

ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION:  
A NATIONAL SURVEY OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

BY

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To my parents, wife and daughters

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## Abstract

This study examined the role and involvement of school psychologists across the nation in school violence prevention. One hundred and seventy-four participants were recruited through the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) email listserv and through direct emailing from the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) database. Results indicate that school psychologists are not leaders in violence prevention in their schools and typically do not facilitate school violence prevention. School psychologists are involved as counselors, members of school violence prevention teams and in consultation with school staff. The longer a school psychologist has been in the field and factors hypothesized as related to involvement (e.g., positive attitude towards school violence prevention) did have a significant relation with school psychologist level of involvement. An interesting finding of this study was that respondents reported that they did not feel prepared by their graduate programs to be involved in school violence prevention. However, when asked about specific tasks related to school violence prevention, the majority of respondents noted a wide breadth of specific skill competence. Findings suggest that school psychologists are not as involved as prevalent thinking would suggest and there are significant implications for current practitioners and training programs.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Concern about violence within the schools has increased in recent years (Furlong & Morrison, 1994; Nickerson & Martens, 2008; Rickets, 2007; Smith & Smith, 2006). When parents leave their children in the trust of schools, these caregivers expect that students will be safe, that their exposure to harm will be minimized and they will be provided with an appropriate education. However, with increasing violence in educational settings this long held belief may no longer be true. In fact, some researchers suggest that the issue of school violence may be one of the most prominent issues facing schools and children (Furlong, & Morrison, 1994; Kondrasuk, Greene, Waggoner, Edwards, & Nayak-Rhodes, 2005; White & Beal, 1999). School violence includes behaviors which can range from verbal fights and insults to bringing a weapon to school or physical altercations (Furlong & Morrison, 1994; Larson, 1994; Larson, Smith & Furlong, 2002)

### **School Violence Prevalence and Study Methodology**

Although it is generally agreed that school violence is a prevalent issue, some studies question whether or not the situation in schools is as dire as it seems. Media coverage sensationalizes current acts and may place a more intense focus on school violence, giving the appearance that it is a central issue in schools. Remarkably, according to an FBI crime index report, it appears as if overall violence, including that among school children, is decreasing throughout the United States (Miller, 1994). More specifically there has been a decrease in school-based incidents of violent crimes since the early 1990s (DeVoe, Peter, Noonan, Snyder, & Baum, 2005; Neiman & Devoe, 2009). Still, researchers seem to agree that school violence is an important issue because of the degree to which it affects our culture, society and children

(Furlong & Morrison, 1994; Larson et al., 2002; McKellar & Sherwin, 2003; Miller, 1994; Neiman & Devoe, 2009; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002)

Furlong and Morrison (1994) argue that because of the methodology used in school violence research, the results of such studies should be interpreted with caution. For example, most studies use self-reports based on opinions, in order to gather information about school violence. Researchers argue that although these are good measures of concern and perception of school violence, these are not objective or fact-based measures of the levels of actual violence. In addition, research has focused on confirming the *fact* that school violence is an important issue by gauging level of concern about school violence. However, very little research has compared the relative importance of school violence to other aspects of school that may be of concern to students.

Despite these caveats about methodology, researchers continue to use self-report methodology because the strengths and benefits outweigh the potential drawbacks. Self-report measures are easily administered to large samples and the responses are easily quantifiable and amenable to statistical analysis. Additionally, they offer the researcher the ability to question different groups of respondents on different aspects of an area of interest. Multiple perceptions have helped researchers gain a better overall picture of the current school situation. For example, gaining self-reports from teachers, students, school psychologists and other school personnel aids researchers in studying all aspects of the issue. Although a more complete outlook is gained through a comprehensive analysis of different perspectives, it is still wise to temper self-report research with fact-based analyses and measures (Furlong & Morrison, 1994).

### **Types of Aggression**

School violence is a complex and multifaceted issue. Stephens (1994) makes a distinction between two types of aggression that lead to school violence and emphasizes that these must be treated differently. In proactive, instrumentally-driven aggression the violence is a learned means to get a desired outcome, whereas reactive, or affectively-driven violence, is in response to a perceived threat and is characterized by emotional outburst. The students with the latter emotional response usually need instruction in social role taking and empathy; similar symptoms are usually exhibited by students in war zones and are linked to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). School violence is not a one-dimensional issue but is described in research literature as ranging from fighting, bullying and discipline issues to homicides, gun and other weapon-related violence (Furlong & Morrison, 1994). According to the Center for the Prevention of School Violence in the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2002), school violence refers to “any behavior that violates a school’s educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against person or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions or disorder” (p. 1). Furlong and Morrison (1994) suggest that the focus of school authorities is often on the more severe types of aggression but the school community should not underestimate the need to address behaviors like bullying in a comprehensive approach to school violence prevention.

### **Teacher and Student Fears**

Studies have demonstrated that teachers see school violence as damaging to the primary educational purpose of schools and that many teachers do not feel adequately trained to deal with violence in their classroom and surrounding community (Chartier, 2000; Smith & Smith, 2006; White & Beal, 1999). In a study that compared the attitudes of teachers in training (preservice)

and teachers in the field (in-service) towards school violence (White & Beal, 1999), results suggest that both groups perceived school violence as an issue of utmost importance and felt unprepared to handle incidents of violence. It is also interesting to note that preservice teachers were more worried than their in-service counterparts about encountering violence in their classrooms.

Additionally, some teachers leave the profession because of the threat to personal safety and due to direct and indirect contact with incidents of violence (Smith & Smith, 2006; White & Beal, 1999). Teachers are generally unsure of how to deal with school violence when it is directed toward them or others and report a decrease in the sense of safety within their schools (Chartier, 2000). Kondrasuck et al. report in a 2005 survey of school administrators that 14% of respondents did not feel safe in their schools. Although this study included school administrators, this information appears to be representative of the school population. Fear of violence is not typically at the front of students and teachers' minds, but the few highly publicized incidents quickly bring the issue to the foreground. Student and teacher fears may be elevated because the general perception is that school violence incidents have increased. In addition, the response of schools to violence (e.g., zero tolerance policies) may reinforce this thinking (Cornell, 2006). Although NASP (2006) reported a general downward trend in incidents of school violence, it is important to note that when incidents of violence occur, they challenge the belief that schools are safe havens. Therefore it is important to continue to try preventing and reacting to any violent activities within schools.

### **Prevention Programs**

After incidents of school violence occur, there is usually call for change within the schools. Because of the multifaceted nature of school violence it is impossible to have a one-

size-fits-all attitude toward combating it (Poland, 1994; Stephens, 1994). Indeed some changes made are well-researched and can be effective while others are counter-productive. Researchers seem to have come to the same conclusion on how to combat school violence. Good prevention programs focus on issues such as anger management, stress reduction and restraint of aggressive tendencies. Indeed, researchers and authors seem to recognize the need for better educator and student training, especially in the area of conflict resolution, to aid in avoiding and defusing potentially violent situations (Feindler, Marriott & Iwata, 1984; Rich, 1992). Additionally, protective factors should be enhanced, such as having a strong student-centered support group, strengthening existing coping skills and training parents to interact effectively with their children. These proactive approaches help schools to address children who are at risk for either perpetrating or being victims of violence in the schools. Finally, as with all school programs, cultural sensitivity to the background and experiences of the student and his/her family is paramount (Miller, 1994; Poland, 1994; Stephens, 1994).

The broad focus of school violence prevention programs appears to fit best in a collaborative framework, particularly throughout the implementation phase. This collaboration may be with the community, crisis prevention/intervention teams, parents and other professionals. By accessing resources other than those inside the school, the program is strengthened and helps to provide a consistent message for students (Poland, 1994). Overall researchers believe that school violence can be prevented with research-based, multi-faceted interventions (Cornell, 2006; Howard, Flora & Griffin, 1999).

### **Ideal School Psychologist Role**

Research has suggested that it is essential that planners of school violence prevention programs have familiarity with students and inner workings of schools; this would include

current school personnel (Stephens, 1994). School psychologists are often at the forefront of responding to acts of school violence, are involved in prevention of these acts and therefore are uniquely positioned to be a resource for students, teachers and schools (NASP, 2006). For example, school psychologists are trained in social-emotional assessment and are in an ideal position to spearhead early identification of at-risk students and perform violence risk appraisals. Additionally, these professionals can be utilized to facilitate the implementation of school-based cognitive-behavioral programs that have demonstrated effectiveness. School psychologists could actively participate in research and practice in this area since they have the training and scientific orientation to both provide services and evaluate them. Their training in the areas of evaluation and intervention can be indispensable assets which can be used in the planning of safe schools (Furlong, Kingery, & Bates, 2001; Larson, 1993, 1994). Further, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) encourages school psychologists to take a leadership role in responding to and preventing school violence (NASP, 2006). NASP suggests that school psychologists can be involved directly with victims of school violence, implement school violence prevention programs and may even be involved in determining program effectiveness. NASP promotes school psychologist involvement in implementing intervention programs designed to reduce violent acts, consulting with school staff about targeted programs and being involved in team strategies to help plan for a safer and more effective school. Additionally, school psychologists can, on a direct level, counsel victims of violence and be involved in community-based collaboration.

### **Current School Psychologist Role**

Although the ideal role has been communicated through position statements and various articles (Furlong & Morrison, 1994; Larson, 1994; NASP, 2006) the current school psychologist

role may not match the ideal description suggested by these sources. Research literature in the area of school violence has primarily been descriptive in nature and takes a snapshot of the current situation in schools at a given point in time. This has been done by examining the attitudes and perceptions of students and teachers. School psychologists are one of the most well-placed personnel in the schools to combat school violence (NASP, 2006), yet little research has investigated the actual role of the school psychologist in violence prevention. Indeed, there is little evidence in the research literature to indicate that school psychologists are involved in school violence prevention although prevention programs are thought to be one of the most effective ways of combating violent incidents. In a 2003 study, McKellar and Sherwin investigated the role of Kansas school psychologists in violence prevention and intervention. Specifically investigated was the accuracy of school psychologist knowledge about incidents of violence in their school, who was responsible for violence prevention in their school and school psychologist training in violence prevention. Results of this study suggest that school psychologists are generally very knowledgeable about incidents of violence in their schools and a majority believe that school violence prevention is an important part of their role. Although this is the case, 36% of respondents reported receiving little or no training in school violence prevention. The authors addressed two main limitations of this study. First, there was no overall definition of school violence used. Second, a majority of the respondents worked in elementary schools. While this study helps describe the role of Kansas school psychologists little is known about the nationwide role of school psychologists in violence prevention, impediments to involvement in prevention activities and current school violence prevention tasks.



