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Perceptions of Southwest Missouri Superintendents in Regard to School Violence and Prevention

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by

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

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Abstract

This research involved examination of the causes of school violence, attitudes concerning violence, and preventative measures used by schools in the United States in relation to problems and solutions found in southwest Missouri schools. The goal of this dissertation was to study perceptions of school violence in the United States to form a better understanding of what schools are doing to combat violence and why these actions are seen as necessary for the safety of students, staff, and faculty within schools. To gather relevant information for the study, a literature review was conducted, followed by a written questionnaire administered to school superintendents of southwest Missouri. This research revealed two significant findings. First, school superintendents in southwest Missouri generally consider their communities to be safe and the likelihood of school violence to be low. Second, the main influences for school violence are perceived to be factors outside of the school over which administrators have little control. These findings reveal the need for more involvement of families and communities in order to combat violence before it reaches the schools.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The phenomenon of school violence encompasses actions that can cause emotional or physical harm (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015b). While the risk of death is typically minimal, nonfatal injuries such as psychological damage can cause major problems and risk factors that can lead to further school and youth violence (CDC, 2015b). These include drug use, poor family functioning, and poverty (CDC, 2015b).

One of the greatest problems currently plaguing today's society is how to get school violence under control (Reilly, 2016). It has become increasingly apparent the education of younger generations is vital to their futures and the well-being of society as a whole (Reilly, 2016). The younger generations are expected to find solutions to issues such as the energy crisis and the plethora of modern diseases; however, a major obstacle hindering the education of many students is school violence (Reilly, 2016).

School violence sometimes results in the deaths of children, but it can also have non-fatal, long-term physical and mental health effects (Reilly, 2016). Students who are victims of school violence may end up suffering from depression or other forms of trauma that ruin their lives (Reilly, 2016). The issue of school violence is so great the federal government has taken action to put an end to this issue and to establish a safe and supportive learning environment for all students (Duncan, 2016).

Schools, in collaboration with parents, need to provide guidance and protection to students, as well as loving relationships (Reilly, 2016). Students of all backgrounds need an established sense of self-worth so they will not turn toward violence (Reilly, 2016). Policies aimed at protecting minority children from unfair punishment can often have the

opposite effect and lead to increased bullying and violence (Reilly, 2016). A 2013 study published " in the Journal of Criminology, suggested that anti-bullying programs could be having the opposite than intended effects" (Trowbridge, 2013, para. 5). Trowbridge (2013) referred to the University of Texas study findings that "students at schools with anti-bullying initiatives may be more likely to become a victim of bullying" (para. 5). In addition, some policies and programs alienate teachers and break down student-teacher relations, leading to increased violence (Reilly, 2016).

School threats were up 158% from 2013 to 2014, showing violence is not curbed adequately with current solutions (Reilly, 2016). Evidence has shown teacher-parent-student relationships need to be improved significantly (Reilly, 2016). Teachers need to be seen as sources of guidance who deserve respect, while students require care and the establishment of loving relationships that can lead to decreased violence (Reilly, 2016).

According to the CDC (2015a), "In a 2013 nationally representative sample of youth in grades nine through twelve, 19.6% reported being bullied on school property and 14.8% reported being bullied electronically during the 12 months before the [CDC] survey" (p. 1). In 2011, 5.4% of high school students reported having a weapon at school (Kennedy, 2015). Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics stated 31 violent deaths occurred on school campuses during the 2010-2011 school year (Bidwell, 2014). The Constitutional Rights Foundation (2014) pointed out that every year, three million young people fall victim to crimes at school. However, statistics show the number of violent crimes that occur on school campuses has declined, raising the question of the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies (Neuman, 2012).

Melvin (2011) discussed the reasons zero-tolerance policies are not a good way to deal with school violence, because "these policies often do not treat violators fairly" (p. 721). Melvin (2011) argued there is a difference between children who have learning disabilities or emotional problems and those who misbehave intentionally. Punishment cannot be used for all children; it depends on the situation (Capuzzi & Gross, 2014). However, school security must be maintained (Capuzzi & Gross, 2014).

Children exposed to violence in school exhibit trauma that can cause behavioral problems and affect social skills (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012). The idea of trying to prevent, or at the very least decrease, the amount of violence in schools in the United States is important for both children and educators (Melvin, 2011). It is imperative children should have the opportunity to work, learn, and express themselves (Capuzzi & Gross, 2014). First-rate education is very important for students, because today's children are going to build the future (Capuzzi & Gross, 2014). A society built by well-educated people is a strong and powerful society (Capuzzi & Gross, 2014). One of the ways educators can help students achieve success is to be incorporated into the daily lives of schoolchildren and to protect students while in a safe school environment (Melvin, 2011).

This study includes discussion of several examples of school violence. From the earliest documented cases, these selected examples show past and present-day acts of school violence. This will allow for a broad view of how violence in schools has progressed over time. It will also help with making connections among similarities and differences in incidents of school violence, as well as with identifying possible triggers.

Background of the Study

School violence has occurred for centuries; the only thing that has changed is the media coverage of these violent acts (Twemlow et al., 2008). The first incident of school violence happened in the 18th century (Dixon, 2005). As stated by Middleton (2007), "One of the earliest shooting crimes that took place in a school property was the Pontiac's Rebellion school massacre on July 26, 1764, when four Lenape American Indians entered a schoolhouse near present-day Greencastle, Pennsylvania" (p. 171). The assailants shot and killed schoolmaster Enoch Brown and nine or 10 children (Middleton, 2007). Only three children survived (Middleton, 2007).

The mid-19th century began a steady increase in violence at schools (Middleton, 2007). In the 1850s, the majority of school violence seems to have taken place on the East Coast, and only one incident occurred on the West Coast (Dixon, 2005). During the 19th century, school violence continued to spread throughout the United States (Dixon, 2005).

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, which was sponsored by the CDC and the Justice Department, was developed to gauge the amount of violence to which the youth of today's society are exposed (Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, Hamby, & Kracke, 2015). After the initial survey, a second survey was conducted in which a sample representative of the population reported 57.7%, or three in five, children were exposed to one of the different forms of violence (physical assault, sexual victimization, maltreatment, property victimization, and witnessing violence) within the past year (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Other notable findings included 41.2% of children were victims of assault, 10.1% were injured in an assault, 5.6% were sexually victimized, 24.1% were

victims of property crimes, 22.4% witnessed a violent act, 8.2% witnessed family violence, and 3.7% witnessed bomb threats at their schools within the past year (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Approximately 48.4% of the sample reported having multiple exposures to violence within the year (Finkelhor et al., 2015).

A common theme of the statistics mentioned is that youth exposure to violence is still very prevalent in today's society and can present many problems; it can lead to children developing violent behaviors and continuing to perpetuate the cycle of violence (Finkelhor et al., 2015). One of the main issues is that school violence can hinder the educational process for all students, causing society to regress backward as younger generations do not receive the education they need (Finkelhor et al., 2015). In addition, children's exposure to violence can cause health problems such as developmental difficulties, depression, and behavioral issues (Finkelhor et al., 2015). A youth plagued with violence leads to children being more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol (Finkelhor et al., 2015).

Much of what is considered school violence today is violence that targets only one individual or is self-inflicted (Bracy, 2009). In today's society, it seems such small-scale violent acts do not attract the attention of the media (Bracy, 2009). However, violence in schools has gradually started to affect larger groups of students, such as in Columbine, Colorado (Bracy, 2009). The media has covered Columbine and other recent school acts of violence, but these large-scale acts of violence are not the only ones (Bracy, 2009). The violence in most publicized school shootings affects many people, but there have been several other shootings in which only a few individuals were affected (Bracy, 2009).

Prior to the 20th century, the majority of incidences of school violence and shootings were accidental (Twemlow, 2000). It appears these earlier school shooters did not intend to kill multiple individuals, as many shooters intend to today (Twemlow, 2000). In the 18th and 19th centuries, it was legal to carry firearms in schools, so it was very common for students to bring weapons to school (Twemlow, 2000). However, today it is illegal to carry firearms in schools because of new laws and policies (Twemlow, 2000).

In the late 20th century, the United States experienced an increase in the media coverage of school shootings (Cornell, 2003). The misconception in media coverage is that school shootings and other mass violence in schools have increased suddenly in the last several decades; however, this is not the case (Cornell, 2003). In contrast to media reports, there has not been a sharp increase in school violence; instead, it has continued to increase gradually throughout the decades (Cornell, 2003). The difference is the role the media plays during the mass violence perpetrated at schools in the 20th century, such as the Columbine shooting in 1999 (Cornell, 2003).

The Columbine case was the first to receive large-scale media coverage, which occurred at the time of the shooting and for a period thereafter (Cornell, 2003). For instance, the media reminded people of the Columbine school shooting images repeatedly (Cornell, 2003). The news media continued to show images of the Columbine school shooting years after the event, keeping the event fresh in people's minds (Cornell, 2003). Cornell (2003) found, "One of the largest national tabloids made the Columbine High School shooting its cover story three years after the shooting, when it obtained newly released photographs of bloody victims" (p. 705). Unfortunately, because of media

coverage, Columbine is probably the most well-known high school in the United States (Cornell, 2003).

The media publicizes these acts of school violence, and reports continue to refer to them for years afterward (Bracy, 2009). Some researchers have closely examined violence in schools with the objective of determining causes and the ways educators can help prevent such violence with the hope children can grow up in a safe and secure environment (Twemlow, 2000). Student gang violence, intimidation of younger students, and physical attacks on peers and staff members are some of the forms of school violence (Cornell, 2003). Such violence has become a very serious issue in the academic field, but particularly in the United States, where the rates of violence in schools are exceedingly high and where students have access to knives, guns, and other weapons (Cornell, 2003). This is a major concern for parents and school staff.

In the past, schools were the safest places for students (Cornell, 2003). School staff members and fellow students were monitoring children every second, so school was safer for students than their homes (Reddy et al., 2001). However, schools are no longer safe due to the rise of violent behavior on school grounds (Reddy et al., 2001). It is disturbing that the system is not able to control violence inside schools (Reddy et al., 2001). Since children are likely to be victims, parents worldwide are worried about this violence (Reddy et al., 2001).

Many factors have contributed to the grave and dangerous activities happening in schools (Reddy et al., 2001). The risk factors arise from the roles parents, teachers, a student's friends, and a child's mindset play in generating violent outbursts (Reddy et al., 2001). Nevertheless, the deciding factor is the contribution of the parents (Reddy et al.,

2001). The first place children learn about appropriate behavior and gain a positive

attitude about behavior is the home; therefore, parents should keep an eye on their

children every day (Dixon, 2005). Parents are supposed to watch over children and

monitor student attitudes toward fellow beings, such as whether children are behaving

badly (Dixon, 2005). Lesneskie and Block (2016) found schools with greater parent

involvement in academic area activities experienced lower instances of violence. Ending

the bad conduct of children when it first occurs will affect children's attitudes (Dixon,

2005). A child who shows signs of violence can still be cared for in a manner that may

help him or her find a way to help manage anger and violence (Dixon, 2005).

Any examination of the ways parents can help children succeed at school and feel

safe should include consideration of whether children receive enough attention and

affection at home (Dixon, 2005). Another way to help combat school violence is to make

sure children are educated on all forms of intimidation, especially bullying, and how it

affects other children (Twemlow et al., 2008). There are several online sources which

provide information and recommend ways for parents to handle school violence

(Twemlow et al., 2008). Parents should educate themselves in order to avoid violence

(Twemlow et al., 2008).

Violence can vary based on the location of the school and the size of the student

body (Reddy et al., 2001). It is common for most people to associate incidences of

school violence only with urban schools (Reddy et al., 2001). However, according to

Reddy et al. (2001), "If researchers make a thorough assessment of school violence

taking place in the small schools of rural America, then there are various facts that we

can easily reveal" (p. 9). Recent studies and reports clearly say schoolchildren in rural areas are as aggressive as their urban counterparts (Reddy et al., 2001).

While combating youth violence and trying to ensure it does not manifest in schools can be difficult, the main solutions are preventive programs and interventions aimed at reducing youth exposure to violence in the first place at the family and school levels (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Successful programs typically incorporate families to provide children with a safe and violence-free environment at home (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Families need to limit exposure to violence whether in video games or on television so children do not become accustomed to the misbelief violence is acceptable (Finkelhor et al., 2015). In addition, school programs such as anti-bullying campaigns that reduce youth victimization have shown success in reducing exposure to violence and promoting a safe environment necessary for learning (Finkelhor et al., 2015). These programs need to be promoted constantly, and more effort is necessary to ensure violence is combated effectively and youth are able to get the education they deserve (Finkelhor et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework known as Positivism or Post-Positivism guided this study (Butin, 2010). Positivism follows the understanding knowledge is simply to describe the phenomena individuals experience (Creswell, 2013). It is a matter of sticking to what scholars, scientists, and researchers can observe and measure (Creswell, 2013). Within Post-Positivism, there are several key elements to look at such as "assumptions about 'reality,' assumptions about 'truth,' key goals, key outcome, unit of analysis, and key criteria" (Butin, 2010, p. 59).

Statement of the Problem

The problems that exist within the topic of prevention of school violence are mainly the many factors that lead to the existence of school violence (Hong & Espelage, 2012). School violence occurs due to a multitude of factors, and not all of the factors affect each student (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Each student has his or her own breaking point before deciding to commit an act of violence at school (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Being able to narrow down the triggers for each individual student is difficult and improbable (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Many factors, such as environmental pressures, family matters, and behavior issues, are different for everyone, which makes it difficult to map out a trend of what might set off each individual student (Hong & Espelage, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

This study was focused on the prevention of school violence, especially threats against life. This focus extended beyond the recent mass school shootings in the United States to the small-scale violence that is commonly ignored in the media today (Gerler, 2013). Osborne defined small-scale violent acts as:

1. acts against objects, such as theft, vandalism, and arson;

2. acts against same-sex peers, such as intimidation, bullying, assault, battery, and homicide;

3. acts against opposite-sex peers, such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, intimidation, bullying, and rape;

4. acts against staff and faculty, such as intimidation, bullying, assault, battery, theft, sexual offenses of various types, and homicide; and

5. other deviant or undesirable behaviors that are "victimless." (as cited in Gerber,

2013, p. 61)

To know how to prevent violent acts, the reasons for these acts need to be understood; the

focus must extend beyond mass shootings such as Sandy Hook Elementary and

Columbine (Duncan, 2013).

Research questions. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How can school staff members and parents better control or eliminate violence

in schools in the United States?

2. What are the causes of the increased violence in schools over the last decade?

3. What are the attitudes of southwest Missouri administrators on school

violence?

Significance of Study

Schools in southwest Missouri were studied to get a better idea of how school

violence affects people in the United States. It is important to note Columbine and other

more recent acts of school violence recorded in the media today are not the only cases

occurring but are the primary cases covered by the national media (Muschert, 2009). It

seems for each publicized school shooting, there are several more that only affect a few

individuals (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004). Looking more closely at violence in schools

may help determine the causes of these violent acts and ways educators can help prevent

these acts of violence (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004).

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were defined:

Mass shooting. Mass Shooting Tracker (2016) defines "Mass shooting to be an incident of violence in which 4 or more people are shot" (para. 19). This definition includes the shooter if killed during the incident. (Mass shooting tracker, 2016).

School violence. According to the CDC's *Youth Violence: Definitions* (2015b), school violence is a subset of youth violence, which is a broader public health problem. The CDC (2015b) noted, "Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power against another person, group, or community, and the behavior is likely to cause physical or psychological harm" (para. 1). Again according to the CDC (2015b), "Although youth violence can begin in early childhood, it typically includes individuals between the ages of 10 and 24" (para. 1).

Terroristic threat. A terroristic threat is defined as follows:

A crime generally involving a threat to commit violence, which is communicated with the intent to terrorize another, to cause the evacuation of a building, or to cause serious public inconvenience, in reckless disregard of the risk of causing such terror or inconvenience. (USLegal, 2015, para. 1)

A terroristic threat includes but it is not limited to endangerment, harassment, stalking, ethnic intimidation, and criminal mischief (USLegal, 2015).

Zero tolerance. According to DeMitchell and Hambacher (2016):

[Zero tolerance] is a disciplinary approach intended to send the message that certain behaviors (e.g., drugs and weapons on campus) will not be tolerated on

school grounds by punishing all offenses, major and minor, uniformly and severely. (p. 2)

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified in this study:

Sample size. The sample size was limited to the number of superintendents who completed the questionnaire. This was a small sample, since questionnaires were only available to superintendents in the southwest Missouri area instead of throughout the United States.

