manage paper or electronic filing systems, recording information, updating paperwork, or maintaining documents, such as record from other hospitals, patient procedures, or other material.
- Operate office equipment, such as voice mail messaging systems, and use word processing, spreadsheet, or other software applications to prepare reports, invoices, financial statements, letters, case histories, or medical records.
- Receive and route messages or documents, such as laboratory results, to appropriate staff.

Parts Specialist O'Reillys Tupelo, MS

March 2015 – September 2015

- Conduct pre-operational checks on equipment to ensure proper functioning.
- Clean, lubricate, and refill equipment.
- Read catalogs, microfiche viewers, or computer displays in order to determine replacement part stock numbers and prices.
- Receive and fill telephone orders for parts.

- Fill customer orders from stock.
- Prepare sales slips or sales contracts.
- Receive payment or obtain credit authorization.
- Take inventory of stock.
- Place new merchandise on display.

Technician GCI Madison, MS

October 2011 – April 2012

- Inspect and test electrical systems and equipment to locate and diagnose malfunctions, using visual inspections, testing devices, and computer software.
- Reassemble and test equipment after repairs.
- Splice wires with knives or cutting pliers, and solder connections to fixtures, outlets, and equipment.
- Adjust, repair, or replace defective wiring and relays in ignition, lighting, air-conditioning, and safety control systems, using electrician's tools.
- Measure, cut, and install frameworks and conduit to support and connect wiring, control panels, and junction boxes, using hand tools.
- Maintain equipment service records.
- Cut openings and drill holes for fixtures, outlet boxes, and fuse holders, using electric drills and routers.

United States Navy Charleston, SC

November 2009 – September 2011

- Initiate corrective actions or order plant shutdowns in emergency situations.
- Direct operating or maintenance activities of operational nuclear power plants to ensure efficiency and conformity to safety standards.
- Monitor nuclear facility operations to identify any design, construction, or operation practices that violate safety regulations and laws or that could jeopardize the safety of operations.
- Examine accidents to obtain data that can be used to design preventive measures.
- Conduct tests of nuclear fuel behavior and cycles or performance of nuclear machinery and equipment to optimize performance of existing plants.
- Synthesize analyses of test results and use the results to prepare technical reports of findings and recommendations.
- Analyze available data and consult with other engineers to determine parameters of experimentation and suitability of analytical models.

EDUCATION | **ITAWAMBA COMMUNITY COLLEGE**, FULTON, MS
ASSOCIATES OF LIBERAL ARTS

3.48 GPA. I took classes related to nursing field as well as many prerequisites.

NORTHWEST COMMUNITY COLLEGE, SENATOBIA, MS

ASSOCIATE DEGREE IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

3.7 GPA

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI, UNIVERSITY, MS

BACHELORS DEGREE IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

3.49 GPA. I also made the Dean's and Chancellor's List as an undergraduate.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI, UNIVERSITY, MS

MASTERS DEGREE IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE, HOMELAND SECURITY EMPHASIS.

- Current Cumulative GPA 3.7. Master's Thesis related to Juvenile Delinquency.