**Present Study**

Few studies have focused on the role of school psychologists in school violence prevention even though these professionals may be involved in the planning and implementation process of these programs (Schubarth, 2000; Smith & Smith, 2006). Instead, most studies focus on the effect and role of school violence on students and teachers. The present study was a national survey and descriptive analysis of school psychologists' responses about their current practice and responsibilities related to school violence prevention. A national survey was needed because it is difficult to generalize from state-level surveys since practices in different states vary widely. No national surveys of this type exist in the research literature. Obtaining a representative national sample was important to gauge the school violence prevention practice of United States school psychologists. The purpose of the current study was to gauge the readiness of schools to deal with violence and assesses the role of school psychologists in this issue. The literature suggests that a majority of school psychologists' time is spent in assessment, with consultation, counseling and special projects comprising the remainder of their time (Desimone, 1998; Levinson & Orf, 1996; Reschly, 2000; Roberts & Roberts, 1994; Smith, 1984). This study helped to understand what gaps exist in training or service and addressed the factors that determine whether or not school psychologists are involved in school violence prevention.

**Research questions and hypotheses.**

Question 1. How involved are school psychologists in school violence prevention?

Question 2. What is the role of school psychologists in school violence prevention?

NASP encourages school psychologists to use their training in this area to help prevent, plan for and respond to incidents of violence in schools (NASP, 2006). It remains unclear however, the number of school psychologists who are involved in school violence prevention and their current

role. Are they social-emotional-behavioral assessors, program evaluators or direct interventionists? Do they have a leadership role?

Question 3. What are the positive determinants and impediments to school psychologists' involvement in school violence prevention and does the level of impediment/positive determinants affect the level of involvement reported by school psychologists? Although it was hypothesized that the majority of school psychologists are involved in leadership roles in school violence prevention, there are almost certainly school psychologists who do not have such a high level of involvement. What external and internal forces affect the school psychologists' level of involvement in prevention activities? It is expected that the majority of exogenous impediments are due to role restriction and not from a lack of desire on the part of school psychologists. That is, the school psychologist role, as defined by the district, limits the amount of time spent in school violence prevention activities. In addition, research has focused on the perceptions, attitudes and opinions of students and teachers related to school violence and prevention programs. Findings, as described above, have suggested that both of these groups perceive school violence as a serious issue and recognize the need for prevention programs and crisis intervention plans. It was hypothesized that most school psychologists will have similar views to the groups used in previous research but because of training, may place greater emphasis on prevention programs.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

Violence in schools is concerning because it challenges our belief that schools are safe places. Statistically, children are not likely to be harmed while at school but concern about violence is increasing (Furlong & Morrison, 1994; Nickerson & Martens, 2008; Ricketts, 2007; Smith & Smith, 2006). When violence arises in schools, calls are made for school psychologists to be more involved in preventing these acts (NASP, 2006). School districts have tried a variety of approaches to solve this problem and want an effective response (Cornell, 2006).

### **School Violence in Rural, Urban and Suburban Areas**

It is often assumed that rural and suburban schools are safer than urban schools (Klonsky, 2002). Past reports by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) confirmed that serious violent crimes are more likely to occur in larger schools (Klonsky, 2002). More recent NCES reports also appear to confirm this conclusion. In a 2009 report a higher percentage of city schools reported gang-related crime compared to rural or suburban schools. In fact, city schools had the highest incidence rate per 1000 students than either suburban or rural schools for violent incidents, serious violent incidents, theft, other crimes, distribution of illegal drugs and vandalism (Neiman & Devoe, 2009). Although the overall rate of violence is lower in suburban and rural schools, the violence rates in these areas is not insignificant (Kingery et al., 1991). In a 1991 study of violent incidents at a rural school near a major metropolitan area, Kingery et al. found that rates of certain violent acts at times exceeded the national average. Instead of focusing on the community (i.e., rural, urban, suburban) of the school, Klonsky (2002) suggests that the size of the school may have a greater relationship to incidents of violence. Smaller schools have many advantages over their larger counterparts which include but are not limited to: a collaborative teacher environment, increased knowledge of students, a welcoming accepting

environment, and isolated students are more visible. All these factors help students to be connected to their school and become part of a learning community (Klonsky, 2002; Stephens, 1994; Wasley et al., 2000). In the 2009 NCES report, schools with an enrollment of over 1000 reported the second highest incidence of serious violent events and the highest incidence of theft and other events. In contrast, schools with an enrollment of 500 to 999 students reported the second lowest incidence of serious violent events, theft and other incidents (Neiman & Devoe, 2009).

### **Prevention Science**

Prevention has a long past but short history (Buckner & Cain, 1998). Greek mythology describes two concepts of prevention: the early detection of illness and subsequent treatment by trained practitioners (promoted by Asklepius, the god of medicine and healing) versus positive maintenance of overall health (practiced by the daughter of Asklepius). Both approaches have their supporters and detractors and emphasis of both types of approaches can be seen in prevention science today (Buckner & Cain, 1998). In the 1970s, researchers questioned the effectiveness of prevention activities and whether resources should be diverted from primary treatment of disorders to this *new* science. More recent research has demonstrated the effectiveness of prevention of various disorders and the National Institute of Mental Health has been supportive of prevention activities (Coie et al., 1993; Jones, 1998; Larson, 1994; NIMH 1996, 1998). According to Buckner and Cain (1998), "prevention science represents an amalgamation of knowledge, principles and methods developed in the fields of epidemiology, human development, psychopathology and education" (p. 508). Researchers who follow a prevention science process address two primary concepts. In the first stage, research from prior studies based on protective or risk factors is used to posit a theory for the etiology of a disorder.

Next a preventive intervention is designed and tested to gauge the effect of the intervention.

Interventions can be implemented at three different levels within the school system (Buckner & Cain, 1998).

### **School Violence Response: Primary Prevention**

School district response to violence has been varied (Gable & Acker, 2000; Larson, 1994). Response has ranged from districts that do nothing to districts where strict no-tolerance violence policies are enforced. Schools can choose to have a proactive or reactive approach to school violence. That is, schools can choose to prevent or organize in advance of incidents of school violence or schools can choose to respond to incidents of school violence as they occur (Jones, 1998). Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of proactive, primary prevention approaches, such as the implementation of violence prevention programs (Jones, 1998; Larson, 1994). School violence prevention includes programs geared towards peer mediation, social skills training and behavior replacement techniques. One such program is Second Step (Committee for Children, 1992) which is designed to reduce aggressive behaviors by teaching skills necessary for prosocial behavior. Programs like this typically have a structured curriculum that facilitators can follow and may allow the opportunity for role-play practice of skills. Additionally, anger is described as a normal emotion and the focus is on how to appropriately express anger (Larson, 1993). Teachers report that students were less violent after utilizing such programs (Jones, 1998). Because teaching these skills has been demonstrated to be effective, Natale (1994) hypothesized that the most effective way to prevent school violence is to start teaching pro-social behavior early in children's lives.

Specific programs are not the only response by which school districts can address violence prevention. In fact, some schools attempt to adopt a system-wide approach by

personalizing school buildings and avoiding overcrowding. Research (Jones, 1998; Larson, 1994) has shown that a reactive response to violence prevention, like metal detectors and security guards, can lead to student alienation. The goal for schools should be to adopt a welcoming and inviting atmosphere where children can feel safe and connected. The idea of system-wide, school cultural change is an important one in school violence prevention. In a three-year longitudinal study, Schellenberg, Parks-Savage and Rehfuss (2007) investigated the effectiveness of Peace Pal, a peer mediation school violence prevention program. The researchers suggest that it takes between two to five years to see results from violence prevention programs like mediation. For this reason the Peace Pal program was examined in its fifth year of operation. This study demonstrated that both mediators and participants in grades three through five viewed the mediation process as helpful and the researchers found a decrease in out-of-school suspensions and school violence as measured by physical and verbal confrontations. In this situation it appears that the culture of the school has changed.

Larson et al. (2002) believe that as part of a universal prevention program, every school should have a well-conceived school-wide discipline plan and research-based effective schooling and teaching. Although system-wide change is an effective tool at preventing school violence, teachers can also act on an individual basis to aid in decreasing violent incidents. According to Druck (2005), bullying in the classroom (both physical and verbal) should not be tolerated and can actually be addressed by classroom rules. Classroom rules for behavior and penalties can be created with class input in order for students to have a stake in their creation and implementation. As mentioned in previous discussion, conflict resolution and anger management skills can be effective in addressing violent behavior. A specific program is not always necessary as these skills can be taught through role play and classroom discussion. The best model for students is

the classroom teacher. Teachers should be aware that students are able to sense when they are stressed, annoyed and responding inappropriately to situations. This knowledge should empower teachers to utilize their key role in school violence prevention (Druck, 2005).

### **Secondary Prevention**

Secondary prevention programs target students who are at risk for committing violent acts. This approach is the basis of early intervention which has a demonstrated history of effectiveness (Lumsden, 2000; Trembly, Nagin & Seguin, 2000). Students involved in secondary programs can be identified by precursor behaviors, being a member of an at-risk group or simply by teacher referral. Larson (1994) described several secondary prevention programs where both cognitive and affective processes associated with aggression are addressed. This means students correct erroneous assumptions (e.g., attribution errors) and cognitive distortions. Prevention programs can also utilize an indirect approach to affect children's behavior. For example, parent management training can be used to change family interactions for students who are at-risk for aggressive behavior. Typically, students who display negative behavior tend to have disruptive and coercive patterns of behavior with their family members (Larson, 1994). Parent management training attempts to interrupt this negative pattern and retrain students in new behavior blueprints.