Instrument. The questionnaire itself was a limitation, because it was designed by the principal investigator.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.

2. The researcher assumed data gathered in southwest Missouri are representative of school violence data throughout the United States.

Summary

In this study, data collected were compared to findings in the literature on school violence throughout the United States. In Chapter One, a background of the study was presented. Also included in Chapter One were the introduction of the conceptual and theoretical framework that guided this study, a statement of the problem, and the purpose of the study. The research questions were introduced, along with definitions of key terms used within the study. Finally, the limitations and assumptions were shared.

Chapter Two contains the review of literature, which outlines previous findings on this topic that contribute to the present study of violence in schools. Chapter Three

contains a description of the methodology used for this study. An analysis of the data is presented in Chapter Four. A summary of findings, implications for practice, conclusions, and suggestions for additional research are described in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Violence in schools is a very relevant topic in today's society (McGarrell, Hipple, Bynum, Perez, & Gregory, 2013). According to Gray and Lewis (2015):

Sixty-five percent of public schools reported that at least one violent incident occurred at school during the 2013-14 school year. Violent incidents were reported at 53 percent of elementary schools, 88 percent of middle schools, and 78 percent of high school/combined schools. (p. 2)

It is very doubtful there is no violence in schools, but it may not be recorded (Geffner, Igelman, & Zellner, 2014). Furthermore, Reddy et al. (2001) stressed, "Conducting research on schools, communities, students, environment, and health might make it possible to determine some of the causes of increasing violence in schools in the United States" (p. 20).

The causes of school violence are widely variable. Factors such as school location, student body composition, exterminate threat factors (the amount of crime in the surrounding community) and unknown works determine the commonality of school violence (Dogutas, 2013). Poor, urban school districts in what are often high-crime areas have more interpersonal student violence than do rural or wealthy districts (Dogutas, 2013). The simple fact there exists no uniformity in the causes of violence means the responses to violence must be tailored to the circumstances of individual districts, and "one size fits all" approaches will likely not be very successful (Dogutas, 2013, p. 91).

Dr. Aysun Dogutas (2013) wrote, "The environment and setting of schools affect the understanding of types, causes, and meaning of school violence" (p. 91). He noted school violence has a number of origins that are not uniform or evenly distributed

(Dogutas, 2013). There is interpersonal violence, which largely occurs between students (Dogutas, 2013). This kind of violence is more common in communities where violence is considered an acceptable method of conflict resolution (Dogutas, 2013). Often schools where such views are not held suffer far less student-to-student violence (Dogutas, 2013). In general, perpetrators "are likely to be young and of the same race" (Dogutas, 2013, p. 87).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated, "Approximately half of the boys and one quarter of the girls surveyed reported being attacked by someone at school" (as cited in Dogutas, 2013, p. 87). Clearly, as these numbers show, violence is a problem in schools. As Dogutas (2013) has shown, the causes and distribution of such violence are highly variable; consequently, social condition plays an important role in school violence. Because various factors contribute to school violence, it is a complicated problem that varies from place to place and is not uniform as to its causes (Dogutas, 2013).

According to Drs. Rosalind Duplechain and Robert Morris (2014), "School shootings are most commonly committed by either a student who goes to the school or by an intruder from off campus who has a connection to someone within a particular school" (p. 87). Other than internal violence, trespassers and external actions play a part in some violent acts at schools (Dogutas, 2013). This is a large societal problem not linked solely to the school system (Dogutas, 2013). Solving the problem of school violence must involve more than just the school system itself (Dogutas, 2013).

Dogutas (2013) remarked teachers are the most likely intervenors in stopping and preventing school violence. According to Dogutas (2013), "Teachers have an effect on

students' perception or behaviors" and hence have an important role in preventing violence (p. 90). Understanding students and physically stopping fights together make teachers the "first responders" in such violent episodes (Dogutas, 2013, p. 90). Violence differs from school to school, as do its causes and frequency (Dogutas, 2013). What works as a preventive in one place may not work in another (Dogutas, 2013).

McGarrell et al. (2013) agreed with the idea of being able to determine some of the causes of increased violence within schools and outlined ways to work on prevention of violence in schools. If researchers are able to determine even a few reasons for the increase in school violence, stakeholders may be able to target those reasons and help bring the violence rate in schools down by implementing new ways of dealing with students, their health, and their environment. If researchers cannot determine the causes of violence in schools, they should investigate ways to help prevent violence by ensuring measures of security and appropriate procedures.

According to President Obama (as cited in Duncan, 2013) limiting access to weapons and putting checks in place to insure guns stay out of the wrong hands is a start. President Obama (as cited in Duncan, 2013) also indicated "we can also provide new resources, so schools can develop and implement comprehensive emergency management plans (para. 3). Obama (as cited in Duncan 2013) also stated "we can expand student support systems by allowing communities to decide what they need most, including more school resource officers, psychologists, social workers and counselors. A renewed commitment to students' mental and emotional well-being is key" (para. 4). For example, "In the wake of recent school shootings, fear over violence in schools has prompted increased requests for psychologists, educators, and law enforcement professionals to

assist in preventing future school violence incidents" (Reddy et al., 2001, p. 1). Preventing school violence requires the assistance of everyone within a community, not just parents, students, and school officials (Reddy et al., 2001).

Most people who commit acts of violence in schools lack social maturity and are often involved with street gangs, drugs, and alcohol (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). In addition, the four main causes of school shootings are gang-related issues, interpersonal disputes, suicides, and romantic disputes (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). Researchers in previous studies have concluded the majority of violence in schools is caused by social and environmental factors in an individual's life (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). These factors can include childhood abuse, neglect, gang involvement, and bullying (Flores de Apodaca, 2012).

One trend that might be attributed to increased violence in schools is the family dynamic; this dynamic has changed over the decades (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). In the early to mid-19th century, family dynamics shifted to single-parent and split households (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). The breakdown of family infrastructure could be an underlying factor of the increase in school violence (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). In recent years, parents have changed their manner of parenting by hiring nannies or placing children in daycare (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). Some parents leave their children home alone to work longer hours or multiple jobs in order to provide food, clothing, and other material objects for the children and the rest of the family (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). This could also be a contributing factor in the growing amount of violence; children are not able to have quality time with parents or guardians to discuss what is happening in school concerning bullying, depression, isolation, and violence (Flores de Apodaca,

2012). Without proper nurturing and communication, children are very impressionable and are easily persuaded (Flores de Apodaca, 2012).

The CDC (2015b) advocated programs that teach emotional control, involve outreach to the streets, and increase parental involvement to help prevent school violence. The CDC's (2015b) approach to prevent school violence includes defining the problem, identifying risks and protective factors, developing and testing prevention strategies, and ensuring widespread adoption. Currently, the CDC (2015b) implements a variety of programs including the youth risk behavior surveillance system, school health index, and guide to community preventive services to prevent school violence and improve safety.

Parents and guardians should be more involved in their children's care and education (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). Parents need to understand their children's abilities, fears, concerns, potential, and mental health status (Melvin, 2011). Teachers should communicate with both parents and students to help students feel safe and secure in the school environment (Melvin, 2011). If teachers, parents, and guardians pay more attention to children during the vulnerable years of growth, it could be one way to start the process of preventing violence in schools (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). Based on the review of relevant research, it appears violence in schools can be prevented in some instances; however, it seems unlikely a solution can be found to end violence in schools altogether (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). Nevertheless, stakeholders can continue to try to decrease the amount of violence in schools as well as the number of deaths associated with school violence (Melvin, 2011).

One way to decrease the amount of violence in schools is to increase security measures (Cornell, 2003). Security measures can include metal detectors, cameras,

security guards, entrance only after identification by office personnel, bulletproof glass to protect entrances, and doors that lock (Cornell, 2003). It is helpful for office personnel to know every individual who enters the building (Cornell, 2003). Some other measures that could help ensure school safety include the prohibition of backpacks and purses that can be used to carry guns, knives, or other handheld weapons (Cornell, 2003). All of these security measures could help to lower the violence rates in schools, especially those incidents that result in death (Cornell, 2003). With these security measures in place and a better understanding of violence in schools, students would have a safer place to learn and to focus fully on education (Cornell, 2003).

Another way to decrease violence in schools is to put stronger controls on guns (Donohue, 2015). It is well known countries with strong gun control laws have lower per capita rates of gun violence than countries that have virtually no gun control laws (Donohue, 2015). Countries in Europe, for example, require psychiatric evaluations, police interviews, aptitude tests, or proven participation in regulated gun clubs before citizens may purchase firearms (Donohue, 2015). Besides, Donohue (2015) claimed:

> A loaded, unsecured gun in the home is like an insurance policy that fails to deliver at least 95% of the time you need it, but has the constant potential – particularly in the case of handguns that are more easily manipulated by children and more attractive for use in crime – to harm someone in the home or (via theft) the public at large. (para. 13)

He quoted the *National Crime Victimization Survey*, which showed 99.2% of crime victims did not defend themselves with guns (Donohue, 2015).

However, John Weldon (2013) argued taking guns from law-abiding citizens will make them more vulnerable. Weldon (2013) stated, "To ban guns would only mean that law abiding citizens would be disarmed while criminals get the guns" (para. 9). Weldon (2013) used anecdotal evidence to support claims gun control is unworkable and counter-productive.

After dismissing gun control as having no value in decreasing gun violence, Weldon (2013) examined what other methods might work. Weldon (2013) claimed lockdowns are not an effective determinant because they produce a "bunker mentality," and evacuation is a better response (p. 20). After dismissing standards like lockdowns, Mr. Weldon (2013) concluded making teachers and staff active combatants to counter an armed attack will be more successful.

School violence is a pressing issue in the United States today (Muschert, 2009). Violence in schools has been a problem since at least the early 18th century (Reddy et al., 2001). In the 20th century, the increase in media coverage has played a large role in raising the public's awareness of school violence (Muschert, 2009). Many factors contribute to violence in schools, such as the environment, behavior, and economics (National PTA, 2014). No single issue can be regarded as the cause (National PTA, 2014).

Moreover, there are also several ways to help prevent and/or stabilize school violence (National PTA, 2014). For example, the implementation of effective communication and school safety guidelines should involve parents, teachers, and security officers (National PTA, 2014). The purpose of this chapter was to review the information and methodologies from previous studies on the topic of violence in schools.

Not all of the studies reviewed in this chapter reveal consistent thoughts on the causes of or ways to resolve school violence.

Theoretical Framework

Within the realm of deductive reasoning, the way one looks at a particular issue, at what level of analysis, and with what goals, determines the specific framework used (Butin, 2010). According to Butin (2010), "Any particular way of looking at an educational issue is called a theoretical framework" (p. 58). Within educational research, there is one main theoretical framework, which is Positivism (Butin, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the theoretical framework is a combination of Positivism and Post-Positivism.

Positivism is a perspective of educational research developed in the middle of the 19th century (Butin, 2010). This theoretical framework came in response to the era of industrialization and scientific thought (Butin, 2010). According to Butin (2010), "Positivism underpins common sense beliefs that the world and its workings can be known through objective, neutral, and rigorous means" (p. 60). Positivism is about trying to find the best answer to the question (Butin, 2010).

Positivism follows the understanding that knowledge is simply to describe the phenomena individuals experience (Creswell, 2013). It is a matter of sticking to what scholars, scientists, and researchers can observe and measure (Creswell, 2013). The basic concepts of the Positivism framework have been traced historically from Aristotle through Comte, the Vienna Circle, Empiricism, Durkheim, socio-behavioral theory, and organizational theory (Creswell, 2013). Various concepts have been added, deleted, and transformed through Positivism's history, but its fundamental basis has remained the

same: objective reality exists that can be known only by objective means (Creswell, 2013). Positivists' use of quantitative data helps to uncover and measure patterns of behavior, produce precise mathematical statements about the facts investigated, seek to discover the laws of cause and effect that determine behavior, and research in a detached and objective manner (Creswell, 2013).

Methods typically used by Positivists are questionnaires, structured interviews, structured non-participant observations, and official statistics (Creswell, 2013). These methods are used to produce reliable data that can be checked by other researchers repeating the research (Creswell, 2013). The research paradigm of Positivism typically employs a research approach using quantitative methods (Butin, 2010). This paradigm also includes research methods such as surveys, questionnaires, longitudinal cross-sectional, correlational, experimental and quasi-experimental, and ex-post facto research (Creswell, 2013).

Within Post-Positivism, there are several key elements to look at such as "assumptions about 'reality,' assumptions about 'truth,' key goals, key outcome, unit of analysis, and key criteria" (Butin, 2010, p. 59). In terms of looking at Post-Positivism, assumptions about a reality mean "an objective reality exists and can be correctly measured (with good enough tools) and adequately described (with clear enough language)" (Butin, 2010, p. 59). Concerning assumptions about truth, "Truth is objective. The key question is what the right answer is" (Butin, 2010, p. 59). A key goal of Post-Positivism is to "uncover the 'right' variables that determine 'best' outcomes" (Butin, 2010, p. 59). When dealing with the key outcome of this theoretical framework, one is looking for "a number; a 'best practice'" (Butin, 2010, p. 59). The variable is the unit of

analysis for Post-Positivism (Butin, 2010). Finally, the key criteria of a Post-Positivism theoretical framework are "reliability, internal and external validity" (Butin, 2010, p. 59).

Background

Violence in schools is not taken lightly (Bracy, 2009). In fact, since the Columbine shooting of 1999, school violence has become heavily debated among a variety of professional fields (Bracy, 2009). Not only parents and teachers, but also the government, psychiatrists, counselors, and students, are involved in the debate about the increasing number of violent incidents in schools worldwide (Bracy, 2009). Researchers have begun to pay increasing attention to this topic with the objective of determining whether there are specific causes, such as environment, mental health, location, and parenting choices (Bracy, 2009).

There are many victims of violence at schools in the United States on a regular basis (Mantilla, 2006). In October 2006, 10 girls at an Amish schoolhouse were taken hostage and all shot by a 32-year-old man (Mantilla, 2006). The girls were between the ages of six and 13 years (Mantilla, 2006). This particular act of school violence resulted in the deaths of five of the children (Mantilla, 2006). The man, a conservative Christian and milkman in the community, had never been in trouble with the law prior to this incident (Mantilla, 2006). This incident revealed violence in schools is a problem in all communities and not just in urban areas (Mantilla, 2006). Because Amish schools are located in rural communities that are usually tight-knit, it seems unlikely these acts of violence would occur within Amish society (Mantilla, 2006). It is obvious no one is exempt from the possibilities of violence in schools (Mantilla, 2006). However, this

story shows that even Amish schools need security in order to avoid situations of school violence (Mantilla, 2006).

The shooting at the Amish schoolhouse demonstrated that sometimes trusted people in the community become aggressors (Mantilla, 2006). In September 2006, Duane Morrison, who worked as a carpenter, entered North Platte High School (Mantilla, 2006). He sexually assaulted six girls and murdered one girl before taking his own life (Mantilla, 2006). Morrison was known as a hardworking person who had few problems with the law (Mantilla, 2006).

While many school shootings involve students attacking school staff and other students, some incidents involve seemingly unrelated people from outside the school (CNN Library, 2016). On May 18, 1927, a farmer in Bath, Michigan, set off explosions at a school killing 45 people including himself (CNN Library, 2016). In September, 1959, a convict killed himself and others with dynamite at a Houston elementary school (CNN Library, 2016). In 1984, sniper Tyrone Mitchell shot 12 students on an elementary school playground in Los Angeles, killing one (CNN Library, 2016). On May 16, 1986, a couple in their 40s held 150 people hostage at Cokeville Elementary School (CNN Library, 2016). They killed themselves after a fire started in the school, because their bomb accidentally detonated (CNN Library, 2016). In unrelated incidents in 1989 and 1994, drifters attacked schools in California and Ohio, respectively (CNN Library, 2016).

Often, violence erupts because the perpetrators were bullied for one reason or another (CNN Library, 2016). Jason Osmanson shot a fellow student in 1994 after being teased because his parents had AIDS (CNN Library, 2016). In 1993, Jason Smith killed "another student who had bullied him" (CNN Library, 2016, para. 44). Nathan Faris

killed another student and himself because he was teased about his weight (CNN Library, 2016). In 1978, Roger Needham killed a student who bullied him (CNN Library, 2016).