### **Tertiary Prevention**

Aggressive behavior tends to be stable across a student's schooling career. That is, students who demonstrate aggressive behavior in elementary school typically will demonstrate similar behavior in middle and high school without intervention (Larson et al., 2002). Tertiary prevention programs are reactive in nature and focus on increasing the adaptive skills of those students who have already committed violent acts. These programs can focus on skill

acquisition and skill application. Indeed, some programs even attempt to increase a student's moral reasoning to affect their behavior (Larson, 1994). The effectiveness of tertiary prevention programs has already been well-documented in the research literature (Feindler et al., 1984; Larson et al., 2002; Marriott & Iwata, 1984). Programs related to anger management are overall highly successful at reducing aggressive behavior. These effective programs are typically multi-factored and teach problem-solving skills, self-awareness, self-monitoring and developing alternative expressions of anger. These programs also focus on self-control, self-regulation and promoting prosocial behavior. It is important to note that these programs are designed for students who are already exhibiting violent behavior (Larson et al., 2002). In a 1984 study investigating the efficacy of a tertiary program, Feindler et al. found that teaching relaxation, social skills and increasing self-awareness led to a higher level of problem-solving skill and increased self-control as measured by self-report. These programs are similar to primary and secondary prevention activities in terms of general skills being taught. However, the specificity of skills and frequency of learning opportunities increase across the primary to tertiary prevention spectrum. Additionally, these programs focus on different groups of children within the student population. In primary prevention the focus is universal and school-wide, in secondary prevention the focus is on a targeted group of students who may be at a higher risk for committing acts of violence and tertiary prevention focuses on working with students who have already committed violent acts to not do so again (Larson et al., 2002). School psychologists have the necessary training and experience to be leaders in implementing and assessing the role of prevention programs (Curtis & Batsche, 1991; Larson & Busse, 1998; NASP, 2006).



**School Psychologist Role: Assessment**

Numerous articles have been written about the role of the school psychologist in schools (e.g., Dean & Burns, 2004; DeSimone, 1998; Janzen, Paterson & Paterson, 1993). NASP views a school psychologist's role as having three primary components: assessment, consultation and counseling. Traditionally, the role of the school psychologist has been embedded in assessment, with research estimating that this area takes up about 50% of a school psychologist's time (DeSimone, 1998). The reasons for this are primarily due to role restriction forced by federal, state and local mandates. Administrators and teachers have traditionally viewed the role of school psychologists as fulfilling legal mandates; thus the legally required part of a school psychologist's role has taken a majority of time (Levinson, Thomas & Orf, 1996).

Although school psychological assessment is typically portrayed as cognitive or academic evaluation, a significant portion of time is spent in social-emotional-behavioral assessment (DeSimone, 1998). This type of assessment is directly related to helping schools combat violence. Mazza and Overstreet (2000) suggest that school psychologists use a measure of exposure to violence as a regular part of their intake process. This is to help consider all the facts within a problem-solving framework and identify potential warning signs. School psychologists' knowledge of psychological foundations can help in the early identification of students who may exhibit violent behavior (NASP, 2006).

**School Psychologist Role: Mental Health Knowledge**

School psychologists are trained in basic and advanced psychological principles and are potentially key personnel in the school to predict and aid in controlling school violence (NASP, 2006). Attempts have been made to determine a *profile* for someone who is likely to become a school shooter or participant in school violence. No research study has been completely

successful in this task but some studies have examined psychological predictors of school-based violence, such as impulsivity, empathy and locus of control (Dykeman & Daehlin, 1996). A more recent focus in the literature in this area has been the threat assessment perspective. Although certain *red-flags* do exist, such as students' history of trauma or violence, a pre-occupation with violent themes, being victims of bullying and suicidal ideation (Weisbrot, 2008), it is difficult to predict which students are likely to actually commit violent acts. A better process, as mentioned above, is to evaluate threats made in schools and recognize the severity of such threats. School psychologist training might be utilized in a threat assessment approach by using common assessment principles.

### **School Psychologist Role: Intervention**

The complex interplay between child, family, school and community is compounded when school violence enters the interaction. Estevez, Musitu and Herrero (2005) found that victimization was directly related to depression, and that a negative family environment was related to violent behavior in the school. Further, violent behavior in school had a negative effect on relationships with parents and teachers which in turn affected levels of distress in the adolescents. These complex relationships that contribute to incidents of violence in the school can best be addressed by personnel who have an understanding of school and family systems and the interaction between them.

School psychologists' knowledge of these principles and general psychological training will be beneficial in taking a lead role in understanding and helping children who suffer from exposure to violence (Mazza & Overstreet, 2000). Exposure to violence in the school can lead to a host of psychological issues, such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, suicidal behavior, anxiety, aggressive behavior and even academic problems (Poland, 1994).

Intervention in dealing with the effects of school violence may be done through individual or group counseling, academic strategies and behavior or crisis intervention plans. Mental health professionals in the school are the only school personnel able to adequately deal with these types of issues (NASP, 2006; National Association of Social Workers, 2000).

Mazza and Overstreet (2000) see the role of the school psychologist as helping to identify students who may have been exposed to incidents of violence and helping to reduce the detrimental impact this may have on their social, emotional, academic and even physical lives. School psychologists have a working, practical knowledge of these areas. Additionally, school psychologists are in a perfect position to identify and bolster supports within the community and family. As school personnel, school psychologists are also in a position to be the liaison between the school and the community since community-based interventions have had a high success rate (Mazza & Overstreet, 2000; Poland, 1994). In addition to mediation, school psychologists are trained in group counseling and reactive strategies to school violence (NASP, 2006). Research has demonstrated effective use of group anger control training to help curb incidents of school violence (Feindler, 1984). Finally, school psychologists' training enable them to be able to make data-based decisions about program effectiveness and to recognize areas of the program that may need to be modified in order to best meet the needs of the child and the community. This will enable them to evaluate school violence prevention programs and their efficacy.

### **School Psychologist: Unique Skill Set**

Professional organizations and researchers have proposed that mental health professionals, such as social workers, should be called on to address violence within our schools (Mandalawitz, 2000; National Association of Social Workers (NASW), 2000). Similarly, as mentioned in previous discussion this challenge has also been posed to school psychologists

(Furlong, Morrison & Pavelski, 2000; NASP, 2006). Indeed, there is significant overlap among the three primary mental professionals in the school system: school psychologists, school social workers and school counselors (Agresta, 2004; Humes & Homenshil, 1987). Despite this similarity, many have posited that school psychologists are uniquely qualified to be at the forefront of combating violence within our schools (Furlong et al., 2000; Knoff, 1995; McKellar & Sherwin, 2003; NASP, 2006; Poland, Pitcher & Lazarus, 1995; Ross, Powell & Elias, 2002). In a 2004 study investigating the actual and ideal roles of school psychologists, school social workers and school counselors, Agresta found that both school social workers and school counselors preferred to spend more time in the areas of individual and group counseling but less time in administrative and teacher consultation. In contrast, school psychologist respondents reported a desire to spend increased time in the areas of individual and group counseling, but were content with current time spent in consultation. All three groups of mental health professionals agreed that the school psychologist was the only staff member with psychometric testing as an appropriate role. School psychologists are the only school staff trained in counseling, behavioral intervention and preventative program planning according to Poland et al. (1995). Indeed, Ross et al. (2002) state that "within the school system this set of knowledge, skills and abilities is unique to the school psychologist" (p. 47). In addition, school psychologists recognize and understand the complexities of working within the school setting. School psychologists have a good understanding of working within consultative and training roles in this setting and are aware that the majority of interactions students have with school staff will be with other adults (i.e., the success of many interventions is dependent on teachers and administrators) (Curtis & Stellar, 1995; Ross et al., 2002). The skill set that school psychologists possess-counseling, program planning and implementation, needs assessment, consultation,

assessment and prevention-make them effective candidates to be involved in school violence prevention activities (NASP, 2006; Poland et al., 1995).

### **Determinants: Time and Self Perception**

As discussed above, one of the primary tasks of school psychologists is assessment. This task takes up a significant portion of school psychological services, with higher percentages reported in school districts with a higher student-to-school psychologist ratio (DeSimone, 1998; NASP, 2006). Dean and Burns (2004) suggested that the high number of evaluations that need to be completed may be a barrier to involvement of school psychologists in other activities such as school violence prevention. This role restriction may lead to fewer school psychologists being asked to implement prevention programs and may lead to the self-perception that their role does not include violence prevention. In fact, Morrison, Furlong and Morrison (1994) hypothesize a barrier to school psychologists' active involvement has been a focus on criminal aspects of school violence, so that responsibility has been deferred to administrators and law enforcement.

The school psychologist's time in schools seems to be influenced by many factors, including but not limited to: number of assessments to be completed, school district perception of school psychologist role, training and school psychologist-to-student ratio. As discussed previously, most school psychological services involve assessment with the remainder of time typically spent in direct intervention activities like counseling and consultation with administrators and teachers. In addition, district needs may direct school psychologist tasks. Although trained in a wide variety of issues including assessment, counseling, consultation and crisis intervention, school psychologists report that school districts dictate whether or not a part of that training is utilized and emphasized (DeSimone, 1998).

School psychologist time is also dominated by assessment-related issues such as paperwork and administrative duties that are typically expected of school psychologists (Gargiulo, Fiscus, Maroney & Fauver, 1981; Smith, 1984). Parent conferences, IEP meetings and report writing shape school psychological roles. It should be noted that the research literature has recognized the discrepancy between the actual and desired role of school psychologists. Role restriction is not something that school psychologists typically seek (DeSimone, 1998).

In a 1993 study, Larson examined the perceptions of school psychologists toward school violence, as measured by referrals where the concern was physical aggression. School psychologists perceived an increase, over the previous ten years, in referrals where violence was the primary issue. In these situations, some of the interventions included having a conference about the incident and suspension. The author raised concern that school psychologists were not being perceived as a resource for intervention, although the skill set is available to them. Larson (1993) found that school psychologists shared the same concerns as teachers about rising levels of violence within the school. Despite this rising concern, in a 2004 survey, school psychologists did not endorse themselves to be the most responsible for school violence prevention. Instead, administrators, then teachers, were endorsed as the most likely to take a leadership role in violence prevention (Dean & Burns, 2004). It may be prescient that Larson (1993) commented that perhaps it is time for concern to be translated into "theoretically sound, logistically viable, and time efficient programs and procedures" (p. 349).

### **Determinants: Preparation**

Although the literature has called for school psychologists to be involved in violence prevention, there are some questions as to whether they are prepared to deal with this issue.

When school psychology training programs are examined, the emphasis of course and field work is on special education related issues. School violence prevention is a low priority compared to the study of childhood disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and how to address these disorders in the school (Larson & Busse, 1998). In this study, the authors examined the responses of school psychologist trainers to a survey about school psychologist preparation. Respondents agreed that school violence should be integrated into existing training programs but also noted that there may be a lack of qualified instructors to address this area.

It also appears that school psychologists who feel comfortable addressing school violence prevention often are more experienced and often have increased knowledge about this content area. These professionals feel more prepared to take a leadership role in school violence prevention (Dean & Burns, 2004).

It is important to note that some state education departments have already integrated school violence modules and crisis intervention training into school psychology programs. One such example is the State of New York, which enacted the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE). This law was passed by the New York State Legislature and signed into law by Governor George E. Pataki in 2000. Among other components, the legislation requires that all educators seeking certification as of 2001 must have completed a two-hour course in violence prevention (New York State Center for School Safety, 2009).

## **Summary**

School violence prevention is one of the most effective ways to address violence in our schools (Larson, 1994). School psychologists are uniquely qualified to be at the forefront of combating school violence (Poland et al., 1995). Although impediments may exist to their involvement in prevention activities, researchers and professional organizations have called for

their participation (Dean & Burns, 2004; Furlong et al., 2000). There is limited research that investigates the actual involvement of school psychologists in violence prevention, making it difficult to provide a clear picture of their role (McKellar & Sherwin, 2003).



### **Chapter Three: Method**

#### **Participants**

There were one hundred and seventy four participants in the study. Surveys were emailed to 1000 school psychologists randomly selected from a current list of members of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) who listed their email addresses in the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) database. Additionally, the survey link was sent through the NASP email listserv to 3076 members. The returned surveys represented 45 states and there was a response rate of 4.9%. Ninety of the emailed surveys were returned as undeliverable; six were not completed because respondents either were retired, not working or were working in a post-secondary academic setting; and 22 surveys were not included in data analysis because the respondents were not practicing school psychologists or only completed the demographic information of the survey.

#### **Respondent and School Demographics**

Demographic characteristics of respondents are contained in Table 1. Seventy four percent of respondents were female and almost all were white (91.9%). Respondents' mean years of practice in their current districts was 9.2 years and ranged from one to thirty eight years ( $SD = 9.1$ ). Respondents' highest educational attainment included 23.8% masters degrees, 54.7% specialist level degrees and 21.5% doctorates.

School district demographics are in Table 2. The majority of respondents were school psychologists who worked in districts that they categorized as suburban (42.4%). Additionally, a plurality of respondents were from districts where they served under 499 students (28.2%). The current study used 2010 Census regions to define the geographic area of respondents (see Table

3). The region in which respondents were located varied widely, with the largest groups from the South Atlantic (17.8%) and East North Central regions (16.7%).

### **Research Design**

This descriptive study was designed to explore the involvement and determinants of involvement for school psychologists in school violence prevention. Additionally, perceptions of school psychologists towards school violence, their role in prevention within the schools and training for school violence incidents was addressed. Variables (i.e., age, gender, time in district, type of district, and size of district) were investigated to determine their relation to school psychologists' level of involvement.

### **Measures**

A survey containing questions regarding the role of school psychologists in school violence prevention and the status of prevention programs currently in place was designed for this study (see Appendix A). The survey was comprised of two parts. The first section gathered demographic information about the respondent and the district employing the respondent. Information was gathered concerning the school's size, respondents' age, gender and years as a school psychologist. The second section assessed whether the respondent's school district has any school violence prevention programming in place. If so, the role of the respondent in school violence prevention was assessed by gauging involvement in tasks directly related to combating school violence (e.g., participating in the school-based team that addresses at-risk students). Additionally, determinants of involvement (e.g., time spent completing evaluations and other administrative duties, attitudes about school violence prevention) are assessed. Questions were developed based on the research literature in the area of school violence and school psychologist roles in school districts.

## Variables

**Gender.** Gender was coded as a categorical variable.

**Type of district.** Type of district was coded as *urban* = 2, *suburban* = 1 and *rural* = 0.

**Length of time in field.** School psychologists self-reported the length of time they have been working as a school psychologist, which was coded as a continuous variable.

**Determinants of Involvement.** A scale was created by averaging responses to all items on the survey related to exogenous and endogenous determinants of involvement. Exogenous determinants refer to external factors that are outside of school psychologists' control, such as work schedule, number of evaluations or graduate training. In contrast, endogenous determinants refer to internal factors, such as attitudes and beliefs about school violence prevention. Items were coded so that a score of higher than 2 on this scale reflects a positive determinant of involvement while a score of 2 or lower reflects an impediment to involvement. The range of scores on this scale were zero to four. Questions 14 to 42 were included in the creation of this scale, excluding questions 29, 37 and 40.

**Level of Involvement.** A scale was created by averaging responses to all items on the survey related to school psychologist involvement in school violence prevention. Questions 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13 were included in this scale.

## Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to examine the face validity of the survey and to complete some basic reliability checks for the two scales to be used in the proposed multiple regression analysis. Surveys were distributed electronically to faculty, second and third year students and doctoral candidates at the author's school psychology program. Volunteers were asked to complete and review the survey.

The 26 pilot respondents were also asked how long the survey took them to complete, whether they thought the survey was “too long,” “too short” or “just the right length,” and whether the survey questions were directly related to school violence prevention (face validity). Additionally, respondents were invited to share any comments or suggestions. Feedback was minimal and included suggestions about rewording or structuring a few questions for better readability. The average time to complete the survey was about 10 minutes. One hundred percent of respondents thought the survey had face validity. Eighty-five percent of respondents thought that the survey was “just the right length.”

Reliability checks were completed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The level of involvement subscale consisted of 7 items ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) and the determinants of involvement subscale consisted of 26 items ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ). Both of these coefficients fall within the acceptable range for the purpose of this study (George & Mallery, 2003).

**Changes to Scales.** Based on the reliability checks and respondent feedback, a number of questions that were included in the survey were not included in the creation of the scales. Although these questions were not included in the scales they were included on the survey and were analyzed descriptively. The changes are as follows (see Appendix A): Questions 1 to 4 were not included in the scale because they were designed to be analyzed descriptively and did not accurately address either scale (level of involvement or determinants of involvement). Questions 7 and 29 were removed from the level of involvement scale and determinants of involvement scale, respectively, because they were designed to be analyzed by frequency counts and affected scale reliability. Question 9 was not included on the level of involvement scale because it dropped the reliability of that scale to 0.09. Question 7 was also not included on the scale because it was designed to be analyzed by descriptive statistics and removing this question

increased scale reliability from 0.84 to 0.90. Question 37 and 40 were not included in either scale because they were open ended questions. All excluded questions appear to have been affecting scale reliability because they were designed to be measured by qualitative analysis or descriptive statistics only. This led to an extremely wide range of responses. Therefore the overall pattern of response was significantly different than other items of the same scale. It should be noted that all items based on the Likert format (and designed to be part of the scale) were included.

### **Procedure**

Emails containing the linked survey to [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) and informed consent, and an informational letter defining the purpose of the study, were sent to the 3076 NASP listserv members and 1000 NCSPs who were randomly selected based on their state. Twenty NCSPs were emailed from each state. Each participant was given the opportunity to enter a drawing for a school violence-related book to help compensate for the time spent participating in the study. Research has demonstrated that such a technique helps to increase response rates (Fox, Crask & Kim, 2001; King, Pealer & Bernard, 2001). Reminder emails were sent to listserv participants two and three weeks after the original email.

### **Chapter Four: Results**

The results of this study indicate that school psychologists are involved in school violence prevention as counselors, members of school violence prevention teams and in consultation with school staff. The longer a school psychologist has been in the field and factors hypothesized as related to involvement (e.g., positive attitude towards school violence prevention) did have a significant relation with school psychologist level of involvement. Several impediments to involvement in school violence prevention do exist and include not having time in current schedule and another member of the school staff facilitating school violence prevention. More specific results are described below.

#### **Schools and Violence Prevention**

The majority of school districts were reported to have a school violence prevention program in place (76.2%). The program most frequently endorsed was counseling intervention (77.7%) with peer mediation being the specific program least endorsed (30.9 %). Some respondents (15.4%) noted that their school has other programs in place. These programs included character education, response to intervention, drug and alcohol prevention, 504 plans, crisis intervention, the Second Step curriculum, social skills training, suicide prevention, positive behavior support, threat assessment, de-escalation strategies and administrative protocols (see Table 4).

#### **School Psychologist Involvement in Violence Prevention**

The first research question addressed how involved school psychologists were in school violence prevention. The level of involvement scale was created by averaging the responses to questions 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13 (see Table 5). The *level of involvement* scale had a mean score of 1.56 with a standard deviation of 1.02. A score of one on this scale suggests minimal

involvement and a score of two moderate involvement. Respondents were also asked directly if they were involved in school violence prevention (Question 3); 57.7% of responses were affirmative. Additionally, when those who responded negatively to this question (42.3%) were asked if they thought they should be involved 75.6% of those respondents answered affirmatively (see Table 6). The majority of respondents (72.0%) noted that other personnel were facilitating school violence prevention activities (Question 36). Additionally, only 25.8% of respondents endorsed that the school psychologist (either alone or part of a team) was involved in facilitating school violence prevention activities. School psychologists reported that on average they spend about 3 hours weekly in school violence prevention activities (Question 7;  $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD 6.51$ ). The range of responses for this question ranged from zero to forty hours.