Mental illness also plays a role in many acts of school violence. John Christian spent time in a psychiatric hospital after killing his teacher in May of 1978 (CNN Library, 2016). On September 25, 1996, David Dubose Jr. killed one of his teachers (CNN Library, 2016). He was subsequently committed to a state mental hospital (CNN Library, 2016). Byron Truvia was found "unfit to stand trial" after killing two people at his high school in Texas (CNN Library, 2016, para. 11).

Other incidents seem to stem from some kind of domestic violence or family issues. For example, in 1997, Luke Woodham killed his mother, then went to his school and killed two classmates (CNN Library, 2016). In 1998, Kip Kinkel killed his parents, then killed two students in his school (CNN Library, 2016). Jeff Weise killed his grandfather and several people at Red Lake High School in 2005 (CNN Library, 2016). The most renowned of these incidents happened in 2012 when Adam Lanza, aged 20 years, entered Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut and killed 27 people, including young children (Kunkle, 2012). He used guns that belonged to his mother, whom he had killed prior to going to Sandy Hook Elementary where the majority of the deaths occurred (Kunkle, 2012). Lanza finally took his own life (Kunkle, 2012).

On January 29, 2013, 15-year-old Hadyia Pendleton, who was a student at King College Prep High School in Chicago, was shot and killed in a park near her school after finishing her final school exam (CBS News, 2013). Earlier in the week, she had performed with her high school band at President Obama's inauguration ceremony (Kennedy, 2013). On the same day, a gunman got on a school bus in Midland City,

Alaska (Kennedy, 2013). He shot the driver to death, kidnapped a six-year-old boy, and kept the boy hostage in a bunker for a week until law enforcement rescued the boy by storming the bunker and killing the gunman (Kennedy, 2013).

Changing policies and procedures is another way to help stop violence in schools (Cook, Gottfredson, & Na, 2010). One of the ways to prevent school violence is to create zero-tolerance policies for weapons and violence in schools (Cook et al., 2010). It is important to spell out penalties in advance so students and faculty know what to expect (Cook et al., 2010). Mottos such as "If it's illegal outside school, it's illegal inside" are great ways to illustrate schools have the same ideas of what is illegal compared to agencies outside school grounds (National Crime Prevention Council, 2015, para. 2). It is crucial to inform students, parents, and staff of policies and consequences (Cook et al., 2010).

In order for schools to combat violence, it is necessary to design a system for students to report crime-related information without implicating themselves, thus avoiding retaliation in schools (Cook et al., 2010). Cook et al. (2010) suggested establishing a faculty-student-staff committee to develop a Safe School Plan to ensure staff and students are aware of what plans of action to take in case of emergencies. Involving police officers in the culture of the school allows students to learn to interact with police officers in a positive way (Cook et al., 2010). Officers on a campus will also help deter acts of school violence (Cook et al., 2010).

It is important to have policies and procedures for everyday operations as well as for crises (Cook et al., 2010). Policies and procedures for both day-to-day operations and crisis handling should cover such subjects as identifying who belongs in the building and

avoiding accidents and incidents in corridors (Cook et al., 2010). In addition, procedures should address reporting incidents on school grounds and reporting weapons or concerns about them (Cook et al., 2010). Working in tandem with police and mental health professionals to ensure at-risk students get help is also a useful procedure to instate (Cook et al., 2010). It is important school staff work with juvenile justice authorities and local police officers to handle threats, potentially violent situations, and other crimes in schools (Cook et al., 2010).

Holding regular meetings to review problems and concerns will only strengthen the understanding of staff, allow them to be on the same page, and help them to communicate effectively to students and parents (Cook et al., 2010). It is imperative principals also communicate with law enforcement regarding access to the school building and the reporting of crimes, arrests, and other related issues (Cook et al., 2010). Cook et al. (2010) recommended offering training in anger management, stress relief, mediation, and related violence prevention skills to staff and teachers to help them cope, learn to handle their stress, and have an outlet for it. Training teachers to handle stress and manage their emotions allows them to model this behavior for the students (Cook et al., 2010).

One way to work on achieving a violence-free school is to involve everyone within the school community, such as faculty, professional staff, custodial staff, and students, in developing solutions for averting violence (Cook et al., 2010). Another important way to help ensure the safety of all on the school grounds is to maintain open lines of communication to all students (Cook et al., 2010). Principals should work on

ways to make it easier for parents to play a more active role in the lives of their students (Cook et al., 2010).

Cook et al. (2010) expressed principals are working with community groups and law enforcement to create a safe way to travel to and from school. Even older students will stay home rather than face a threat of violence (Cook et al., 2010). Being aware and able to assist in identifying and eliminating neighborhood trouble spots will be beneficial in making students feel safe and will help prevent violence within schools (Cook et al., 2010). Rewarding good behavior is always an effective system to use and goes a long way to show students good behavior is favorable (Cook et al., 2010). Acknowledging students who handle difficult situations properly, either by resolving an argument without violence or by helping another student, helps raise the bar for the entire school (Cook et al., 2010).

It is also important staff be held accountable for treating each other and students with respect (Cook et al., 2010). Principals are seen as essential and as the main role models (Cook et al, 2010). Ensuring the school staff are educated on how to connect students in need with available resources is important and will allow students to get the proper help and support (Cook et al., 2010). The steps principals take to help prevent school violence will allow students to learn techniques to prevent violence during their school experience (Cook et al., 2010). It is important these techniques and steps are not a one-time thing but part of a larger process that will help prevent school violence (Cook et al., 2010). Another way in which principals can help prevent violence in schools is to create policies such as making the storage of coats and jackets in lockers mandatory, which reduces opportunities for the concealment of weapons, and requiring mesh or clear

backpacks to increase visibility of contraband (Cook et al., 2010). Limited-entry access to the building will also help to decrease the threat of intruders in schools (Cook et al., 2010).

Teachers are great assets when it comes to helping prevent school violence (Zimmer, Modglin, & Neil, 1998). For instance, teachers should be working in coordination with principals, parents, and students (Zimmer et al., 1998). Teachers can help the principals on many levels when it comes to preventing and eliminating school violence (Zimmer et al., 1998). Teachers can start by first reporting to the principal any threats, discussions of weapons, signs of gang activity, or other conditions that might invite or encourage violence (Zimmer et al., 1998). Along with assistance from students, teachers need to establish norms for behavior in their classrooms, because it is important for the environment of the school and to keep consistency among classrooms in terms of dealing with behavior and violence prevention (Zimmer et al., 1998). It is important teachers take a stand, do not ignore violence, and refuse to permit violence (Zimmer et al., 1998).

When teachers have students participate in setting penalties and enforcing the rules, this allows students to have a sense of responsibility for preventing school violence (Zimmer et al., 1998). Teachers should regularly ask to speak with parents about student progress and concerns in order to keep all parties involved and held accountable (Zimmer et al., 1998). Teachers should engage in constant communication with parents about the care of students by sending home notes celebrating children's achievements and not only their shortcomings (Zimmer et al., 1998).

It is crucial teachers and other school staff members learn how to spot the warning signs a child might be at-risk for dangerous behavior in order to get appropriate help for him or her (Zimmer et al., 1998). Teachers need to be engaged, encouraging, and willing to sponsor student-led anti-violence activities and programs ranging from peer education to teen courts to mediation to training (Zimmer et al., 1998). Teachers who are engaged and serving on a committee to develop and implement a Safe School Plan, including how teachers should respond in emergencies, are one of the most important elements in creating and engaging a school system that focuses on violence prevention (Zimmer et al., 1998). It is important all school staff members firmly, consistently, and fairly enforce school policies that seek to reduce the risk of violence (Zimmer et al., 1998). Teachers should also take responsibility for areas outside as well as inside their classrooms (Zimmer et al., 1998).

Teachers taking a stand and insisting students not resort to name-calling or teasing will go a long way toward preventing school violence, because teasing and name-calling are just the start of school violence (Zimmer et al., 1998). Students should be encouraged by teachers every day to demonstrate the respect they expect (Zimmer et al., 1998). Again, it is important to involve all parties in standards of acceptable behavior set by the example of principals and teachers (Zimmer et al., 1998). The more teachers teach with enthusiasm, the better reactions they will gain from students (Zimmer et al., 1998). Students who are engaged in work that is challenging, informative, and rewarding are less likely to get into trouble (Zimmer et al., 1998). It is important for teachers to teach conflict resolution and anger management skills not only in the context of the school setting, but also in everyday life, so students properly learn these valuable skills (Zimmer

et al., 1998). Discussing these skills and violence in context and incorporating discussions on violence and its prevention into the subject matter taught go a very long way in working to prevent violence in schools (Zimmer et al., 1998).

Now Is the Time was a federal initiative formatted by executive order by President Obama ("Examining School Safety," 2014). This order, produced in March of 2013, was an attempt to combat violence against the most likely victims; that is, those 12-17 years of age (38%) and 18-24 years of age (49%) ("Examining School Safety," 2014). This program, administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, has the goal "to reduce violence by gun violence by providing resources to schools" ("Examining School Safety," 2014, p. 8). Among its 23 executive actions, Now Is the Time was initiated to fund programs and to improve school climates by training teachers and staff to support "students' mental and physical health" ("Examining School Safety," 2014, p. 8). The initiative was also designed to "help address trauma and anxiety in student population," to promote conflict resolution, and to engage restorative efforts after violence or natural disasters ("Examining School Safety," 2014, p. 8). Some of the actions met considerable opposition in Congress, in particular those actions restricting gun sales ("Examining School Safety," 2014). This initiative also provided funding to police departments to train high school resource officers (SROs) ("Examining School Safety," 2014).

In September of 2014, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced grants totaling $99 million to help implement mental health and violence reduction strategies in schools ("Examining School Safety," 2014). These grant monies also provided funding for project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in

Education) to state and local education organizations ("Examining School Safety," 2014). The so-called health transition program also "helps to provide access to treatment and support services for youth aged 16-25" who either have or may have serious mental health issues ("Examining School Safety," 2014, p. 8). School resource officers are expected to conduct normal police work while being the first to respond to emergencies and to school-related crime, while helping create emergency response plans, holding drills for emergency preparedness to help reduce crime, and serving as educators about these matters ("Examining School Safety," 2014).

Many years ago, people did not believe acts of violence would occur in schools as in the streets (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). At the beginning of the 21st century, 23% of public school students in the United States were victims of violence at school (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). Most of these acts happened in urban environments with high poverty rates (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). The cases described above spanned many years and locations and are only a few of the many cases of violence in schools that have occurred in the U.S. (Bennett-Johnson, 2004).

Dr. Earnestine Bennett-Johnson (2004) listed "risk factor domains that urban environments tend to have. Risk factors are seen in four categories: individual, family, community, and school" (p. 199). These categories (or domains) include risk factors such as aggressiveness, substance abuse, family violence, lack of parental involvement, availability of weapons and drugs, gang involvement, and academic failure (Bennett-Johnson, 2004).

Each instance of a school suffering a violent tragedy involves actions taken by the faculty, staff, parents, teachers, administrators, government, law enforcement, and law

enforcement agencies (Dahlberk & Krug, 2002). These stakeholders investigate what could have been done to prevent the tragedy (Dahlberk & Krug, 2002). According to Dahlberk and Krug (2002), this means taking a closer look at school safety measures as well as the methods used by emergency personnel and staff. Furthermore, every episode of school violence imparts new knowledge that can save lives in the future (Dahlberk & Krug, 2002). No case of school violence is the same as another (Dahlberk & Krug, 2002).

Violence Prevention

In response to growing violence in schools, school authorities are looking to "proven methods of violence prevention as a primary defense" (CDC, 2015a, para. 2). Methods of violence prevention which can be seen are considered physical measures, which "are ordinarily based on access control, locked doors, student ID's, and check-ins being the most common (88% of schools). Use of cameras for security proposes is also common (64%)" ("School Violence Prevention," 2014, p. 4).

There have been many changes to the way school violence is handled since the 1999 Columbine shootings (Muschert, 2009). Even more changes have taken effect since the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting (Muschert, 2009). Although both incidents were tragic, they promoted new policies and procedures to keep students safe (Muschert, 2009). Twemlow (March 25, 2012) suggested asking students their opinions on how to address the problem of cyber bullying. The following are actions taken by schools to ensure school safety (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [AACAP], 2012).

Metal detectors in schools. Some people view the integration of metal detectors in schools with apprehension, but they have proven effective in keeping weapons out of schools (AACAP, 2012). Following a study published by the *Journal of School Health* of metal detectors in high schools in New York City, Ginsberg and Loffredo (as cited in Hankin, Hertz, & Simon, 2011) compared the frequency of weapon carrying in schools with and without metal detectors. Ginsberg and Loffredo (as cited in Hankin et al., 2011) found students in schools with metal detectors were half as likely to carry a weapon to school as students in schools without metal detectors. Ginsberg and Loffredo (as cited in Hankin et al., 2011) determined a decision by school officials to use metal detectors in a program to search students routinely for weapons is a type of gun-control measure.

Before and after-school programs. Ensuring children have a place to go before and after school decreases the number of latchkey kids (AACAP, 2012). Latchkey kids are children between the ages of five and 13 who often take care of themselves with no adult supervision before and after school (AACAP, 2012). Children left alone after school are more prone to experiment with drugs and alcohol or to be involved with crime (AACAP, 2012). These programs give students a place to go and offer them activities that foster good habits (AACAP, 2012).

Zero tolerance. The implementation of zero-tolerance policies against weapons, gang violence, and gang-related activities has "significantly lowered the number of violent crimes in schools" (Melvin, 2011, p. 720). Students caught with weapons are expelled from school and prosecuted (Melvin, 2011). Schools that have zero-tolerance policies have seen a decrease in the numbers of weapons and drugs on school property as

well as a reduction in fighting, gang activity, and similar violence-prone activities (Melvin, 2011).

Zero-tolerance policies are implemented for specific actions such as bringing a gun to school ("School Violence Prevention," 2014). The results of such policies are a mixed bag. Racial and ethnic minorities and other minorities are often the unjustified targets of such policies ("School Violence Prevention," 2014). The National Center for Supportive School Discipline urged schools "be provided with resources to promote consistency and equity among all students" ("School Violence Prevention," 2014, p. 4).

Holistic approaches beyond increasing control by administrators over the educational environment are being tried ("School Violence Prevention," 2014). Physically restrictive means may be counterproductive, actually producing fear and a decreased perception of safety ("School Violence Prevention," 2014). Holistic approaches attempt to promote conflict resolution among students using problem solving rather than violence ("School Violence Prevention," 2014). School violence is like an infectious disease, spreading upon contact ("School Violence Prevention," 2014). These holistic approaches provide ways to quiet the contagion ("School Violence Prevention," 2014). Showing teachers how to improve their classroom management is also important ("School Violence Prevention," 2014).

Comprehensive emergency plans are becoming more commonplace, and ways to provide emotional support to students are thought to be important ("School Violence Prevention," 2014). Funding for programs such as Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) to state and local education organizations are part of the efforts to increase mental health among students ("School Violence Prevention,"

2014). Students form a diverse group, and an effort to provide for all needs is difficult but necessary ("School Violence Prevention," 2014).

Extra training for teachers. Training teachers and staff to recognize warning signs can help prevent violence and get at-risk students help before a problem occurs (Melvin, 2011). Currently, most teachers receive some type of training, such as crisis management and crisis prevention (Hoffman et al., 2016). This is designed to help teachers deal with potential threats before they become major problems (National PTA, 2014).

Police or security patrols. Some high-risk schools employ a police officer or security guard who performs regular patrols and is visible to the students (Graham-Tebo, 2000). This is an effective deterrent for violent crime or illegal activity on school campuses (Graham-Tebo, 2000). Having an officer nearby is also helpful if violent activities do occur on school campuses (Graham-Tebo, 2000).

These are only a few of the measures taken to maintain safety for children and faculty members (Graham-Tebo, 2000). These measures provide a better understanding of how to keep children safe while they are at school (Graham-Tebo, 2000). Some of these were the policies, procedures, and measures put into place after the first major shooting in recent history, the 1999 event at Columbine (Bracy, 2009).

Reasons for School Violence

As described in "Causes of School Violence" by the Constitutional Rights Foundation (2014), "School violence is a many-faceted problem" (para. 1). Duncan (2013) stated:

We will never fully understand why 20 first-graders and six educators were

gunned down at Sandy Hook Elementary School – or why still more students and

educators lost their lives at Columbine, Chardon or Red Lake high schools,

Westside Middle School, Virginia Tech or the many other campuses and

communities in our country where guns have cut short dreams and created fear.