### **School Psychologist Role**

The second research question asked about the role of school psychologists in school violence prevention. Specifically, whether school psychologists are social-behavioral assessors, program evaluators or direct interventionists. Table 7 contains the percentages of school psychologists who responded whether they were involved (from not involved to extremely involved) in the roles listed. The roles which were endorsed by more than 80% of respondents were involvement on a school violence prevention team and consultation with others about school violence prevention. In terms of type of involvement the most highly endorsed role was in the area of consultation where 78.2% of respondent indicated moderate to extreme involvement. The second most endorsed role indicated involvement on a violence prevention team where 60.5% of respondents indicated moderate to extreme involvement. The areas of counseling, training other school personnel and planning and implementation of school violence prevention programs were the next most endorsed roles with moderate to extreme involvement

of 57.8% , 42.2% and 40.9%, respectively (see Table 7). Moderate to extreme involvement in the role of program review and evaluation was indicated by 34.5% of respondents. The majority of respondents endorsed some involvement in all roles except for research. In the area of research only 21.4% of respondents indicated moderate to extreme involvement with 79.6% of respondents noting that they were either not involved or minimally involved. This role was least endorsed by school psychologists. As shown in Table 8, on average 45.1% of all evaluations completed by the respondents contained formal social-emotional-behavioral components. The research question also asked whether school psychologists had a leadership role in school violence prevention. When asked (question 41) whether they had a leadership role in school violence prevention in their school, almost half of respondents (46.7%) reported that they did. These results suggest that school psychologists demonstrate different levels of involvement within varying roles. While involvement through a school team and consultation were endorsed more highly than other roles it does appear that school psychologists are assessors, program evaluators and interventionists in this area.

### **Positive Determinants and Impediments**

It was hypothesized that internal and external factors would affect school psychologists' involvement in violence prevention activities. Items that were thought to be related to involvement (e.g., attitude, beliefs, size of caseload) can be viewed as either a positive determinant or an impediment to involvement. For example, a positive attitude toward training for school violence prevention or believing that school violence prevention is important would be considered to be positive determinants. In contrast, believing that school violence prevention is unimportant or having a high caseload would be considered to be impediments. The third research question investigated what items represented positive determinants or impediments to



involvement in school violence prevention. The mean response to items that indicate positive determinants is tabulated in Table 9. Items with means of larger than two are considered to be positive determinants and those with means of equal to or less than two represent impediments. The three most strongly endorsed positive determinants were: school psychologists believe that schools have a responsibility to keep students safe (question 15,  $M = 3.86$ ), school psychologists believe that they should play an active role in school violence prevention (question 14,  $M = 3.47$ ) and that working with families was a necessary aspect of school violence prevention (question 20,  $M = 3.39$ ). It should also be noted that school psychologists report a willingness to complete training that focuses on combating school violence (question 18,  $M = 3.16$ ).

Table 10 outlines the items that were indicated by respondents to be impediments to involvement in violence prevention. The most noteworthy impediment was that other personnel were facilitating school violence prevention activities (question 36,  $M = 1.35$ ). The role of the school psychologist in their local district (question 31,  $M = 1.50$ ) and limited time in their schedule (question 35,  $M = 1.54$ ) were also strong impediments to involvement.

Whether or not school psychologists felt prepared to address different aspects of school violence through a variety of techniques was also investigated. The most highly endorsed task was social-emotional-behavioral assessment. Over 60% of the respondents (see Table 11) endorsed that they were prepared to address school violence prevention in all the tasks listed except for bullying prevention. Bullying prevention was endorsed by only 42.3% of respondents.

### **Factors Predicting Involvement**

The third research question also asked what internal and external forces affect level of involvement. As noted above, Tables 9 and 10 outline positive determinants and impediments to

involvement in school violence prevention. All the impediments listed in Table 10 appear to address external factors such as having a leadership role, being adequately prepared, having time in their current schedule, current role in school district and other personnel currently facilitating violence prevention activities. Further, when respondents were asked who was responsible for facilitating school violence prevention in their district the school psychologist was not indicated by respondents as being responsible for school violence prevention (see Table 12). Instead, administrators and counselors were reported to be the two most highly endorsed responsible personnel.

Additionally, it was hypothesized that impediments to involvement in school violence prevention would be due to external and not internal factors. One such hypothesized impediment was size of caseload. On average, participants reported that they completed 63 evaluations per year. A correlation between the number of evaluations a respondent completed and level of involvement was conducted but the variables were not significantly correlated ( $r = -.15, p = .056$ ).

A multiple regression analysis was used to test if the level of involvement of school psychologists could be predicted by determinants of involvement, time in field, gender, community type, highest degree attained and size of district served. Table 13 contains the results of this analysis. The overall model was significant and results of the regression indicated the five predictors explained 47.5% of the variance (Adjusted  $R^2 = .48, F(6, 147) = 24.053, p < .001$ ). This means that the tested variables account for 47.5% of possible variation of scores in the level of involvement scale. Within the model, the variables of determinants of involvement and length of time in field reached significant levels with *Betas* of .638 ( $t = 10.544, p < .001$ ) and .155 ( $t = 2.455, p = .015$ ), respectively. The other variables did not reach significant levels. The third

research question asked whether or not the level of positive determinants/impediments affected the level of involvement of school psychologists in violence prevention. This analysis suggests that it does. Respondents with more time in the field and who reported fewer impediments to involvement (e.g time in current schedule) have a higher level of involvement.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of the school psychologist in school violence prevention. Also addressed was their level of involvement in violence prevention and what impediments and positive determinants related to involvement. Previous research has not focused exclusively on the role of school psychologists but has instead focused on the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of students and teachers. This study is a nationwide survey of school psychologists and their role in school violence prevention. Outlined in this chapter are common roles of school psychologists, what leads to their involvement in violence prevention and impediments to involvement. Also addressed are what these findings mean for trainers, practitioners and researchers.

### **Summary of Results**

**School psychologist involvement.** The present study found that school psychologists on average reported less than moderate involvement in school violence prevention. This is a striking finding because of the calls made for school psychologists to become involved in this issue (NASP, 2006). This was also an important result because the majority of school psychologists reported that school violence prevention was a professional priority and overwhelmingly thought that they should be involved in violence prevention activities. It was hypothesized that one of the reasons school psychologists may not be involved in school violence prevention was because other personnel were facilitating violence prevention activities or addressing incidents of school violence. This hypothesis was confirmed by a majority of respondents who indicated that this was the case. Indeed it is important to note that when asked directly which staff member was responsible for facilitating violence prevention in the school that the school psychologist (either alone or part of a team) was endorsed by only about a quarter

of respondents. It is encouraging to note that school psychologists do report spending time (about 3 hours weekly) on school violence prevention activities.

**School Psychologist Role.** It was hypothesized that school psychologists would be leaders in their school district regarding violence prevention. This does not appear to be the case. Although school psychologists were involved in multiple roles, being a leader in this area is not one of them. Several reasons exist which may explain why school psychologists are not leaders in this area. First, administrators may be taking the lead in this area because school violence is sometimes viewed as a discipline rather than a mental health issue. Second, it is possible that school psychologists may enter a school district where there is an established leader for this area. Last, time may be an impediment to taking a leadership role in violence prevention. Despite not taking a leadership role results of this study demonstrate that the school psychologist plays many other roles within school violence prevention. The two most highly endorsed roles were those of consultation and being a team member on a violence prevention team. These two findings appear to be related since contributing as a team member could be perceived as a form of consultation. This level of involvement on a multidisciplinary team is an encouraging result because of the increased emphasis which state education departments and our field have placed on team-based decision making. Additionally, it is not surprising that using the school psychologist's consultative skills is a consistent role because of its presentation as one of the three primary school psychology skill sets. Conducting counseling was also highly endorsed by respondents, likely for the same reasons.

The training of other school personnel, as well as planning and implementation of school violence prevention programs, were not as highly endorsed. It is unfortunate but not surprising to note that respondents reported being least involved in research about school violence

prevention. School psychology is a practice-based field and most members are solely practitioners. The demands which school districts and state education departments place on school psychological time may leave little room for independent research. Additionally, research-oriented work may not be highly valued by school districts and state education departments. Yet, completing research in this area may be helpful to give our field a better understanding of effective ways to address violence in schools and allows us to determine best practice. School psychologists may be the best trained school personnel in how to conduct research. Although school districts may be implementing violence prevention programs there most likely is little to research at the district-level to determine its effectiveness. Program evaluation and training other school personnel are well within the realm of competency for school psychologists but unfortunately it appears that little of this is currently being done for our school violence prevention programs or school staff. These areas are ones that utilize the unique skill set that school psychologists have but are being underutilized.

School psychologists are completing evaluations with social-emotional-behavioral components (45.1% of all evaluations). This is the most basic form of school violence prevention. While there are no profiles or social-emotional-behavioral characteristics that predict students who will commit acts of violence this type of evaluation allows school psychologists to determine what level of intervention might be necessary for specific students. For example, evaluation may uncover that a student has already committed violent acts, currently bullies others or is a victim of bullying. Information of this kind may help school psychologists implement targeted individual or systemic intervention. While this high level of social-emotional-behavioral assessment should not be a surprising result (since assessment is a major school psychological role) even routine assessment does allow school psychologists to recognize

students who may benefit from intervention. It was hypothesized that school psychologists would place a greater emphasis on school violence prevention programs than other personnel previously researched, such as teachers and students. Although those two groups were not investigated, the results of this study do demonstrate the significant role school psychologists play in consultation and serving on violence prevention teams, both ideal indirect interventions.

**Positive determinants and impediments.** Positive determinants and impediments to school psychologist involvement were also investigated. Positive determinants were questions that were thought to relate positively to a school psychologist's involvement in violence prevention. Impediments were questions that were thought to have a negative impact on a school psychologist's level of involvement. Some major positive determinants were the recognition that the school's responsibility is to keep students safe, the recognition of how important it was for school psychologists to be actively involved in violence prevention, working with families and willingness to complete training with a school violence prevention focus. It is encouraging to note how positively the field of school psychology views the area of school violence prevention. The results of this study suggest that school psychologists overwhelmingly have a positive attitude toward school violence prevention. However, there appears to be a gap between these positive attitudes and what is currently being done in the field. A number of possible reasons for this gap are discussed below as impediments. The five impediments noted were not having a leadership role, insufficient graduate school preparation, lack of time in current schedule, limited role in school district and another staff member already facilitating violence prevention activities. These are sizeable impediments to school psychologist involvement in violence prevention. Respondents noted that their current role and schedule in the school system may preclude their involvement in violence prevention activities as they spend so much time in

assessment-related activities. The continuous quest for role definition and the consequent struggle against role restriction is a consistent theme throughout the research literature (Benson & Hughes, 1985) and it is not surprising that respondents noted this. Although impediments to involvement in prevention activities exist it should be noted that the beliefs and attitudes of respondents to school violence prevention was largely positive.