We can, however, take a number of common-sense steps to help prevent future

tragedies. (para. 2)

Although overall crime rates have fallen in this country, school violence has not, "rising

some 10% in between the years 1999-2004, for example" (Constitutional Rights

Foundation, 2014, p. 1). Although most children are nonviolent, the small minority who

become headlines make the idea of school violence topical; students must be protected

and their hopes encouraged while being attentive to the "learning of causes and risk

factors that include… access to weapons, media violence, cyber abuses" (Constitutional

Rights Foundation, 2014, p. 1).

There are myriad causes of school violence (Constitutional Rights Foundation,

2014). In part, the causes are connected in undefined ways with the angst of the

maturation process (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). In some cases, mental

illness is the triggering event (Duplechain & Morris, 2014), while in other cases

seemingly "normal" children and adolescents suddenly erupt into violence

(Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). There are environmental factors that certainly

play a role, but this is not the same for everyone (Constitutional Rights Foundation,

2014). It is a truism children who are living in abusive environments are more likely to

become abusers (Duplechain & Morris, 2014), yet most children who live in crime-

plagued neighborhoods do not themselves become violent perpetrators (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Pinpointing a singular root cause is impossible, because many causes are unclear (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014).

Studying the epidemiology of violence uncovers some broad assumptions about violence, but little about its individual causes (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). It is possible to determine some reasons after a violent incident, but even these reasons have no predictive value (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Another child in the same circumstances does not become violent, and no one knows why (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014).

Deteriorating values. It is easy to blame the laxity of family values and family structures or the effect of poverty or other crimes for violent behavior, but it seems likely these are triggering events for violent outbreaks, not their actual causes (Duplechain & Morris, 2014). Media guru Marshall McLuhan (as cited in O'Dea, 2015) stated, "the medium is the message" (p. 407). Avci and Gucray (2013) found "media and peers occupying an important place in the lives of adolescents' attitudes towards violence and contribute to the demonstration of violence behavior" (p. 2013). Avci and Gucray (2013) felt adolescent opinions about violence could be changed by use of programs that were geared toward protection, prevention and intervention.

Decades ago, President Lyndon Johnson proposed America should strive to be a great society, and he introduced programs to implement that dream (Heritage Foundation, 2016). These programs were largely successful (Heritage Foundation, 2016). They gave economically poor students things to do, programs to feed them and house them, and programs based on care and love (Heritage Foundation, 2016). These programs

encouraged the then-changing perceptions of American society (Heritage Foundation, 2016).

    Injustice. Hate crimes against black Americans spurned on the civil rights movement in the 1960s (Butler, 2015). Recently, black-on-white violence has become a pressing topic (Kerwick, 2013). The "Black Lives Matter" movement is an obvious response to racist and repressive policing; however, the movement has not lessened the incidence of violence and has produced additional violence towards law enforcement (Simpson, 2015). Additionally, the media tends to skew the impression of criminals based on race (Butler, 2015). For example, black or other "colored" assailants are called "thugs" or "terrorists," while white criminals are described as "mentally ill" (Butler, 2015, para. 4). Those living in poverty also face systems that oppress them (Simpson, 2015).

    Many people have developed a distrust for authority figures such as the police and institutions or programs that were designed to help them (Butler, 2015). Ogbonnaya (2015) wrote:

> African-American mothers victimized by domestic violence not only expressed fear that their child would be placed in foster care if they sought help, but also expressed fear based on their belief that the child welfare system would punish them for being 'poor, African American, and abused.' (p. 243)

Ogbonnaya (2015) explained there are more African American children in foster care than children of other races, and this seems to correlate with statistics that show more African American women experience domestic violence than white women.

Anger. Violence often arises from festering anger – from wrongs not righted, opportunities not seized, injustices not solved (Simpson, 2015). James Simpson (2015) quoted Frances Fox Piven, who said:

> [B]efore people can mobilize for collective action, they have to develop a proud and angry identity and a set of claims that go with that identity. They have to go from being hurt and ashamed to being angry and indignant. (p. 38)

Piven's point was that people who experience injustice and oppression have to become angry in order to obtain their rights (Simpson, 2015). This is likely to be one of the reasons behind aggressive behavior in schools, especially if students are bullied or mistreated in any way as seen in the examples described previously (CNN Library, 2016).

Availability of guns. Middle school children are more likely to be affected by violence than older children, because early adolescence is a more difficult life stage and may be the first time young children come in contact with others from different neighborhoods (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2016). Teen gun violence rose from the 1970s through the 1990s (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2016). Many teens also have access to guns, either because "35% of homes with children under age 18 have at least one firearm" or through illegal sales (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2016). Currently, tougher gun laws, which would deny guns to children under 18 and people with a history of mental health problems, have not been passed by United States legislators (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2016).

Social media. There is no doubt today's youth have access to a large array of social media and networking sites (Muschert, 2009). Prior to the late 1990s, bullying

usually occurred person-to-person, but now bullying is perpetrated through groups via social media (Williams & Pearson, 2016). Peterson and Densley (2016) stated "cyber violence takes many forms" (pp. 19-20). This allows such intimidation to take place at any time of the day or night (Muschert, 2009). Since the 1990s, "the internet, blogging, e-mail, cell-phone text messaging, and online video games have come to play significant roles in the erosion of school safety" (Muschert, 2009, p. 166).

Violent video games Researchers at Ohio State University found high-school students who had more exposure to violent video games held "more pro-violent attitudes and had more hostile personalities, were less forgiving, believed violence to be more normal, and behaved more aggressively in their everyday lives" (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014, p. 1).

Ready access to violence in the media is a significant factor in the increase of violence in schools (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Among school-age children, "exposure to these media increases the likelihood of physically and verbally aggressive behavior, thoughts, and emotions" (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014, para. 15). The American Psychological Association feels more research is necessary in order to establish a link between video games and these behaviors (Kelly, 2015).

Cyberbullying. Electronic media, such as text messaging, email, and social networking, provide additional platforms that support a new form of violence, cyberbullying, which occurs when people of all ages "use electronic media to taunt, insult, or even threaten their peers" (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014, para. 5). Children in middle school and high school usually perpetrate cyberbullying (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Cyber abuse, which includes bullying through

email and cell phone text messaging, results from in-person bullying and violent video games and has been an increasing problem since the 1990s (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Cyberbullying is a new form of violent conduct that may become actual physical violence (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). According to the Constitutional Rights Foundation (2014), "Race and ethnicity, income levels and other measurable elements…can contribute to anti-social behavior" (para. 1). These factors are beyond the scope of what school administrators and teachers can expect to control, but such personal conflicts can affect the general discussion about these issues, as community leaders suggest mechanisms to lessen these impacts (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). The roles of the community and of the families of students also play an important part in making violence either more or less prevalent (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014).

It seems almost all of the social sciences research directed toward the problems of youth and school violence are largely collections of actual causes of this epidemic (Fahsl & Luce, 2012). Examining the effect various solutions may have can bring to light many examples of what not to do. For example, the "Fight-Free Schools" movement expressed the problem is lack of school discipline (Fahsl & Luce, 2012, p. 217). This is a "cause free" approach, which addresses punishment as the solution (Fahsl & Luce, 2012, p. 217). If one removes all of the "offending" students and attempts to say this is a solution, then they are following the same line of reasoning that says the solution to drug problems is to put all drug users in prison (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012, p. 137). That did not work for drugs and it will not work, ultimately, for school violence (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012).

Thompson and Trice-Black (2012) espoused the view, at least in part, that addressing actual causes is an effective approach. Methods of "conflict resolution… [and] identification and expression of feelings" are looked at as playing a role that is more effective than mere punishment (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012, p. 137). School violence is seen as a behavioral problem, but this definition hardly goes far enough (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012). It does not reach the underlying problem, which is societal (Thompson & Trice-Black, 2012).

Although it is possible the rate of school violence in schools is falling because of methods including zero-tolerance policies, increased security and policing may push the root causes of violence to grow worse (Neuman, 2012). This does not portend well for the future. Overall violence and theft may be increasing (Bidwell, 2014), and the dominant solution for violence may be based on boosting security (Duplechain & Morris, 2014).

Understanding the causes of school violence is not simple (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Causes are complex, and methods that work in one place may not be effective in another (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). In "Causes of School Violence," the Constitutional Rights Foundation (2014) stated:

Most educators and education researchers and practitioners would agree that school violence arises from a layering of causes and risk factors that include (but are not limited to) access to weapons, media violence, cyber abuse, the impact of school, community, and family environments, personal alienation, and more. (para. 10)

It is important to remember as technology changes, the concepts of bullying and school violence change (Muschert, 2009). To help counteract these changes, parents, administrators, teachers, and the community have to be vigilant in identifying new forms of bullying, the warning signs, and the impact on school violence (Downey, 2013). Currently, cyber abuse is only one form of school violence; youth daily face many other kinds of violence (Muschert, 2009).

Supporting Research

In order to prevent violence in schools, teachers and parents should take better care of their children (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). Dr. Bennett-Johnson (2004) stated, "Each school should involve community services, staff, parents, teachers, and students" (p. 55). Plans for safety procedures (e.g., evacuation routes and emergency communications) should be developed with the advice of local law enforcement, fire departments, and medical services experts (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). All employees of the school should be trained to practice emergency procedures in case an act of violence happens on school property (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). In addition, other resources should be available to teach staff about violence prevention, including lessons about anger management, bullying, character education, and drug abuse prevention (Bennett-Johnson, 2004).

Kennedy (2013) reviewed a number of recent examples of school-based gun violence in the month of January 2013. He noted mass shootings like the one at Sandy Hook Elementary School, in New Town, Connecticut, make big headlines and have an effect on almost everyone (Kennedy, 2013). Although events such as this are quite rare, the frequency of such events and those of less sensation has been increasing in recent years (Kennedy, 2013). Kennedy (2013) listed other events in January 2013 alone.

These and the lesser incidents in their aggregate have produced a profound change in American perceptions about school security (Kennedy, 2013). Everyone is looking for a solution (Kennedy, 2013).

Tragedies such as Sandy Hook have produced a profound impact on the safety of children in schools and about gun violence in general (Kennedy, 2013). Kennedy (2013) noted, however, these concerns have led to many often-contradictory ways to address this problem. Responses range from the view the solution is to arm everyone, to the opposite view that "gun control" is the solution (Kennedy, 2013, p. 34). Kennedy (2013) also noted that between these two elements there are other possibilities for action that may protect children and lessen school violence. It is possible to implement policies that can increase school security and have a wide appeal to Americans (Kennedy, 2013). He wrote, "Schools... must be constantly evaluating their security strategies" (Kennedy, 2013, p. 34). Kennedy (2013) also noted:

> Physical measures should be combined with education programs to decrease the chance that an outside intruder will not be detected and prevented from doing harm, or that an internal threat from a deranged student or staff member will be found before any harm can be done. (p. 34)

Kennedy (2013) expressed vigilance is the hallmark of a successful security policy, but offered no road map that says how this is to be accomplished. Kennedy (2013) offered little more than truisms about how to approach the problem of school violence. He ended with a quotation from President Barack Obama, who said, "No law or set of laws can keep our children completely safe, but if there is even one thing we can do, if there is just one life we can save, we have got an obligation to try" (as cited in Kennedy, 2013, p. 34).

The advancement of technology and the growth of social media has led to the increased awareness of a problem plaguing today's schools and is threatening the education system (Masullo, 2016). School violence presents a very daunting issue, as it cannot only lead to diminished physical health, but also mental trauma that may inhibit development (Masullo, 2016). The growth of technology, however, also provides schools with methods to help curb this issue by pointing out signs of impending school violence and allowing staff to take steps to prevent it from occurring (Masullo, 2016).

School violence identification strategies include risk assessment, monitoring trends, and utilizing predictive intelligence (Masullo, 2016). While these methods might not be 100% effective, they provide adequate means for establishing safe learning environments (Masullo, 2016). It is necessary schools incorporate technology at a higher level, while also getting involved with parents in teaching students to have loving and educational relationships at school with their teachers and fellow classmates (Masullo, 2016). Schools and parents must also identify at-risk students who need to be guided to the right path prior to engaging in violent activities (Masullo, 2016).

Each school should incorporate violence prevention plans that involve everyone in the community (Cornell, 2003). Principals, parents, students, and teachers must work together to help avoid violence in school (Cornell, 2003). When everyone works together, a better and safer learning environment can be created for children (Cornell, 2003).

Many groups are involved in ways to prevent violence in schools (Cornell, 2003). For instance, on their website, the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) include a list of actions to avoid this issue (Cornell, 2003). These PTAs also have other programs that

relate to the prevention and understanding of school violence in an attempt to engage the entire community (National PTA, 2014). According to the National PTA (2014), the top 10 ways to help prevent violence in schools are the following:

1. Talk to Your Children: Start important discussions with your children−about violence, smoking, drugs, sex, drinking, and death−even if the topics are difficult or embarrassing. Do not wait for your children or teens to come to you.

2. Set Clear Rules and Limits for Your Children: Children need clearly defined rules and limits set for them so that they know what is expected and what the consequences are for not complying. When setting family rules and limits, be sure the children understand the purpose behind the rules and be consistent in enforcing them.

3. Know the Warning Signs: Sudden changes (in behavior) should alert parents to potential problems. These could include withdrawal from friends, decline in grades, abruptly quitting sports or clubs the child had previously enjoyed, sleep disruptions, eating problems, evasiveness, lying, and chronic physical complaints (stomachaches or headaches).

4. Do not Be Afraid to Parent; Know When to Intervene: Parents need to step in and intervene when children exhibit behavior or attitudes that could potentially harm them or others.

5. Stay Involved in Your Child's School: Communicate with your child's teachers throughout the school year, not just when problems arise. Stay informed of school events, class projects, and homework assignments. Attend all parent orientation activities and parent-teacher conferences. Volunteer to assist with school functions and join your local PTA. Help your children seek a balance between schoolwork and outside activities. Parents also need to support school rules and goals.

6. Join Your PTA or a Violence Prevention Coalition: According to the National Crime Prevention Council (2014), the crime rate can decrease by as much as 30 percent when a violence prevention initiative is a community-wide effort. All parents, students, school staff, and members of the community need to be a part of creating safe school environments for our children. Many PTAs and other school-based groups are working to identify the problems and causes of school violence and possible solutions for violence prevention.

7. Help to Organize a Community Violence Prevention Forum: Parents, school officials, and community members working together can be the most effective way to prevent violence in our schools.

8. Help Develop a School Violence Prevention and Response Plan: The most effective violence prevention and response plans are developed in cooperation with school and health officials, parents, and community members. These plans include descriptions of school safety policies, early-warning signs, intervention strategies, emergency response plans, and post-crisis procedures.

9. Know How to Deal with the Media in a Crisis: Good public relations and media relations start with understanding how the media works and what they expect from organizations that issue press releases, hold press conferences, and distribute media kits.

10. Work to Influence Lawmakers: Writing an editorial for the local newspaper, holding a petition drive, speaking before a school board meeting, or sending a letter to your legislator can be effective ways to voice your opinion and gain support from decision makers for violence prevention programs in your community. (National PTA, 2014, paras. 1-10)

The media has exaggerated the portrayal of violence in schools (Muschert, 2009). This is done with extensive and continued coverage of the incidents (Muschert, 2009). Another common issue blamed for violence in schools is violent video games (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004).

There are many examples of violence prevention practices that are not very effective (Shah, 2013). In 2001, Nick Stuban committed suicide when he was transferred from one Virginia high school to another because he bought one pill of a legal drug that had marijuana-like effects (Shah, 2013). Transferring students to other schools creates detachment from friends, makes students feel angry, and makes them more prone to violent behavior (Shah, 2013). It would be better to let students stay at the school familiar to them and give them counseling there (Shah, 2013).

Those who support the right to own guns say more people should be allowed to have them (Kunkle, 2012). Kunkle (2012) claimed gun-rights advocates think if people at schools, such as teachers, have guns, then they can defend children against shooters

(Kunkle, 2012). Gun-rights advocates "see guns as an answer to the problem of violence, not the problem itself" (Kunkle, 2012, p. 1). However, others feel guns should not be owned by anyone except law enforcement and military personnel (Kunkle, 2012).

Summary

Violence in schools throughout the United States continues to attract a great deal of media coverage (Kunkle, 2012). The need to broadcast as much information as possible about violent acts of crime committed in schools is evident through network channels, television, the internet, and social media (Kunkle, 2012). The review of previous studies by Kunkle (2012), Shah (2013), Reddy et al. (2001), Muschert (2009), and others revealed information that provides a background for the analysis of violence in schools and solutions to this nationwide problem.

The examination of previous studies of violence in schools yields information about what occurs within schools not only locally, but also nationwide (Reddy et al., 2001). This knowledge will allow individuals to understand the problem and provide the means to correct the situations that contribute to school violence. The goal of learning about all aspects of this subject is to understand and help protect against such violence or to prevent it altogether. The use of cluster sampling to select schools in southwest Missouri yielded data that provides insight into the causes of violence in schools in the United States.

Chapter Two included an examination of the literature that contributed to the present study of violence in schools. Chapter Three contains a description of the methodology used for this study. An analysis of the data is presented in Chapter Four.

The findings, conclusions, implications for practice, and suggestions for further research

are found in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Every year in the United States, there are sufferers of violence in schools (McGarrell et al., 2013). There are many reasons for students to commit violent acts toward each other or faculty (Geffner et al., 2014). These violent acts threaten the security of children and others in school, and they interfere with the students' ability to have a safe environment in which to learn and gain knowledge (Reddy et al., 2001). Violence also hinders the ability of teachers and faculty to provide a safe place for learning to ensure the education of children (Reddy et al., 2001). It is important for members of society to learn about and find ways to decrease or eliminate school violence in the United States (Reddy et al., 2001). If nothing changes to decrease or eliminate these violent acts, children may assume such behavior is acceptable and normal in society, which is not the case (Reddy et al., 2001). Downey (2013) determined:

> This violence and bullying data are alarming for all of us, especially for parents, students, teachers and society as a whole… it shows a trend toward the acceptability that violence is OK if we feel angry. What worries me the most is that these high-school students will carry this behavior forward as they enter adulthood. (para. 4)

It is important for everyone within communities to contribute in some form to making schools a safer place for children in all grades (McGarrell et al., 2013).

School violence is varied, and it happens to both boys and girls (Downey, 2013). Both boys and girls participate in bullying; boys tend toward physical bullying, while girls tend toward verbal bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012). The Josephson Institute of Ethics, a non-partisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization located in Los Angeles,

California, conducted a questionnaire on school violence (Downey, 2013). The results included the following:

> Attitudes about the acceptability of violence remain unacceptably high, especially among boys. One-third of the boys (33%, versus 17% of the girls) agree with the statement, "It is sometimes OK to hit or threaten a person who makes me very angry." (Downey, 2013, para. 5)

Furthermore:

> It should be no surprise that nearly one in three boys and girls (30% and 32% respectively) says that "Physical violence (fighting, bullying, and intimidation) is a big problem at my school." . . . Consequently, one in five (20%) of all students say they do not feel safe when they are at school. (Downey, 2013, para. 6)

The results of the questionnaire indicated "50% of the boys and 37% percent of the girls (43% overall) admitted hitting a person in the past year because they were angry" (Downey, 2013, para. 7). These statistics indicate several things. Male students usually conduct physical violence, but it is still very prominent in females, who also act out in violence (Downey, 2013). This questionnaire was conducted with 23,000 students (Downey, 2013). If one in five students reported not feeling safe, about 4,600 students did not feel safe while at school (Downey, 2013). It is the job of adults to make sure something is done to help these children feel safe (McGarrell et al., 2013).

Problem and Purpose Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the violence epidemic in schools according to location, environment, and socioeconomic status. An attempt was made to classify types and reasons of violence in an effort to understand the best ways to prevent

violence in schools in the United States. This study also focused on the measures taken by principals and other staff members at local schools to prevent violent behavior and on the effectiveness of such measures. The researcher examined the types of programs in place in schools and outside of schools to gather information about the violence prevention steps taken outside school hours by parents, siblings, and other community members. The primary investigator also examined the security measures schools have in place or would like to implement, as well as how these types of measures can help ensure the safety of both students and faculty. In investigating these security measures, the researcher attempted to determine their disadvantages.

Research questions. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How can schools and parents better control or eliminate violence in schools in the United States?

2. What are the causes of the increased violence in schools over the last decade?

3. What are the attitudes of southwest Missouri administrators on school violence?

Research Design

School superintendents were identified in southwest Missouri, and questionnaires were administered electronically regarding attitudes about school violence and school safety procedures. Measures concerning school violence prevention were also discussed. Results were collected electronically, and all participants remained anonymous.

A descriptive approach was used to investigate how schools and parents can play a role in better controlling or eliminating violence in schools. It is important to

note that Columbine and other more recent acts of school violence reported in the media are not the only cases, but they are the ones extensively covered by the national media (Muschert, 2009). For each publicized school shooting, several more affect just a few individuals (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004). Violence in schools was examined in order to determine its causes and the ways in which educators can help prevent it (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004).

In order to better investigate the research questions, a causal-comparative research design was used to analyze the data collected. The causal-comparative research design allows researchers to determine what causes differences in groups of people (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). The specific type of design chosen for this study was an exploration of causes related to school violence in southwest Missouri. This type of study was chosen because a full study of the causes of school violence would be too time consuming and costly to conduct (Fraenkel et al., 2015). First, the investigator defined the phenomenon of violence in schools. Then, possible causal factors were identified for investigation.

Causal-comparative research is a type of non-experimental research, which means the researcher cannot manipulate any of the variables in the study (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Nonexperimental quantitative research is an important tool for educational research, because so many of the variables that need to be studied in education cannot be manipulated (Creswell, 2013). Using a causal-comparative research design can strongly suggest a relationship between variables (Creswell, 2013). This suggestion of causality can be more persuasive than what is suggested by a correlational research design (Creswell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

This study was not biased against gender, religion, race, or socioeconomic status. The questionnaires did not ask for specific events, and the privacy of students, teachers, and families affected by violence in school was maintained. For example, an online survey link was used to distribute and collect questionnaire information, which did not ask for identifying information from participants. The participants were not asked questions to specifically identify the school districts in which they were employed.

Population and Sample

Southwest Missouri school superintendents were contacted via electronic mail after contact information was collected from the Southwest Missouri Association of School Administrators. The superintendents were provided a copy of the informed consent (see Appendix A), and a link to the questionnaire (see Appendix B) was attached to the electronic communication. Through the link, the superintendents agreed to participate in the research and answered the questions. No one was forced to participate, and the questionnaire remained anonymous.

For a demographic perspective on the participants' region, southwest Missouri consists of 26 counties, one major city, and several small towns (United States Census Bureau, 2015). Springfield is the largest city in this region with a population of approximately 166,000, which is less than half the size of Missouri's largest cities, Kansas City and Saint Louis (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The next largest city is Joplin at about 52,000 people (United States Census Bureau, 2015). Springfield's population is predominantly White (89%), with small populations of African-Americans (4%), Hispanics/Latinos (4%), and other minority groups (3%) (United States Census

Bureau, 2015). Joplin has a similar makeup of 88% White, 3% African-American, 5% Hispanic/Latino, and 4% other (United States Census Bureau, 2015).

Southwest Missouri is largely rural with many towns with populations of less than 10,000 people (United States Census Bureau, 2015). Roughly 20% of the population in this region are below the national poverty level, with school-age children comprising many of those who are impoverished (United States Census Bureau, 2015). Although crime rates in Springfield seem relatively high according to Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics, overall crime rates in the area are generally low (Bridges, 2015).

Instrumentation

In order to understand the topic better, a review of the recent relevant literature was conducted. The literature revealed many aspects of school violence, which set the tone for the types of questions asked of the participants. Regions of interest were identified, and broad open-ended questions regarding school violence were established by talking to teachers and others in the field of education. It was important to include attitudes and perceptions of the level of violence locally to further define the seriousness of this topic as it related to superintendent responses on the types of violence and prevention methods used in southwest Missouri schools.

The authors of "Characteristics of Schools in Which Fatal Shootings Occur" listed four main motives for school shootings: interpersonal disputes, gang-related violence, suicides, and romantic disputes (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). These reasons for violence branch out into problems with relationships at home and school, access to drugs and weapons, negative outside influences heightened by abundant availability of the internet, and differences in social status (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). These potential sources of

violent behavior were included in questions on the questionnaire as follows: parental

negligence to include abuse, neglect, divorce, and conflicting relationships; all forms of

peer pressure; differences in religion or beliefs; exposure to violent entertainment;

varying income levels; availability of weapons; and treatment by authority figures at

school.

In every school, there is some kind of violence (Cook et al., 2010). It differs in

type and magnitude according to the environment, socioeconomic status of students, and

location of the school (Cook et al., 2010). Therefore, the questionnaire addressed all

types of violence, because students are affected by more than one kind. Locations of

violent occurrences were also taken into consideration to see if the results revealed

whether the level of supervision makes a difference in the frequency of violent acts. The

questionnaire was field-tested by a small group of area superintendents.

Data Collection

The data collection process was set up to help with understanding the dynamics

of violence in schools in southwest Missouri. The questionnaire was designed to elicit

the perceptions of administrators in regard to violence in schools in southwest Missouri.

Understanding of school violence in this region will hopefully allow for a better

understanding of school violence in the United States as a whole. The questions were

designed to gain an understanding of how superintendents view violence in their

communities and within the schools they oversee.

Data were collected through SurveyMonkey, and all participants remained

anonymous. SurveyMonkey allowed for ease and flexibility for administering the

questionnaires and for the participants to finish at their convenience. The questionnaire

was open for one week, giving ample time to be completed. Some superintendents did not choose to participate, which limited the number of questionnaire responses.

Each item on the questionnaire was developed to elicit data on how violence is perceived and dealt with in schools in southwest Missouri. These data provided the researcher a better understanding of how local schools and communities manage violence prevention. The answers to the questions provided information about how both students and faculty perceive violence. The researcher analyzed the data and was able to draw conclusions about ways to work with the community to prevent and eliminate violence in schools.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of thoroughly applying statistical and/or logical methods to describe, illustrate, and evaluate data (Bluman, 2013). The statistics underwent a path analysis, as the information was indicative of direct and indirect effects of predictor variables (Bluman, 2013). Along with applying statistical and or logical techniques, a descriptive process was employed. The questionnaire findings are presented question by question in Chapter Four.

Responses to each question were compiled and totaled by SurveyMonkey. Percentages were calculated by counting the number of superintendents who chose a response and dividing by the total number of superintendents. In cases where one or more superintendents declined to answer a question, the number of responses were divided by the total number of respondents. Most questions where designed for the participants to select only their most common response; only one answer was allowed. A

couple of questions asked the superintendents to rank from a list of several possible responses.

Summary

Violence in schools is a measured problem in the United States (Reddy et al., 2001). Acts of violence have a ripple effect on many people and not just those injured during the incidents (Muschert, 2009). For instance, violence affects the victims, the perpetrators, the family and friends of the victims and the perpetrators, the faculty and staff where the incident occurred, and the entire community in which the acts take place (Reddy et al., 2001). This researcher attempted to understand the reasons why violence occurs in schools and how to prevent various types of violence. The focus of this research was schools in southwest Missouri. The schools in the area use a variety of methods to try to prevent violence, and these methods are generally effective.

This study was limited by the size of the sample used. Because the sample included school districts of numerous sizes in southwest Missouri, findings cannot be generalized to all schools in the country. Moreover, errors may have been introduced into the findings because of inadequate sampling.

Chapter Three contained a description of the methodology used for this study. Chapter Three included a discussion of how the research was conducted, what methods were used to determine the sample, and what instruments were used for data collection. An analysis of the data is presented in Chapter Four. The findings, conclusions, implications for practice, and suggestions for further research are found in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

This chapter includes a discussion of the results of a questionnaire designed to investigate the prevalence of school violence in southwest Missouri. The study was a quantitative study of causal-comparative design. The participants (superintendents) in the study filled out confidential questionnaires administered via SurveyMonkey, an external web link. This study was focused on the prevention of school violence, especially threats against life. This focus extends beyond the recent mass school shootings in the United States to the small-scale violence the media commonly ignores (Cook et al., 2010). To know how to prevent violent acts, the superintendents need to understand the reasons for these acts. This study focused on three main research questions:

1. How can school staff members and parents better control or eliminate violence in schools in the United States?

2. What are the causes of the increased violence in schools over the last decade?

3. What are the attitudes of southwest Missouri administrators on school violence?

The questionnaire focused on school violence in the region and on the ways in which superintendents perceive violence within their schools. Questions focused on the level of perceived violence within the schools, what methods the schools use to protect children from violence, and overall security measures implemented in the schools.

The questionnaire consisted of seven questions designed to result in data to answer the research questions. There were 27 participants from southwest Missouri.

With the use of SurveyMonkey, the participants' identifying information and schools remained anonymous. All raw data are found in Appendix C.

One of the disadvantages of keeping participants anonymous is not having access to specific geographical information from the superintendents, including if they are from rural or urban districts. Anonymity also does not allow for indication of the size of the districts in correlation with rural and urban settings. One of the other shortcomings is not knowing exactly how the superintendents define "violence."

In order to better analyze the data, the responses were coded based on a basic scale of 1=Nil, 2=Low, 3=Average, 4=High, and 5=Very High. Based upon this scale, the responses to question one showed the superintendents in southwest Missouri generally rated the violence at their schools as "Nil." In fact, 96.5% rated the overall violence where they lived as nil or low. The remaining response was included in the category of "Average."

Question One

How do you rate the overall violence where you live? Superintendents were asked about their perceptions of the level of violence where they live in southwest Missouri. The results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Overall Violence: Responses by Percentage

Response	Percentage
1 = Nil	19.23%
2 = Low	76.92%
3 = Average	3.85%
4 = High	0.00%
5 = Very High	0.00%

Note. One superintendent did not respond to this question.

The findings in response to question one supported previous research regarding the degree of real violence versus perceived violence in schools (Cornell, 2003). In the late 20th century, the United States experienced an increase in the media coverage of school shootings (Cornell, 2003). The misconception in media coverage is that school shootings and other mass violence in schools have increased suddenly in the last several decades; however, this is not the case (Cornell, 2003). In contrast to the media reports, there has not been a sharp increase in school violence; instead, it has continued to increase gradually throughout the decades (Cornell, 2003).

Question Two

Question two concerned the superintendents' perceptions of what social and economic factors have a bearing on students who commit school violence. Of the participating superintendents, 48% rated parental negligence (e.g., abuse, neglect,

divorce, and conflicting relationships) as the most significant factor contributing to school violence. Superintendents rated peer pressure (e.g., treatment, fashion, reputations) and entertainment (e.g., video games, movies, music, books, art) in the average range. Religion/beliefs (e.g., conflicting ideas, treatment, extremism, prejudice) ranked in the low range, with 68.42% of superintendents rating religion/beliefs as a low factor for school violence. Finances (e.g., poverty, middle-class, upper-class/wealthy, cost of living, goods) were rated by 31.58% of superintendents as average or high.

The accessibility of weapons among students (e.g., availability of guns/etc., availability of bomb recipes on the net) in relation to school violence was ranked in the low to average range. According to 47.37% of participating superintendents, weapons were a low factor for school violence, while 31.58% rated it as an average factor for school violence. In regard to the treatment of students by teachers or school administrators, 42.11% of the superintendents polled felt this was a risk factor that ranked in the nil or low range.

Superintendents were asked to rank specific factors that may contribute to school violence on a scale of one to five. Table 2 shows superintendent responses concerning the effect parental negligence may have on school violence. Results showed 48% of school superintendents expressed parental negligence has an effect on school violence.

Table 2

Factors Affecting School Violence: Parental Negligence

Response	Percentage
1 = Nil	0.00%
2 = Low	4.00%
3 = Average	40.00%
4 = High	48.00%
5 = Very High	8.00%

Note. Two superintendents surveyed did not answer this question.

The second factor school superintendents were asked to address in the questionnaire dealt with their opinions on the effects of peer pressure on school violence. Table 3 illustrates 57.69% of the school superintendents surveyed felt peer pressure only has an average effect on school violence.

Table 3

Factors Affecting School Violence: Peer Pressure

Response	Percentage
1 = Nil	0.00%
2 = Low	15.38%
3 = Average	57.69%
4 = High	26.92%
5 = Very High	0.00%

A third factor school superintendents were surveyed about was the effect of entertainment on school violence. Table 4 shows 42.31% of those surveyed felt entertainment has an average effect on school violence. The results also showed 34.62% of those surveyed felt entertainment has a low effect on school violence.