**Level of involvement.** It was found that the length of time in the field and factors that were hypothesized to be related to violence prevention involvement were significant predictors of how involved school psychologists were in violence prevention activities. The longer a school psychologist has been practicing the more likely it is that they are involved in school violence prevention. It is possible that the level of importance that a school psychologist places on violence prevention activities increases with their time in the field, thus leading to increased involvement. This may be due to increased awareness of violence prevention issues or an increased level of comfort with addressing school violence prevention. As mentioned above, school psychologists in this study reported not feeling adequately prepared by their graduate programs to address issues of school violence. Perhaps time in the field and professional development opportunities utilized over time aid in school violence prevention involvement. The school district within which the school psychologist works may see violence prevention and response as a priority. Continuous involvement with this school district and professional development related to violence prevention may spur involvement in this area. Another possibility is that school psychology veterans have been able to manage and mold their current role in the school district, allowing them more opportunities to address school violence prevention.



It was not surprising that the factors related to violence prevention involvement achieved significance since an individual's level of impediment intuitively would predict their current level of actual involvement. For example, factors such as attitude toward school violence prevention, having time in current schedule for violence prevention activities and willingness to undergo training all appeared at face value to predict involvement. Simply put, when school psychologists have a currently full schedule, don't feel prepared to address school violence or are not willing to be involved in receiving training in violence prevention they are less likely to be involved in violence prevention. School psychologists in this study recognized the importance of school violence prevention and the need for prevention programs and crisis intervention plans. This is a positive result that continues to demonstrate the willingness of school psychologists to expand their roles in the schools.

**Role restriction.** It was also hypothesized that the majority of impediments to involvement in violence prevention would be due to role restriction and not a lack of desire on the part of school psychologists. Almost every impediment found in this study was exogenous, that is, outside of the school psychologist's control and four of the five impediments listed address role definitions. It does appear that school psychologist involvement in violence prevention is impeded primarily by role restriction. This is not a new finding and continues to demonstrate the struggle in which school psychologists find themselves when defining their role. Assessment-related activities continue to take a prominent role.

### **Limitations**

This study had a few limitations. One of the major limitations was the poor response rate that was obtained (4.9%). It should also be noted that this study was done by soliciting participants by two different methods: NASP online list-serv and direct emailing of school

psychologists. The direct emailing to solicit participation appears to have been the more effective method of gaining respondents with a separate response rate of over 10 percent. Such a low response rate does limit the generalizability of this study. However, it is important to note that this study is the only nationally representative study of its kind and has respondents from *every* Census region. Additionally, analysis of respondent demographics suggests that the sample for this study is a good representation of the population of school psychologists in the United States.

Another limitation may have been a selection bias which may mean that the results of this study are not entirely representative of school psychologists. It may be that participants of the list-serv and members who are NCSPs are more active in NASP. This increased involvement in NASP may be associated with a higher level of training and heightened involvement in school violence prevention. Additionally, those who responded to the solicitation request may have had more interest in the subject matter.

It also might have been helpful to have respondents rank tasks that they believe are relevant and important to their job to see if school violence prevention is valued. This would have allowed the present research to gain insight into school psychologists' daily schedule and how it relates to violence prevention. Also, as with all survey research the information received is subjective and reports made by respondents might have been socially acceptable answers or responses to make the field and themselves appear to be performing at a high level. Finally, it may have been helpful to ask respondents for their definition of school violence to see how it compares with definitions used in research literature.

**Implications for Future Research**

Results from this study suggest a perceived gap in training that school psychologists report regarding school violence prevention. A large percentage of school psychologists reported that they did not feel adequately prepared to address school violence prevention when they exited their graduate programs. In contrast, when asked about specific skills that directly relate to school violence prevention, the majority of respondents indicated that they felt comfortable addressing school violence prevention with these specific skills. It is possible that school psychologists have the necessary skills to be assets in violence prevention but haven't determined how to integrate their skills within their school districts. The next logical research step might to determine if a gap in training actually exists.

The survey used in this study may also be particularly effective in gathering information at the state level to obtain a unique state-by-state picture of school violence prevention involvement. While national studies are important, each state does present a unique picture because of state educational mandates. Some states require that school districts have crisis intervention plans. School districts can also have their own mandates and policies regarding this issue as well. Future research may want to focus on a state or local regional approach.

A number of unanswered questions also exist. This study has demonstrated that a small percentage of school psychologists are involved in violence prevention research. School psychologists are ideally situated and qualified to answer these research questions. That is, their physical location in schools, their access to school programs and their unique qualifications make them excellent candidates to complete this kind of research. A suitable future research question is whether or not the lack of involvement in violence prevention research extends to all areas of research. It is possible that school psychologists are completing research in other areas, such as

reading interventions, other behavior interventions, program evaluation or multicultural issues. All these areas are within the scope of school psychology and future research may discover that involvement in research is limited to only school violence prevention. Additionally, this study found five impediments to involvement in school violence prevention. It may be helpful to delve deeper into questions about impediments to involvement. This could be done through direct observation or even time studies of school psychologists.

Similarly, this study highlighted that a lack of leadership role was an impediment to school psychologist involvement in violence prevention. Future research might investigate whether this lack of leadership is limited to just the area of school violence prevention.

It should be noted that a majority of school psychologists endorsed themselves as being involved in school violence prevention when asked about general involvement. In contrast, when asked about specific areas of violence prevention (see *level of involvement* scale) less than moderate involvement was noted. It is possible that when asked about general involvement most school psychologists believe that they are involved in violence prevention in some way. This question was categorical and included all levels of involvement. It is therefore not surprising that when asked about types of involvement (e.g. consultation, participation on a violence prevention team) and corresponding levels of involvement that there is an apparent decrease in reported involvement. It may be beneficial for future research to determine whether there are additional types of involvement not included in this scale that was reported by school psychologists as general involvement.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study suggest that a minority of school psychologists are involved in training others within their school districts regarding school violence prevention. This is a

disappointing result. While some forms of training may already be occurring within individual and small group consultation it can be a formalized duty of school psychologists. District-level training by school psychologists at beginning-of-the-year meetings may be an effective way to implement this practice. School psychologists can share their knowledge efficiently and can continue to expand their overall role definition and repertoire of skills. While it is true that school psychologists perform varying functions depending on their state and district they should continue to market their unique skill set to enhance their indispensability to schools. One impediment to this type of involvement may be that school psychologists do not feel adequately prepared themselves to address violence prevention. This lack of preparedness may be overcome by taking additional training or by utilizing available professional development. Since results from this study indicate that school psychology veterans may be more involved in violence prevention perhaps they can take the lead in training other school personnel. As it currently stands, it appears that school districts are not fully utilizing the skills of their school psychologists.

Especially of concern is the fact that school psychologists continue to rate bullying prevention as one of their least prepared areas although research continues to demonstrate the link between bullying and more serious incidents of school violence (Dwyer & Osher, 2000). Although tasks primarily involving assessment have taken up a large amount of a school psychologists' time it is important to note that school psychologists are first and foremost mental health practitioners in schools. School psychology is a unique field in that we understand more about psychology than most education personnel and understand more about education than other psychology professionals. School psychologists are not merely assessors and test givers. In the continual search for role definition the field should not become limited to a specific task or

duty. This study presents an encouraging result--the longer a school psychologist has been in the field the more likely he/she is to be involved in school violence prevention. Future research may investigate this further but a worthwhile hypothesis is that school psychologists who are in the field longer have had more opportunities to define their role in their districts. School psychologists should continue to expand their roles within the schools and include research in this expansion of responsibilities. As a field we are ideally suited and placed to become more involved in this area. The time has come for us to translate our quest for role definition into tasks beyond traditional assessment, consultation and counseling. This is well within our field of competence.

### **Implications for Trainers**

One noteworthy finding from this study that should be of particular importance to trainers of school psychologists was that respondents noted that they did not feel adequately prepared to address school violence by their graduate program. This item was indicated as an impediment to involvement by participants. In contrast, when asked about specific activities (e.g., staff consultation) respondents reported that they felt comfortable with a majority of activities. This finding might be explained by previous research which found that school psychologists did not necessarily view specific activities (like bullying prevention) as school violence prevention. Instead, more recognized activities such as crisis intervention or incidents involving a weapon were more closely identified with violence prevention (Furlong et al., 1996). This finding continues to have significant implications for practice and training of school psychologists since Dwyer and Osher (2000) found that bullying in schools is correlated to incidents of school violence. It may benefit trainers to explicitly relate specific skills (e.g., crisis intervention, counseling, consultation) to its use in preventing violent acts in schools. Future research may

determine whether or not a perceived or actual gap in training exists but until that time the field of school psychology may benefit from more explicit training in school violence prevention.

While it is understood that there are many other standards that exist for school psychological training, school violence prevention utilizes a vast number of skills and has significant overlap with general school psychologist training.

### **Conclusions**

School psychologists agree that schools have a responsibility to keep students safe. The overwhelming majority of school psychologists are involved in school violence prevention but some note that they would like to be more involved than they currently are. Based on this study, their role in school violence prevention is varied. They are involved in prevention teams, counseling, consultation and assessment. In contrast, they report limited involvement in training others, not being adequately prepared to address school violence and that another person in the school facilitates violence prevention. This appears to be not because of a lack of desire but because of impediments to involvement like role restriction, current schedule and level of training.