Table 4

Factors Affecting School Violence: Entertainment

Response	Percentage
1 = Nil	3.84%
2 = Low	34.62%
3 = Average	42.31%
4 = High	15.38%
5 = Very High	3.84%

Note. One superintendent did not answer this question.

The fourth factor superintendents were questioned about solicited their feelings on the effect of religion and/or beliefs on school violence. All in all, superintendents felt religion/beliefs have a low to nil effect on school violence. Questionnaire results showed 61.54% felt religion/beliefs have a low effect, and 15.38% felt it has no effect.

Table 5

Factors Affecting School Violence: Religion/Beliefs

Response	Percentage
1 = Nil	15.38%
2 = Low	61.54%
3 = Average	19.23%
4 = High	3.84%
5 = Very High	0.00%

Note. One superintendent did not respond to this question.

Superintendents surveyed about the effect finances have on school violence felt this factor is not a major contributor to school violence. Results showed 61.54% of superintendents surveyed felt finance is a low factor in school violence. Results also showed 15.38% felt finances have no effect at all on school violence.

Table 6

Factors Affecting School Violence: Finances

Response	Percentage
1 = Nil	15.38%
2 = Low	61.54%
3 = Average	19.23%
4 = High	07.69%
5 = Very High	0.00%

Note. One superintendent did not respond to this question.

The sixth factor school superintendents were asked about was the availability of weapons. Of superintendents surveyed, 38.46% felt weapon availability only has a low effect on school violence. Only 30.77% felt weapon availability has an average effect on school violence.

Table 7

Factors Affecting School Violence: Weapons

Response	Percentage
1 = Nil	19.23%
2 = Low	38.46%
3 = Average	30.77%
4 = High	11.54%
5 = Very High	0.00%

Note. One superintendent did not respond to this question.

The final factor school superintendents were questioned about was the treatment of students by teachers and administrators. Questionnaire results showed 48.00% of school superintendents felt student treatment by teachers or administrators has a low effect on school violence. Results also showed only 4.00% of administrators felt student treatment by teachers and administrators has a high effect on school violence.

Table 8

Factors Affecting School Violence: Treatment of Students

Response	Percentage
1 = Nil	24.00%
2 = Low	48.00%
3 = Average	24.00%
4 = High	4.00%
5 = Very High	0.00%

Note. Two superintendents did not respond to this question.

School superintendents surveyed recognized parental negligence as the major factor leading to school violence. Religious beliefs and treatment of students in school by staff members were considered to be insignificant factors. Peer Pressure was the second most significant factor leading to school violence in the opinion of school superintendents in southwest Missouri (See Figure 1).
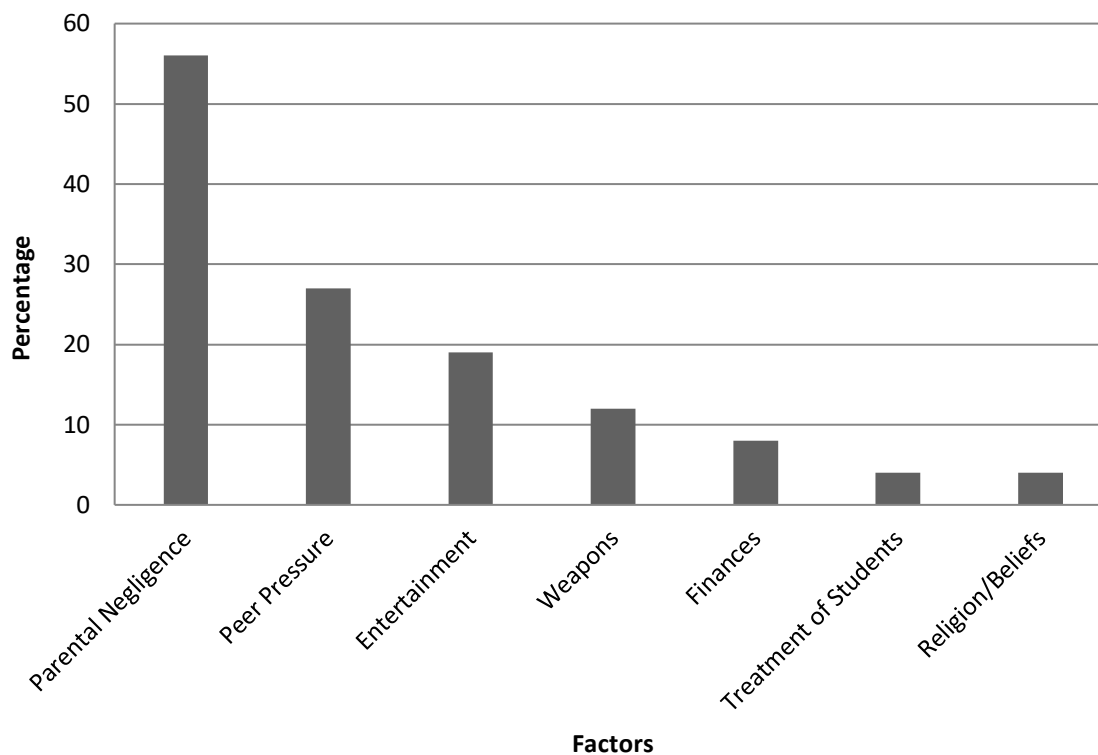
Figure 1. Percentage of superintendents responding high or very high for factors leading to school violence.

Question Three

What are your feelings concerning school violence in your area? Superintendents were asked about the likelihood of violence occurring in their schools and in their geographic area. Response options ranged from the indication school violence "cannot happen" to the answer "school violence has happened, with serious consequences." The results displayed in Table 9 show 72.00% of school superintendents indicated school violence can happen but there is little chance of it happening in their districts.

Table 9

Possibility of School Violence in Schools

Response	Percentage
Cannot happen	0%
Can happen, but little chance of major violence occurring	72.00%
School violence has happened, but nothing serious	24.00%
School violence has happened, with serious consequences	4.00%

Note. All superintendents surveyed felt there was at least a slight chance of school violence occurring in their districts.

Questionnaire results showed superintendents felt school violence can and has happened in their geographic region. Most superintendents were confident there is little chance of a major act of school violence occurring in the geographic region. Of those surveyed, 70.40% selected this option.

Table 10

Possibility of School Violence in Geographic Area

Response	Percentage
Cannot happen	0%
Can happen, but little chance of major violence occurring	70.4%
School violence has happened, but nothing serious	18.5%
School violence has happened, but nothing serious	3.7%

The responses of participating superintendents do not seem to support earlier research by others, such as Muschert (2009), who found school violence is a pressing issue in the United States today. The results also do not support information from Reddy et al. (2001), who stated, "If researchers make a thorough assessment of school violence taking place in the small schools of rural America, then there are various facts that we can easily reveal" (p. 9). Recent studies and reports clearly indicate schoolchildren in rural areas are as aggressive as their urban counterparts (Reddy et al., 2001).

Perhaps the idea the media plays a large part in perceptions of violence is accurate (Twemlow, May 9, 2012). School violence has occurred for centuries; the only thing that has changed is the media coverage of these violent acts (Twemlow, May 9, 2012). The first incident of school violence happened in the 18th century (Dixon, 2005). Violence is schools has been a problem since at least the early 19th century (Reddy et al., 2001). In

the 20th century, the increase in media coverage has played a role in raising the public's awareness of school violence (Muschert, 2009).

Question Four

What measures have your school district taken to prevent violence? Question four answered by the superintendents also aids in the answering of research question three. Examining what measures superintendent put in place within their school districts to prevent violence allows for an understanding of what some of the important safety concerns in the region of southwest Missouri are. When answering the question about what measures their school district had taken to prevent violence, the questionnaire instructed the superintendents to mark all that applied for their districts.

Questionnaire results showed 36.00% of school districts have installed security cameras in their respective districts. Another security measure taken by 16.00% of superintendents surveyed is requiring staff members to wear security name badges. Finally, all superintendents surveyed responded their districts have made some effort to increase security in their districts.

Table 11

Safety Measures Implemented Within Southwest Missouri Schools

Response	Percentage
The school district has done nothing. Our district is perfectly fine.	0.00%
School security patrols the halls.	4.00%
Cameras have been installed.	36.00%
A police officer occasionally checks on the school.	4.00%
An armed police officer is stationed at the school.	4.00%
Use of name badges for faculty.	16.00%
Teachers are required to take self-defense training.	0.00%
Metal detectors at the entrance of buildings.	0.00%
Occasional random weapon and drug searches.	4.00%
Visitors must sign or check in.	4.00%
Controlled access to school buildings/school grounds during school hours.	16.00%
Closed campus for lunch.	4.00%
Students must use clear book bags.	0.00%
Use of a structured anonymous threat reporting system.	4.00%
Other (please specify).	8.00%

As shown in Figure 2, the most popular security measure used by schools in southwest Missouri was security cameras. Name badges and controlled access to district buildings were also measures that districts used.
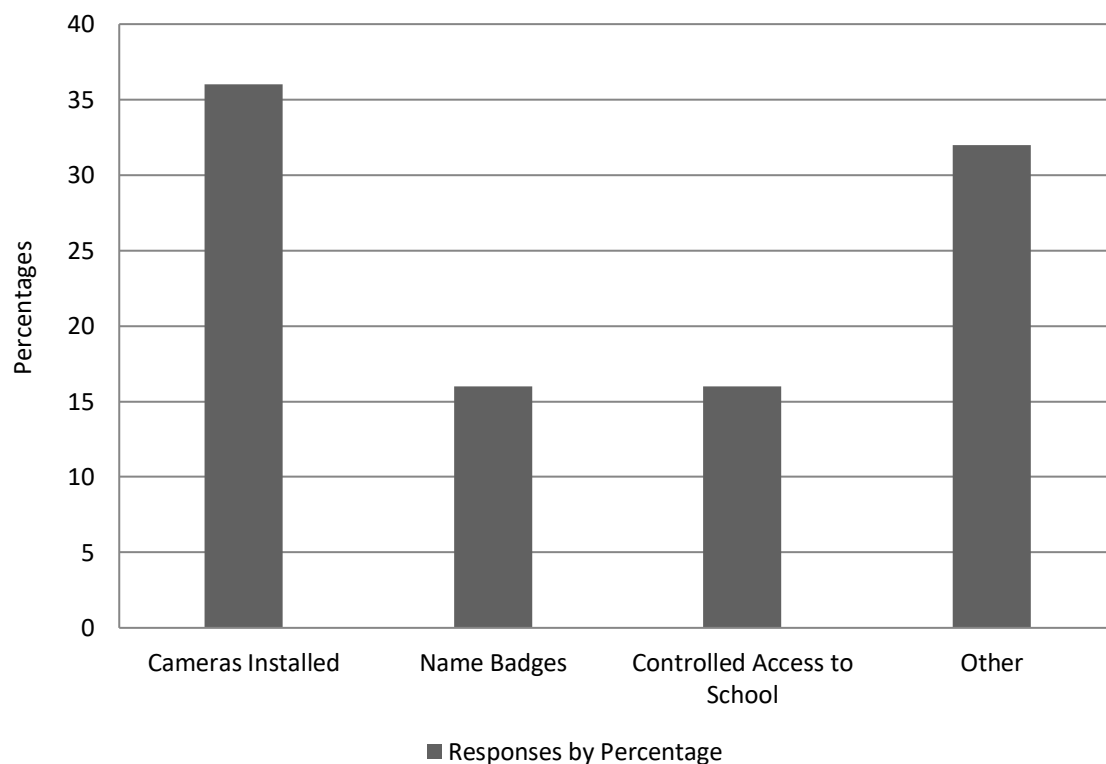
Figure 2. Most popular security measures used by schools in southwest Missouri.

When indicating which measures school districts take to prevent violence, none of the superintendents indicated the school districts have done nothing. However, superintendents did not view districts as perfectly fine. Four percent of the superintendents indicated school security personnel patrol the halls. Nine of the superintendents indicated security cameras have been installed within the school districts.

In regard to having a police presence on school grounds, 4.00% indicated they

have a police officer occasionally check on the school. Sixteen percent of the superintendents said they use name badges for faculty. Out of the 27 superintendents polled, none of the school districts require teachers in the districts to take self-defense training. Schools in southwest Missouri use metal detectors a lot less frequently than would have been anticipated. Indicated by the questionnaires, none of the districts represented in the study use metal detectors at the entrance of buildings. When it comes to the occasional random weapon and drug searches, none of the districts employ this tactic to help prevent violence.

One of the most common ways to help prevent school violence within southwest Missouri, outside of the use of cameras, is requiring all visitors to sign-in or check-in prior to entering the main part of school campuses. This technique was indicated as a measure already in place by 94.74% of superintendents. Another important technique employed by the superintendents was controlling access to school buildings/school grounds during school hours (16.00%). Having this type of controlled access would definitely support the equal percentage of superintendents using both sign-in or check-in along with restricted access. When it comes to keeping schools secure, 4.00% indicated they have a closed campus for lunch. Based on the questionnaire, none of the superintendents mandate the students use clear book bags. Only 4.00% of the superintendents indicated they employ the use of a structured anonymous threat reporting system.

These results were unexpected, since it seems there would be many more measures taken to increase security in schools. Cornell (2003) indicated many things need to change in the schools for the buildings to be safe and secure. One way to

decrease the amount of violence in schools is to increase security measures (Cornell, 2003). Security measures can include metal detectors, cameras, security guards, entrance only after identification by office personnel, bulletproof glass to protect entrances, and doors that lock (Cornell, 2003). It is helpful for office personnel to know every individual who enters the building (Cornell, 2003). Some other measures that could help ensure school safety include the prohibition of backpacks and purses that can be used to carry guns, knives, or other handheld weapons (Cornell, 2003). All of these security measures could help to lower the violence rates in schools, especially those incidents that result in death (Cornell, 2003). With these security measures in place and a better understanding of violence in schools, students would have a safer place to learn and to focus fully on education (Cornell, 2003).

In regard to where school violence takes place in their districts, 78.95% of superintendents said the majority of the time hallways are where violence takes place, more often than any other of the places listed. For instance, gyms, parking lots, and other unidentified places ranked the second highest locations at 31.58%. Based on the questionnaire, the area for least concern of violence in schools is the classroom, which was ranked at a score of 5.26% by the superintendents.

Question Five

Does your school limit access to social networking websites (e.g., Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter) from school computers? The 27 superintendents polled answered 85.19% do limit access to social networking websites (e.g., Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter) from school computers, while 7.41% indicated they do not limit social

networking websites on school computers. Two (7.41%) superintendents did not respond to this question.

Table 12

Access to Social Networking in Schools in Southwest Missouri

Response	Percentage
Yes	85.19%
No	7.41%
No Response	7.41%

The results of the answers to question number five showed the school superintendents believe keeping students away from social media sites during school hours is imperative. Because of the way the question was worded, it is unclear if this is because of the threat of violence from social media sources, or if it is simply because the students should focus on their schoolwork instead of social media.

Question Six

Does your school prohibit use of cell phones and text messaging devices during school hours? Electronic media, such as text messaging, email, and social networking, provide additional platforms that support a new form of violence, cyberbullying, which occurs when people of all ages "use electronic media to taunt, insult, or even threaten their peers" (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014, para. 5). Children in middle school

and high school usually perpetrate cyberbullying (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014).

Cyber abuse, which includes bullying through email and cell phone text messaging, results from in-person bullying and violent video games and has been an increasing problem since the 1990s (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Cyberbullying is a new form of violent conduct that may become actual physical violence (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). In response to question number six, 70.37% of the superintendents polled enforce prohibiting the use of cell phone and text messaging devices during school hours, while 22.22% of the schools do not prohibit the use of such devices during school hours. Two (7.41%) superintendents did not respond to this question.

Table 13

Access to Cellular Phones and Text Messaging in Southwest Missouri Schools

Response	Percentage
Yes	70.37%
No	22.22%
No Response	7.41%

As with question number five, it is unclear if cell phones and text messaging are prohibited in order to protect the students from cyberbullying or for other reasons. Also, this question did not allow superintendents to indicate if the use of these devices was

limited to emergencies or designated free time in the cases where the superintendents said devices were not prohibited. Researchers and practitioners agree school violence arises from a layering of causes and risk factors that include, but are not limited to, the following: access to weapons; media violence; cyber abuse; the impact of school, community, and family environments; personal alienation; and more (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014).

Because cyber-bullying can occur through both computers and cell phones, schools must address technology as part of their overall security plans. The data from questions five and six, as displayed above in Table 12 and Table 13, showed school personnel try to limit student interaction with the outside during school hours. Schools are more concerned with limiting computer social media than with prohibiting cell phone use.

It is important to remember as technology changes, the concepts of bullying and school violence change (Muschert, 2009). To help counteract these changes, parents, administrators, teachers, and the community have to be vigilant in identifying new forms of bullying, the warning signs, and the impact on school violence (Downey, 2013). Currently, cyber abuse is only one form of school violence; youth daily face many other kinds of violence (Muschert, 2009).

Question Seven

Where does violence in the school take place most often? When the school superintendents were presented with a question about where school violence most often occurs, the hallways of the schools were seen as the places with the greatest chance of violence at 38.46% of the responses. In contrast, both the classrooms and gyms were

seen as the places least likely for violence to occur, with a score of 0% given to both of these areas individually. With these responses, it would seem locations with the most adult supervision are perceived as the safest places.

Table 14

Most Likely Locations for School Violence in Southwest Missouri Schools

Response	Percentage
Hallways	38.46%
Classroom	0%
Gym	0%
Cafeteria	3.85%
Parking Lot	19.23%
Buses	3.85%
Other	34.62%

This information shows the importance of adult supervision for students. It is important for teachers and staff to be able to monitor and recognize potential problems before violence begins. In order to prevent violence in schools, teachers and parents should take better care of their children (Bennett-Johnson, 2004).

Dr. Bennett-Johnson (2004) stated, "Each school should involve community services, staff, parents, teachers, and students" (p. 55). Plans for safety procedures (e.g.,

evacuation routes and emergency communications) should be developed with the advice of local law enforcement, fire departments, and medical services experts (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). All employees of the school should be trained to practice emergency procedures in case an act of violence happens on school property (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). In addition, other resources should be available to teach staff about violence prevention, including lessons about anger management, bullying, character education, and drug abuse prevention (Bennett-Johnson, 2004).

Summary

An analysis of the data collected from the 27 participating superintendents was presented in this chapter. The complete questionnaire administered via SurveyMonkey can be found in Appendix B. The findings from the data allowed for final review and analysis of the concept of school violence in southwest Missouri, and the findings will allow for a better understanding overall of school violence. The information was gathered to respond to the three research questions to be answered in regard to southwest Missouri.

The information provided by the 27 superintendents allowed for analysis of how southwest Missouri superintendents perceive school violence in their area. The information provided allowed for acknowledgement violence has occurred in schools in southwest Missouri, although the level and severity of the violence seen was not indicated. Even though violence in southwest Missouri was acknowledged, the superintendents still indicated the overall level of school violence in southwest Missouri is low.

Of the superintendents surveyed, 96.50% indicated a low level of violence in the

region. Even though violence is seen to be at a low level of concern, violence was

reported in schools in one form or another. Superintendents in southwest Missouri felt

the main factor for violence in school is attributed to parental neglect, which was

indicated by 63.16% of the superintendents. A summary of findings, conclusions,

implications for practice, and suggestions for further research are found in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

School violence is a growing concern in the United States (Reddy et al., 2001). Where once there was little mention of school violence in the media, there now seem to be weekly stories of students acting out in a violent manner toward classmates, teachers, and staff (Reddy et al., 2001). This in turn has led to debate about the best ways to address violence and prevent incidences before they occur (Muschert, 2009).

Although school violence does exist, and has for centuries (Reddy et al., 2001), the reason for more focus on this problem in recent years has more to do with media coverage of the incidents than an increase in violence (Muschert, 2009). Where once school violence was discussed and dealt with on a local level and handled by the community, media sources now broadcast the occurrences to a wider audience (Muschert, 2009). This wider reporting has led to a greater awareness of the problem across the country (Muschert, 2009).

Another change to the perception of school violence is a redefining of what constitutes violence in schools. Previous reports focused on incidents which involved direct bodily harm, usually directed toward a group of people (Reddy et al., 2001). In recent years, the definition of violence has grown to include bullying as well (CDC, 2015a). Anyone who has attended school in the United States can attest to the fact bullying, both verbal and physical, has always existed, but now it has formally been included in the category of violence (CDC, 2015a).

The purpose of this study was to explore the violence epidemic in schools according to location, environment, and socioeconomic status. The researcher attempted to classify types of violence and the reasons for violence in an effort to understand the

best ways to prevent violence in schools in the United States. This study also focused on the measures being taken by principals and other staff members at local schools to prevent violence and on the effectiveness of such measures. The programs in place in schools and those outside school hours were examined. The study also included examination of the security measures schools have in place or would like to implement, as well as how these types of measures would help ensure the safety of both students and faculty. While investigating these security measures, disadvantages of such measures have become evident.

Within this chapter, the research questions are answered as presented in the original study design. Since this was a quantitative study, the questionnaire was not perfectly aligned to the original research questions. Rather than being a direct reflection of the original research design, information from the respondents was used to infer the answers to the research questions.

To gather information, a questionnaire was designed to allow for investigation of the prevalence of violence in schools in southwest Missouri. The study was a quantitative study utilizing the causal-comparative design. The independent variables in this study were schools in southwest Missouri. The dependent variable in this study was school violence as defined by Bracy (2009). The questionnaire was administered to better understand how school personnel perceive school violence, as well as what policies, practices, and protocols are implemented to prevent school violence.

There were several limitations in the study. First, although the study had a relatively large number of participants (27), it could have been much larger and more data could have been collected if all invited superintendents had participated. Therefore,

the opinions of 27 superintendents cannot be expected to represent all superintendents' views of violence in the region. Second, there is no solid definition of school violence, and some participants may have had preconceived notions of what school violence is that differ from the notions of their counterparts.

Findings

Research question one. How can schools and parents better control or eliminate violence in schools in the United States?

Questionnaire question number four is relevant to research question number one. In question number four, the focus was on physical things schools have done or could do to monitor and prevent acts of violence. Participants were not asked if the schools planned to implement any of these measures in the near future. In question number four, the participants were asked, "What measures have your school district taken to prevent violence?" This question was followed by a choice of 14 items which previous researchers suggested help control violence in schools. The 14 items included the following:

- The school district has done nothing.

- Our district is perfectly fine.

- School security patrols the halls.

- Cameras have been installed.

- A police officer occasionally checks on the school.

- An armed police officer is stationed at the school.

- Use of name badges for faculty.

- Teachers are required to take self-defense training.

- Metal detectors at the entrance of buildings.

- Occasional random weapon and drug searches.

- Visitors must sign or check in.

- Controlled access to school buildings/school grounds during school hours.

- Closed campus for lunch.

- Students must use clear book bags.

- Use of a structured anonymous threat reporting system.

The measures being taken to prevent violence in schools were addressed in question number four. The most common measure taken was the installation of cameras in the schools, with nine (36%) of the superintendents responding affirmatively to that choice.

The second and third most common measures reported were the use of name badges for faculty (16%) and controlled access to buildings (16%). For four of the choices listed (teachers are required to attend self-defense training; metal detectors at entrances; random weapon and drug searches; and the mandatory use of clear book bags), southwest Missouri superintendents reported no implementation of the measures. This again reflects the perception of relative safety in the communities and schools, with only minimal safety measures in place.

Questionnaire questions five and six also indirectly address the causes of violence in schools. Although violence was not directly asked about in these questions, social media and texting are ways in which students can engage in cyberbullying. By limiting access to these resources during school hours, the chances of cyberbullying may be limited as well.

Questionnaire question number five asked, "Does your school limit access to social networking websites (e.g., Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter) from school computers?" Questionnaire question number six asked, "Does your school prohibit use of cell phones and text messaging devices during school hours?" The responses to these two questions were limited to "yes" or "no."

In response to question five, 24 (92.31%) schools limit access to social networking from school computers, while only two (7.69%) do not. In response to question six, 18 (69.23%) of the schools limit the use of cell phones and texting during school hours, while eight (30.77%) do not. While these devices are not commonly seen as weapons of violence, limiting their use may have a positive impact on emotional well-being during school hours (Cornell, 2003). By limiting the usage of these devices, schools will in turn limit contact with outside influences, as well as limit verbal and emotional abuse that may be unseen by educators (Cornell, 2003).

Questionnaire question number seven asked, "Where does violence in the school take place most often?" This was followed by a choice of seven areas of the school campus (Hallways, Classroom, Restroom, Gym, Cafeteria, Parking Lot, Buses, Other). When asked in question seven where school violence was likely to occur, two of the responses, hallways (38.46%) and other (34.62%), received the majority of the votes. None of the respondents felt the classroom or gym are places where violence is likely to occur. From these responses, it can be inferred areas where teachers and staff provide more supervision are seen as areas which are safer and less likely to have acts of violence.

Research question two. What are the causes of the increased violence in schools over the last decade?

The most relevant answers to this research question can be found in the responses to questionnaire question number two. Question number two asked, "Rate (5 = high to 1 = low) the following concerning how you feel these factors relate/lead to school violence (Parental negligence, Peer pressure, Entertainment, Religion/Beliefs, Finances, Weapons, Treatment of students by teachers or school administrators)." Superintendents responded with a variety of factors they feel lead to school violence as measured by question two of the questionnaire. Social influences such as parental neglect (48%), peer pressure (57.69%), and religious convictions (61.54%) appeared at the top of their lists, with availability of weapons receiving the lowest score (38.46%) of the choices. From the responses, emotional and mental states are perceived to have the strongest impact on the perpetuation of violent acts in schools.

Research question three. What are the attitudes of southwest Missouri administrators on school violence?

When answering this research question, responses to questionnaire questions numbers one and three provided the most relevant information. Question number one asked, "How do you rate the overall violence where you live?" The participants were asked to rate the level of violence in their communities on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being "nil" and 5 being "very high." Of the 27 school superintendents, only one responded with "average" (4%), 20 responded "very low" (74%), and five responded "nil" (19%). This showed how school superintendents in southwest Missouri who responded to this

questionnaire viewed their communities, and by inference their schools, as safe areas with little chance of violence.

Questionnaire question number three asked, "What are your feelings concerning school violence in your area?" This was followed by four choices (Cannot happen; Can happen, but little chance of major violence occurring; School Violence has happened, but nothing serious; School Violence has happened with serious consequences). When asked about the chance of school violence in their schools, all superintendents admitted to the possibility of this happening, but only one (4%) responded it had happened with serious consequences, while six (24%) responded violence had occurred but was not serious.

The remaining 18 respondents (72%) agreed violence was possible, but dismissed the likelihood of serious consequences occurring in their schools. This reflects the information gleaned from question one, in which superintendents generally responded they feel their communities are safe. The limitation of the question is there were no parameters set to define "serious consequences," so the superintendents may have defined these acts differently according to their own preconceived notions.

The low scores given by the school superintendents to the issue of violence in the media were surprising. Although conflicting study results existed regarding the effects of violent media, the superintendents had a very low perception of violence considering media sources. As stated previously, researchers at Ohio State University found high school students who had more exposure to violent video games held "more pro-violent attitudes and had more hostile personalities, were less forgiving, believed violence to be more normal, and behaved more aggressively in their everyday lives" (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014, p. 1). Kelly (2015) stated, " even after 20 years of studies, the

American Psychological Association says there still isn't enough research into whether games cause actual criminal violence" (para. 5). The school superintendents who responded to the questionnaire for this study seem to agree with these findings.

The responses by the school superintendents did, however, support the literature in regard to the importance of parental involvement affecting student behaviors. Many factors have contributed to the grave and dangerous activities happening in schools (Reddy et al., 2001). The risk factors arise from the roles parents, teachers, friends, and a child's mindset play in generating violent outbursts (Reddy et al., 2001). Nevertheless, the deciding factor is the contribution of the parents (Reddy et al., 2001).

The first place where children learn about appropriate behavior and gain a respectful attitude about behavior is the home (Dixon, 2005). Therefore, parents should keep an eye on their children every day (Dixon, 2005). Parents are supposed to watch over their children and monitor student attitudes toward fellow beings, such as whether children are behaving badly (Dixon, 2005). Ending the bad conduct of children when it first occurs will affect children's attitudes (Dixon, 2005). A child who shows signs of violence can still be cared for in a manner that may help him or her find a way to help manage anger and violence (Dixon, 2005).

All of the participant responses indicated parents are important to student behaviors, with 96% of the responses indicating parental involvement is of average or above average importance. One trend that might be attributed to increased violence in schools is the recent change in family dynamics. Family dynamics have changed over the decades (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). In the early to mid-19th century, family dynamics shifted to single-parent and split households (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). The

breakdown of family infrastructure could be an underlying factor of the increase in school violence (Flores de Apodaca, 2012).

In recent years, parents have changed their manner of parenting by hiring nannies or placing children in daycare (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). Some parents leave their children home alone to work longer hours or multiple jobs in order to provide food, clothing, and other material objects for the children and the rest of the family (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). This could also be a contributing factor in the growing amount of violence; children are not able to have quality time with parents or guardians to discuss what is happening in school concerning bullying, depression, isolation, and violence (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). Without proper nurturing and communication, children are very impressionable and are easily persuaded (Flores de Apodaca, 2012).

Parents and guardians should be more involved in their children's care and education (Flores de Apodaca, 2012). Parents need to understand their children's abilities, fears, concerns, potential, and mental health status (Melvin, 2011). Teachers should communicate with both parents and students to help students feel safe and secure in the school environment (Melvin, 2011). If teachers, parents, and guardians pay more attention to children during the vulnerable years of growth, it could be one way to start the process of preventing violence in schools (Flores de Apodaca, 2012).

Another somewhat surprising result was the score given to the role of religion in school violence. Religion was rated as a low factor for school violence with a score of 61.54%. It might have been assumed a religious upbringing would help students to be less violent and to be calm and handle their differences in a productive way (Flores de

Apodaca, 2012). However, the responses from the questionnaire seem to indicate the influence of religion has little to no effect on school violence.

Answering research question three and understanding how superintendents perceive violence in southwest Missouri is crucial to finding ways to eliminate and overcome violence in schools. This questions elicited responses to gain an understanding of how superintendents view the concept of school violence. Based on the information provided by the superintendents, it is evident school violence with minor consequences is a common occurrence throughout southwest Missouri.

Conclusions

Research question one. How can schools and parents better control or eliminate violence in schools in the United States?

Although there was no specific question in the questionnaire to gather the opinions of the superintendents, inferences can be made from their responses. From questionnaire question two, responses indicated administrators see social and emotional factors as having the greatest influence on school violence. Availability of weapons, violence in media and entertainment, and financial differences were seen as some of the least important influences. In response to question four, it appeared superintendents believe basic monitoring of school grounds and controlling access is necessary for a safe environment. Responses to question seven indicated superintendents feel there is little chance of violence in areas that are heavily monitored by staff and faculty. From the responses to these questions, it can be inferred the greatest chance in preventing school violence is to monitor and address social influences and to monitor and address emotional problems of students.

Research question two. What are the causes of the increased violence in schools over the last decade?

The second research question was not answered through the questionnaire, but rather through the independent literature review presented in Chapter Two. Through literature review, it became apparent it is not violence that has increased, but rather the attention to violence and the perception of an increase that have changed (Muschert, 2009). The questionnaire responses did, however, provide insight into how school superintendents view the causes of increasing school violence.

In the late 20th century, the United States experienced an increase in the media coverage of school shootings (Cornell, 2003). The misconception in media coverage is that school shootings and other mass violence in schools have increased suddenly in the last several decades; however, this is not the case (Cornell, 2003). In contrast to the media reports, there has not been a sharp increase in school violence; instead, it has continued to increase gradually throughout the decades (Cornell, 2003). The difference is the role the media plays during the mass violence perpetrated at schools in the 20th century, such as the Columbine shooting in 1999 (Cornell, 2003).

Research question three. What are the attitudes of southwest Missouri administrators on school violence?

Despite the media attention given to violence in schools, the findings of this study do not support the idea superintendents see school violence as a major concern in southwest Missouri. In question one of the questionnaire, the overall level of violence perceived by superintendents in the geographical area was rated as average by one respondent and as nil or low by all others in the questionnaire group. The perceived

violence of the members of the community would logically transfer to the perceived violence within the schools. This in turn may affect the measures taken within the schools to protect the students, staff, and faculty.

From the responses given, it is apparent these superintendents do see the possibility violence could occur in their schools, but they do not see it as an impending threat, nor do they generally feel there is a chance of serious consequences from that violence. Additionally, the participants perceive little chance of violence when students are heavily supervised. Because of the small number of questionnaires returned and the generally low population density of the area which was surveyed, it is not known if this information can be generalized to the remainder of the country.