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Table 1

*Respondent Demographics*


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|                            | <u>N</u> | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Gender                     | 171      |          |          |
| Female                     |          | 127      | 74.3     |
| Male                       |          | 44       | 25.7     |
| Title                      | 167      |          |          |
| Psychologist               |          | 7        | 4.2      |
| School Psychologist        |          | 155      | 92.8     |
| Special Education Director |          | 2        | 1.2      |
| Other                      |          | 3        | 1.8      |
| Highest Education          | 172      |          |          |
| Master's                   |          | 41       | 23.8     |
| Specialist                 |          | 94       | 54.7     |
| Doctorate                  |          | 37       | 21.5     |
| Ethnicity                  | 172      |          |          |
| White                      |          | 158      | 91.9     |
| Hispanic                   |          | 4        | 2.3      |
| African American           |          | 4        | 2.3      |
| Other                      |          | 6        | 3.5      |

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Table 2

*School Demographics*


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|                    | <u>N</u> | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Location           | 172      |          |          |
| Suburban           |          | 73       | 42.4     |
| Rural              |          | 56       | 32.6     |
| Urban              |          | 43       | 25.0     |
| Region             | 174      |          |          |
| South Atlantic     |          | 31       | 17.8     |
| East North Central |          | 29       | 16.7     |
| Pacific            |          | 24       | 13.8     |
| West North Central |          | 24       | 13.8     |
| New England        |          | 20       | 11.5     |
| Middle Atlantic    |          | 16       | 9.2      |
| Mountain           |          | 15       | 8.6      |
| East South Central |          | 10       | 5.7      |
| West South Central |          | 5        | 2.9      |
| Size               | 174      |          |          |
| Under 499          |          | 49       | 28.2     |
| 500-999            |          | 31       | 17.8     |
| 1000-1499          |          | 36       | 20.7     |

Table 2 Continued

*School Demographics*

|           | <u>N</u> | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Size      | 174      |          |          |
| 1500-1999 |          | 28       | 16.1     |
| 2000-2499 |          | 10       | 5.7      |
| 2500-2999 |          | 10       | 5.7      |
| Over 3000 |          | 10       | 5.7      |

Table 3

*Census Regions*

---

**New England**

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

**Middle Atlantic**

New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania

**East North Central**

Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin

**West North Central**

Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota

**South Atlantic**

Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia

**East South Central**

Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee

**West South Central**

Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas

**Mountain**

Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Montana, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming

**Pacific**

Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington

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Table 4

*School District Involvement*


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|                              | <u>N</u> | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Violence prevention program  | 172      |          |          |
| Yes                          |          | 131      | 76.2     |
| No                           |          | 41       | 23.8     |
| Type of prevention program   | 175      |          |          |
| Counseling intervention      |          | 136      | 77.7     |
| Academic interventions       |          | 128      | 73.1     |
| Bullying prevention          |          | 117      | 66.9     |
| School-wide behavior program |          | 101      | 57.7     |
| Peer mediation               |          | 54       | 30.9     |
| Other                        |          | 27       | 15.4     |

---



Table 5

*Level of Involvement Scale Questions*

|  | <u>M</u> | <u>SD</u> |
|--|----------|-----------|
| Q5. I participated in the implementation and planning of my school's violence prevention program(s)                    | 1.38     | 1.44      |
| Q6. I review and evaluate my school's violence prevention program(s).  | 1.10     | 1.31      |
| Q8. I contribute by training other school personnel in school violence prevention (e.g., conflict resolution skills)   | 1.32     | 1.32      |
| Q10. I am involved in current research about school violence prevention.   | 0.71     | 1.14      |
| Q11. I participate in a building level school violence/ crisis intervention team.                                      | 2.06     | 1.44      |
| Q12. I counsel students who are at-risk for committing or have already committed violent acts.                         | 1.90     | 1.43      |
| Q13. I consult with teachers regarding students who are at-risk for committing or have already committed violent acts. | 2.39     | 1.20      |

Note. *Level of Involvement* scale M = 1.56, SD = 1.02. Responses were as follows: 0 = Not Involved, 1 = Minimally involved, 2 = Moderately Involved, 3 = Significantly Involved, 4 = Extremely Involved.

Table 6

*School Psychologist Involvement in School Violence Prevention*


---

|                                 | <u>N</u> | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Involved in violence prevention | 174      |          |          |
| Involved                        |          | 100      | 57.7     |
| Not involved                    |          | 74       | 42.3     |
| If not, should be?              | 74       |          |          |
| Yes                             |          | 56       | 75.6     |
| No                              |          | 14       | 19.0     |
| Missing                         |          | 4        | 5.4      |

---

Table 7

*Role of School Psychologists in School Violence Prevention*


---

|                             | <u>N</u> | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Planning and implementation | 171      |          |          |
| Not involved                |          | 71       | 41.5     |
| Minimally Involved          |          | 30       | 17.5     |
| Moderately Involved         |          | 24       | 14.0     |
| Significantly Involved      |          | 26       | 15.2     |
| Extremely Involved          |          | 20       | 11.7     |
| Review and evaluation       | 171      |          |          |
| Not involved                |          | 83       | 48.5     |
| Minimally Involved          |          | 29       | 17.0     |
| Moderately Involved         |          | 29       | 17.0     |
| Significantly Involved      |          | 18       | 10.5     |
| Extremely Involved          |          | 12       | 7.0      |
| Training school personnel   | 173      |          |          |
| Not involved                |          | 69       | 39.9     |
| Minimally Involved          |          | 31       | 17.9     |
| Moderately Involved         |          | 35       | 20.2     |
| Significantly Involved      |          | 25       | 14.5     |
| Extremely Involved          |          | 13       | 7.5      |

Table 7 Continued

*Role of School Psychologists in School Violence Prevention*


---

|                          | <u>N</u> | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Research                 | 172      |          |          |
| Not involved             |          | 111      | 64.5     |
| Minimally Involved       |          | 26       | 15.1     |
| Moderately Involved      |          | 16       | 9.3      |
| Significantly Involved   |          | 12       | 7.0      |
| Extremely Involved       |          | 7        | 4.1      |
| Violence prevention team | 172      |          |          |
| Not involved             |          | 34       | 19.8     |
| Minimally Involved       |          | 34       | 19.8     |
| Moderately Involved      |          | 38       | 22.1     |
| Significantly Involved   |          | 29       | 16.9     |
| Extremely Involved       |          | 37       | 21.5     |
| Counseling               | 173      |          |          |
| Not involved             |          | 41       | 23.7     |
| Minimally Involved       |          | 32       | 18.5     |
| Moderately Involved      |          | 34       | 19.7     |
| Significantly Involved   |          | 36       | 20.8     |
| Extremely Involved       |          | 30       | 17.3     |

Table 7 Continued

*Role of School Psychologists in School Violence Prevention*

---

|                        | <u>N</u> | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Consultation           | 174      |          |          |
| Not involved           |          | 15       | 8.6      |
| Minimally Involved     |          | 23       | 13.2     |
| Moderately Involved    |          | 51       | 29.3     |
| Significantly Involved |          | 49       | 28.2     |
| Extremely Involved     |          | 36       | 20.7     |

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Table 8

*Positive Determinants and Impediments: Evaluations*

|   | N   | M    | SD   |
|---|-----|------|------|
| Number of evaluations per year  | 164 | 62.9 | 31.6 |
| Percent of evaluations that include formal social-emotional-behavioral assessment | 159 | 45.1 | 31.5 |

Table 9

*Positive Determinants of Involvement*

|   | M    | SD  |
|---|------|-----|
| Q15. Schools have a responsibility to keep students safe.   | 3.86 | .43 |
| Q14. School psychologists should play an active role in school violence prevention.                       | 3.47 | .63 |
| Q20. I think that working with families is a necessary aspect of school violence prevention.              | 3.39 | .59 |
| Q18. I would be willing to complete training that focuses on combating school violence                    | 3.16 | .70 |
| Q38. I have access to resources about school violence prevention.   | 2.96 | .69 |
| Q17. I am afraid a student may harm me outside of school.   | 2.95 | .32 |
| Q26. I feel that I am adequately aware of common risk factors for school violence.                        | 2.95 | .75 |
| Q24. I have considered changing career/job because of fears of being harmed at school.                    | 2.94 | .39 |
| Q16. I am afraid for my personal safety in school.  | 2.93 | .37 |
| Q30. My school's atmosphere is welcoming and inviting to all students.                                    | 2.83 | .91 |
| Q27. I have no interest in being involved in school violence prevention activities.                       | 2.80 | .57 |
| Q25. I am confident in taking a leadership role in preventing incidents of school violence.               | 2.70 | .91 |
| Q21. School violence prevention programs are generally an effective tool to combat violence in schools.   | 2.67 | .72 |
| Q22. I feel competent to research and develop specific school violence prevention programs for my school. | 2.62 | .91 |

|   |      |      |
|---|------|------|
| Q23. School violence prevention should not be a priority for my district.   | 2.62 | .77  |
| Q34. The administration at my school would support my increased involvement in school violence prevention activities. | 2.56 | .85  |
| Q42. I have attended workshops/conferences to learn about school violence prevention.                                 | 2.52 | 1.06 |
| Q19. School violence is one of the most prominent and serious issues facing our schools today.                        | 2.47 | .98  |
| Q28. School violence prevention is not a personal professional priority.  | 2.45 | .81  |
| Q32. I am informed and aware of current research in the area of school violence prevention.                           | 2.34 | .92  |
| Q33. School violence prevention is not a top priority for the administrators in my school district.                   | 2.13 | .95  |

---

Note. 0 = Strongly Disagree, 1 = Disagree, 2 = Unable to decide, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree. Items with means of equal to 2 or below are considered impediments; items with means higher than 2 are considered positive determinants.



Table 10

*Impediments to Involvement*

|  | M    | SD   |
|--|------|------|
| Q41. I have a leadership role in school violence prevention in my school   | 1.89 | 1.06 |
| Q39. My graduate program adequately prepared me to be involved in school violence prevention activities.             | 1.82 | .95  |
| Q35. I have time in my current schedule to become more involved in school violence prevention activities.            | 1.54 | .85  |
| Q31. My role (e.g., primary evaluator) in the school limits my involvement in school violence prevention activities. | 1.50 | 1.22 |
| Q36. Other school personnel are facilitating school violence prevention activities.                                  | 1.35 | .86  |

Note. 0 = Strongly Disagree, 1 = Disagree, 2 = Unable to decide, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree. Items with means of 2 or below are considered impediments; items with means larger than 2 are considered positive determinants.

Table 11

*Q29. I am adequately prepared to address school violence effectively in my school.*

|  | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--|----------|----------|
| Social-emotional-behavioral assessment | 162      | 92.6     |
| Staff consultation                     | 148      | 84.6     |
| Individual counseling                  | 139      | 79.4     |
| Crisis response                        | 136      | 77.7     |
| Present information to staff           | 121      | 69.1     |
| Group counseling                       | 112      | 64.0     |
| Present information to students        | 109      | 62.3     |
| Bullying prevention                    | 74       | 42.3     |

Note: N = 174

Table 12

*Other Personnel Involvement in Violence Prevention*


---

|   | <u>n</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---|----------|----------|
| Other personnel facilitate (Q36)  |          |          |
| Agree and Strongly Agree  | 121      | 72.0     |
| Disagree and Strongly Disagree  | 47       | 28.0     |
| Responsible personnel (Q37)   |          |          |
| Administrator only  | 49       | 29.3     |
| Counselor only  | 38       | 22.8     |
| Administrator and mental health<br>(does not include school psychologist) | 24       | 14.4     |
| Mental health personnel only<br>(Includes school psychologist)            | 18       | 10.8     |
| Multidisciplinary team  | 13       | 7.8      |
| Administrator and mental health<br>(includes school psychologist)         | 8        | 4.8      |
| Social worker only  | 5        | 3.0      |
| School Psychologist only  | 4        | 2.4      |
| No one  | 4        | 2.4      |
| Unknown   | 2        | 1.2      |
| Teachers only   | 1        | .6       |
| Administrator and teachers  | 1        | .6       |

---

N = 174

Table 13

*Regression Analysis Summary for Variable Predicting School Psychologist Involvement*

|                             | b        | SE b | $\beta$ |
|-----------------------------|----------|------|---------|
| Constant                    | -3.88    | .48  |         |
| Determinants of involvement | 1.90     | .18  | .64***  |
| Time in field               | .02      | .01  | .16*    |
| Gender                      | .21      | .14  | .09     |
| Community type              | .10      | .08  | .07     |
| Highest degree attained     | .04      | .09  | .03     |
| Size of district            | -1.47E-6 | .00  | -.07    |

Note. Adjusted  $R^2 = .48$  ( $p < .001$ ); \* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Appendix A Survey

### Demographic Information

Age:                      Gender:              Male                      Female

Time at current district:

Location of District:    Urban                      Rural                      Suburban

State:

Size of building:

Length of time in field:

Race:                      White                      Black                      Asian                      Hispanic  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Position (Title):

Highest Degree:                      Master's                      Ed.S.                      Psy.D.  
   Ph.D.                      Ed.D.                      Psy.S.

In the following questions/statements “school violence refers to any behavior that violates a school’s educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against person or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions or disorder. These behaviors include but are not limited to verbal and physical bullying, insults, threats, fighting, rape, murder, suicide, put downs and sexual harassment (p.1).” (NCDJJDP, 2002)

1. My school has a violence prevention program(s).    Yes    No
2. What type of program(s) does your school have? (check all that apply)  
     Bullying prevention  
     Peer mediation  
     Counseling interventions  
     School-wide behavior program  
     Academic Interventions  
     Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you involved in school violence prevention in your school(s)? Yes or No
4. If not, do you think you should be? Yes or No

5. I participated in the implementation and planning of my school's violence prevention program(s). (0 = Not involved, 1 = Minimally involved, 2 = Moderately involved, 3 = Significantly involved, 4 = Extremely involved)
6. I review and evaluate my school's violence prevention program(s). (0 = Not involved, 1 = Minimally involved, 2 = Moderately involved, 3 = Significantly involved, 4 = Extremely involved)
7. How much time (in hours) do you spend per week in school violence prevention program activities?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. I contribute by training other school personnel in school violence prevention (e.g., conflict resolution skills). (0 = Not involved, 1 = Minimally involved, 2 = Moderately involved, 3 = Significantly involved, 4 = Extremely involved)
9. What percentage of your completed evaluations include formal social-emotional-behavioral assessment?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. I am involved in current research about school violence prevention. (0 = Not involved, 1 = Minimally involved, 2 = Moderately involved, 3 = Significantly involved, 4 = Extremely involved)
11. I participate in a building level school violence/ crisis intervention team. (0 = Not involved, 1 = Minimally involved, 2 = Moderately involved, 3 = Significantly involved, 4 = Extremely involved)
12. I counsel students who are at-risk for committing or have already committed violent acts. (0 = Not involved, 1 = Minimally involved, 2 = Moderately involved, 3 = Significantly involved, 4 = Extremely involved)
13. I consult with teachers regarding students who are at-risk for committing or have already committed violent acts. (0 = Not involved, 1 = Minimally involved, 2 = Moderately involved, 3 = Significantly involved, 4 = Extremely involved)
14. School psychologists should play an active role in school violence prevention. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
15. Schools have a responsibility to keep students safe. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
16. I am afraid for my personal safety in school. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)

17. I am afraid a student may harm me outside of school. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
18. I would be willing to complete training that focuses on combating school violence(4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
19. School violence is one of the most prominent and serious issues facing our schools today. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
20. I think that working with families is a necessary aspect of school violence prevention. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
21. School violence prevention programs are generally an effective tool to combat violence in schools. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
22. I feel competent to research and develop specific school violence prevention programs for my school. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
23. School violence prevention should not be a priority for my district. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
24. I have considered changing career/job because of fears of being harmed at school. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
25. I am confident in taking a leadership role in preventing incidents of school violence. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
26. I feel that I am adequately aware of common risk factors for school violence.\* (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
27. I have no interest in being involved in school violence prevention activities. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
28. School violence prevention is not a personal professional priority. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
29. I am adequately prepared to address school violence effectively in my school\*. (Check all that apply)
  - Bullying Prevention
  - Crisis response
  - Present information to staff
  - Present information to students
  - Individual Counseling Sessions with students

Group sessions with students  
Consultation with school staff  
Social-Emotional-Behavioral assessment

30. My school's atmosphere is welcoming and inviting to all students. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
31. My role (e.g., primary evaluator) in the school limits my involvement in school violence prevention activities. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
32. I am informed and aware of current research in the area of school violence prevention. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
33. School violence prevention is not a top priority for the administrators in my school district. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
34. The administration at my school would support my increased involvement in school violence prevention activities. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
35. I have time in my current schedule to become more involved in school violence prevention activities. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
36. Other school personnel are facilitating school violence prevention activities. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
37. Who is responsible (e.g. administrator, school counselor, school social worker, teacher etc.) for facilitating violence prevention activities in your school?  
\_\_\_\_\_
38. I have access to resources about school violence prevention. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
39. My graduate program adequately prepared me to be involved in school violence prevention activities. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)
40. How many evaluations/reevaluations do you complete on average each year?  
\_\_\_\_\_
41. I have a leadership role in school violence prevention in my school.\* (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)



42. I have attended workshops/conferences to learn about school violence prevention. (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Unable to Decide, 1 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly Disagree)

\*Adapted from (Dean & Burns, 2004)

*Note.* Negatively worded items were reverse coded.

## Appendix B

**Research Consent Form**

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral school psychology student at Alfred University and a practicing school psychologist. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the role of school psychologists in school violence prevention. This research study will be used in my doctoral dissertation. Little research has been completed regarding the role of school psychologists in violence prevention and this study will help to add to this body of research. It is my hope that this study will give a snapshot of what school psychologists around the country are doing in response to school violence and provide direction for our role in this area. I am inviting you to be in this study because you are currently a practicing school psychologist.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate your response in this study will be anonymous and confidential. Your survey will only be identified by a subject number and we will not ask for your name. Data will be analyzed by group averages and not by individual responses. Data will be stored on password protected files. The survey will typically take about ten minutes to complete.

There are no known risks from being in this study, and you will not benefit personally. However, we hope that others may benefit from what we learn as a result of this study.

If you have any questions regarding this research or wish to obtain results of the study, feel free to contact either me, Timothy Watson (schoolviolenceprevention@gmail.com or 419-617-4462) or my advisor Dr. Jana Atlas (atlasj@alfred.edu or 607-871-2212). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact Dr. Emrys Westacott, acting chair of the Human Subjects Research Committee at Alfred University (westacott@alfred.edu or 607-871-2217).

Your completion of the survey serves as your consent to participate.

I will appreciate it greatly if you participate.

Sincerely,

Timothy Watson, NCSP  
Doctoral Candidate  
Division of School Psychology  
Alfred University  
Alfred, NY 14802

## Timothy C. Watson

watsons0625@gmail.com

### **Education:**

#### **Alfred University, Alfred, NY**

Doctor of Psychology (Psy. D.) in School Psychology, August, 2011.

#### **Alfred University, Alfred, NY**

Master of Arts and Certificate of Advanced Study in School Psychology, May, 2007.  
GPA 3.91

#### **Houghton College, Houghton, NY**

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, December, 2003. GPA 3.26

Intern at Buffalo Psychiatric Hospital, September 2003 to December 2003.  
BRITE I-Social Learning Program for cognitive developmentally impaired adults.

### **Experience:**

#### **Hardin County Educational Service Center, Kenton, OH**

##### **School Psychologist:** July 2008- Present

- Conduct academic, cognitive, social-emotional and behavioral evaluations
- Consult with parents, administrators and teachers
- Consult with teachers and work with students in unit serving students with an emotional disturbance

#### **Owens Community College, Findlay, OH**

##### **Adjunct Instructor:** September 2009- Present

- Create syllabus to match course goals
- Develop units of study in the area of general psychology
- Select materials and design activities to meet course requirements

#### **South Central Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), Pueblo, CO**

##### **Psychologist Intern:** July 2007- July 2008

- Conduct evaluations for new referrals and reevaluations
- Conduct behavioral screenings and individual consultation
- Consult with parents, regular education and special education teachers

#### **Lea R. Powell Child and Family Services Center, Alfred, NY**

##### **Advanced Graduate Clinician:** September 2005- May 2007

- Provide individual, child and family counseling services as well as conducted psychoeducational assessments

### **Activities &**

#### **Professional:**

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), member since September 2004

#### **Affiliations**

Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) since July 2008