Implications for Practice

Implications are practical suggestions for addressing the issues raised in the research (Roberts, 2010). According to Roberts (2010), implications for practice refer to the "Significance of the Study.... [Which] now becomes the basis for preparing your implications.... In other words, what would you tell people to do differently as a result of your findings?" (p. 181). These should be suggestions of what should be done and how it can be done (Roberts, 2010). It is easy to make suggestions as to what should be done regarding an issue; it is another thing to suggest how it can be done (Roberts, 2010). There may not be more than two or three implications for practice (Roberts, 2010). The quantity is not as important as the quality of thought behind the suggestions (Roberts, 2010).

Based upon the findings in this research, the greatest influence on school violence factors come from outside the school. Violence is a result of emotional and social

problems which are not adequately addressed (Twemlow, 2000). By monitoring the students' behaviors and attitudes more closely, problems may be fixed before violence occurs (Twemlow, 2000). School counselors can help to address some of the issues, but other faculty and staff need to be able to recognize students who may need to be referred to the counselor or to others for help (Twemlow, 2000).

Many schools have large class sizes which prevent the recognition of individual problems (Muschert, 2009). Adding additional staff to the classroom in the form of paraprofessionals may help in monitoring the mental and emotional stability of the students. Another solution may be to allow specific times during which all students can visit with a counselor or other professional. This can help to identify and address problems without any of the students feeling as if they are being specifically targeted. This will also allow students to feel talking to someone about problems is a normal and accepted process of communication.

Parental involvement has a great influence on student success and behavior (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016). The amount of quality time parents are able to spend with children has decreased in recent years (Twemlow, 2000). Gardner, Browning, and Brooks-Gunn (2012), concluded "intensive participation in organized youth activities may protect against internalizing problems in adolescence. Moreover, intensive participation in afterschool programs may reduce the strength of associations between parents' domestic violence and youths' internalizing symptoms" (p. 674). Parents who are unable to deal with their own stresses cannot deal with the problems of their children (Muschert, 2009). Referring the families to agencies which will work with them in their

homes and help to teach better communication skills may be one solution to this difficulty (Villarreal & Castro-Villarreal, 2016).

Recommendations for Future Research

In the review of literature and in the research studied, several gaps were identified. The first gap found was the lack of specification of definitions in the literature. Unless the definitions of violence and influencing factors are standardized in the literature, it cannot be clear if the studies have addressed the same issues. Therefore, the issues have little chance of a solution and coordinated efforts to eradicate the problem of school violence becomes impossible.

Little attention has been given to the study of community influences on school violence. It is a reasonable assumption that if violence does not begin in the school, it must begin in the community. Studies have been conducted about what types of communities tend to have more violence, but more attention needs to be given to the specific factors which cause those communities to become violent and how that can be changed. More studies need to be done concerning what influences these students are exposed to outside of school and what resources are reasonably available to these students. Studies that verify the effectiveness of current prevention methods could also be beneficial in order to establish a list of best practices for schools to follow.

More research on problems that relate to, but not necessarily result in, school violence may also find solutions for greater societal problems. Community programs that empower youth to make positive choices or act as leaders in their neighborhoods could greatly influence how children behave at school. Efforts from law enforcement to start conversations with citizens could build more trust and accountability with authority

figures. Increased access to mental health services and resources for dual income families or single-parent families could decrease problems involving depression, neglect, and domestic violence.

Summary

School violence is a major concern in the United States today. By the end of 2012, 297 people died as a result of school shootings since 1980, with the largest death tolls at Virginia Tech at 32 in 2007, Sandy Hook Elementary at 27 in 2012, and Columbine High School at 13 in 1999 (Kirk, 2012). There were 64 school shootings in 2015 alone, although not all ended in fatalities (BBC News, 2016). These are only the most shocking examples of school violence covered by the media.

Major acts of violence prompted increased media coverage and heightened efforts by school administrators to prevent harm to students and faculty. The Columbine High School shooting in 1999 was the first major act of school violence covered by the media (Cornell, 2003). Since then, schools have increased the implementation of policies and procedures to decrease school violence (Muschert, 2009). Procedures include the use of metal detectors to keep weapons out of schools (AACAP, 2012) and regular police or security officer patrols to monitor student activities in high-risk schools (Graham-Tebo, 2000).

Violence-prevention strategies include zero-tolerance policies, which have reduced the amount of gang activity, drugs, and weapons in schools (Melvin, 2011); before- and after-school programs to provide supervision for children when their parents are at work (AACAP, 2012); and crisis management and prevention training for teachers so they are better equipped to identify problems (Graham-Tebo, 2000). Other methods

comprise holistic approaches that not only set restrictions, but increase awareness and support for students and faculty ("School Violence Prevention," 2014). Such methods introduce conflict resolution training and comprehensive emergency planning ("School Violence Prevention," 2014).

School violence is not a new phenomenon; it dates as far back as the 18th century (Middleton, 2007). In the past, it was normal for students to carry weapons to school, and most shootings were accidental (Twemlow, 2000). The earliest recorded school shooting was a revolt by Native Americans against white settlers in 1764 (Middleton, 2007). More recently, acts of violence have been influenced by available technologies such as text messaging and social media websites (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Cyber abuse perpetrated against youth via email, text messaging, and social media websites have led to school violence and suicides (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014).

Reasons for violence vary from mental health issues to family problems to problems within society. Violent media, religious or racial differences, cyberbullying, and access to drugs or weapons have all been blamed for psychological or physical harm inflicted on children nationwide (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Some believe family and social values are deteriorating, that injustice still exists between races and socioeconomic groups, and that there is a vast problem with anger management throughout society (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2014). Additionally, the availability of guns and current gun control laws are a hotly debated topic (Donohue, 2015).

A thorough review of the literature on school violence and responses to questionnaires sent to 27 superintendents in southwest Missouri brought to light the many facets of school violence and potential preventative measures to protect children and educators in America. This research included examination of the causes of school violence, attitudes concerning violence, and preventative measures used by schools in the United States in relation to problems and solutions found in southwest Missouri schools. Based on the information collected from the 27 participants, it seems an overwhelming majority perceive parental neglect and peer pressure as the most prominent factors relating to school violence in southwest Missouri.

In general, educators in southwest Missouri feel the level of school violence in their locality is low. Schools are implementing some security measures such as installing security cameras and controlling access to school grounds. These methods appear to be working to slow the increase in violence at the time of this research, as most superintendents in southwest Missouri responded their schools are safe places and they have little concern for violence occurring in their schools.

To further efforts to prevent violence in schools, experts believe addressing societal problems such as parental neglect and peer pressure is imperative (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). Based upon the responses of the questionnaire participants, it can be concluded the greatest chance of preventing violence in schools can be found in addressing social and emotional issues of the students and within the families. Gereluk, Donlevy, and Thompson (2015) found "along with their educational mandate and invitation to learning – schools carry a heavy responsibility to ensure the safety of all

students and staff" (p. 473). This can be achieved by providing more monitoring and action when problems are noticed.

School violence should not become a new norm, and eradicating this problem begins in communities and at home. Gereluk et al (2015) concluded:

> The horror of gun violence in school settings compels each of us to consider not only how we may make schools safe and secure environments for students and staff, but also how we want to live – how we will get to know our neighbors and how we will continue living together with meaningful understanding, respectful caring, and true acceptance of each other. (p. 474)

There are many challenges ahead, especially for those with few resources. Making sure all stakeholders have a voice in this issue will be important to the future safety of children and communities.

Appendix A

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Perceptions of Southwest Missouri Superintendents in Regards to School Violence and Prevention

Principal Investigator _Ahlam Krimid_____
        Telephone: ▓▓▓▓▓▓ E-mail: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓
Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ahlam Krimid under the guidance of Dr. Shelly Fransen. The purpose of this research is to explore the violence epidemic in schools according to location, environment and socioeconomic status.

2. a) Your participation will involve **completing an anonymous questionnaire**.

   b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be **approximately five minutes.**

   Approximately 130 superintendents from Southwest Missouri will be invited to participate in this research.

3. Due to the anonymity of participants and the confidential manner in which responses will be handled, anticipated risks associated with this research are limited. However, participants should be aware that some of the questions will involve your views regarding parental abuse and neglect of students in your district; the possible negative effects of religious beliefs; and other potentially sensitive matters upon which you may be uncomfortable to reflect. In addition, while the likelihood that questionnaire answers will be traceable to an individual is small (since measures are being taken to ensure your anonymity), 100% anonymity cannot be guaranteed. This is especially true in the event the total number of participants is smaller than anticipated.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about school violence and the prevention of future acts of school violence and may help society.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from

this study; no IP addresses will be collected; and all collected information will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Ahlam Krimid at ▮▮▮▮▮▮ or the Supervising Faculty, Shelly Fransen at ▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Provost, at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date   Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date   Investigator Printed Name

Appendix B

School Violence in Southwest Missouri Schools Questionnaire

Use this rating scale for the following question:

1: Nil   2: Low   3: Average   4: High   5: Very high

1. _____How do you rate the overall violence where you live?

2. Rate (5 = high to 1 = low) the following concerning how you feel these factors

relate/lead to school violence:

_____Parental negligence (e.g., abuse, neglect, divorce, conflicting relationships)

_____Peer pressure (e.g., treatment, fashion, reputations)

_____Entertainment (video games, movies, music, books, art)

_____Religion/Beliefs (e.g., conflicting ideas, treatment, extremism, prejudice)

_____Finances (e.g., poverty, middle-class, upper-class/wealthy, cost of living, goods)

_____Weapons (e.g., availability of guns/etc., availability of bomb recipes on the net)

_____Treatment of students by teachers or school administrators

3. What are your feelings concerning school violence in your area?

      A. Cannot happen

      B. Can happen, but little chance of major violence occurring

      C. School Violence has happened, but nothing serious

      D. School Violence has happened with serious consequences

4. What measures have your school district taken to prevent violence? *(Mark all that*

apply.)

     _____A. The school district has done nothing. Our district is perfectly fine.

     _____B. School security patrols the halls.

_____C. Cameras have been installed.

_____D. A police officer occasionally checks on the school.

_____E. An armed police officer is stationed at the school.

_____F. Use of name badges for faculty.

_____G. Teachers are required to take self-defense training.

_____H. Metal detectors at the entrance of buildings.

_____I. Occasional random weapon and drug searches.

_____J. Visitors must sign or check in.

_____K. Controlled access to school buildings/school grounds during school hours.

_____L. Closed campus for lunch.

_____M. Students must use clear book bags.

_____N. Use of a structured anonymous threat reporting system.

5. Does your school limit access to social networking websites (e.g., Facebook,

Myspace, and Twitter) from school computers?

    Yes

    No

6. Does your school prohibit use of cell phones and text messaging devices during school

hours?

    Yes

    No

7. Where does violence in the school take place most often? Mark all that apply using

scale 1 to 4:

    1 = no risk   2 = low risk   3 = moderate risk   4 = high risk

Hallways_____

Classroom_____

Restroom_____

Gym_____

Cafeteria_____

Parking lot_____

Buses_____

Other_____ (name and use the scale)

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Parts of this questionnaire were taken from: O'Rourke, T. J. (2016). A student survey on

school violence. Retrieved from http://www.angelfire.com/ab/violence/

survey.html?

Appendix C

Raw Data

Participants were asked how they rate the level of violence where they live.

Response	Participant
Nil	1,3,8,10,14
Low	2,4,6,7,9,11,12,13,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,27
Average	5
High	
Very High	
No Response	26

Factors related to school violence (Rated on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being highest):

Factor one: Parental negligence (abuse, neglect, divorce, conflicting relationships)

Response	Participant
Nil	
Low	3
Average	1,8,10,11,13,14,15,17,19,24
High	2,4,5,6,7,12,16,18,20,21,23,25
Very High	9,27
No Response	22,26

Factor two: Peer pressure (e.g., treatment, fashion, reputations)

Response	Participant
Nil	
Low	3,4,6,16
Average	1,2,5,7,10,12,13,14,15,19,20,21,24,25,27
High	8,9,11,17,18,22,23
Very High	
No Response	

Factor three: Entertainment (video games, movies, music, books, art)

Response	Participant
Nil	21
Low	7,8,10,12,13,17,19,22,24
Average	1,2,3,4,14,15,16,18,20,25,27
High	5,6,9,11
Very High	23
No Response	26

Factor four: Religion/Beliefs (e.g., conflicting ideas, treatment, extremism, prejudice)

Response	Participant
Nil	4,8,19,21
Low	6,7,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,23,24,25,27
Average	2,3,5,20,22
High	1
Very High	
No Response	26

Factor five: Finances (e.g., poverty, middle-class, upper-class/wealthy, cost of living, goods)

Response	Participant
Nil	4,8,19,21
Low	6,7,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,23,24,25,27
Average	2,3,5,20,22
High	1
Very High	
No Response	26

Factor six: Weapons (e.g., availability of guns/etc., availability of bomb recipes on the net)

Response	Participant
Nil	4,6,8,18,19
Low	1,3,10,11,13,15,17,22,23,24
Average	2,7,9,12,14,20,25,27
High	5,16,21
Very High	
No Response	26

Factor seven: Treatment of students by teachers or school administrators

Response	Participant
Nil	6,17,18,19,23,25
Low	3,4,7,8,11,12,13,14,15,16,22,24
Average	1,2,5,9,10,20
High	21
Very High	
No Response	26,27

Participants were asked about their feelings on school violence in their geographic area

Response	Participant
Cannot happen	
Can happen, but little chance of major violence occurring	1,2,3,6,7,8,9,10,11,13,14,15,18,19,21,22,23,24
School Violence has happened, but nothing serious	4,5,12,16,24
School Violence has happened with serious consequences	20

Participants were asked what measures their schools had taken to prevent violence. The questionnaire platform used did not allow for multiple responses.

Response	Participant
The school district has done nothing	
School security patrols the halls	11
Cameras have been installed	4,7,8,9,13,15,17,18,24
A police officer occasionally checks on the school	22
An armed police officer is stationed at the school	16,19
Use of name badges for faculty	2,5,12,19,21
Teachers are required to take self-defense training	
Metal detectors at the entrance to buildings	
Occasional random weapon and drug searches	
Visitors must sign or check in	14,19
Controlled access to buildings/ grounds during school hours	3,19,23,25
Closed campus for lunch	10
Students must use clear book bags	
Use of a structured anonymous threat reporting system	6
No response	26,27

Participants were asked whether their schools limited access to social networking sites from school computers.

Response	Participant
Yes	1,2,4,5,6,7,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25
No	3,8
No Response	26,27

Participants were asked if their school prohibits the use of cell phones and text messaging devices during school hours

Response	Participant
Yes	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,23
No	1,9,20,21,24,25
No Response	26,27

Participants were asked which areas of the school campus were most likely to have acts

of violence occur.

Response	Participant
Hallways	3,4,5,7,10,13,15,19,24,25
Classroom	
Restroom	
Cafeteria	2
Parking Lot	8,12,14,16,22
Buses	20
Other	1,6,9,11,17,18,21,23
No Response	26,27

Appendix D

March 4, 2016

████████
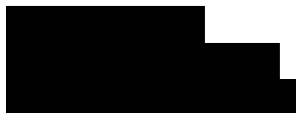
Re: Permission to obtain and use SWMASA School Membership emails inorder to conduct a Research Study on School Violence.

I am writing to request permission to obtain a list of SWMASA school superintendents email addresses. I am currently enrolled at Lindenwood University in St. Charles,. MO, and am in the process of writing my dissertation for a doctoral degree in Educational Administration. The study is titled, Perceptions of Southwest Missouri Administrators in regards to school violence and prevention.

The purpose of this study is to explore the violence epidemic in schools according to location, environment, socioeconomic status, and student-teacher ratio. An attempt will be made to classify types of violence and the reasons for violence in an effort to understand the best ways to prevent violence in schools in Southwest Missouri. This study will also focus on the measures taken by school superintendents to prevent violence and on the effectiveness of such measures. The researcher will examine the types of programs in place in schools and those outside of schools. An examination of security measures schools have in place or would like to implement, as well as the pros and cons of these types of measures and whether or not they ensure the safety of both students and faculty will also take place.

Superintendents in southwest Missouri will be identified and surveyed electronically regarding attitudes about school safety and school safety procedures. Results will be collected electronically, and all participants will remain anonymous. A descriptive approach will be used to investigate how schools and parents can

play a role in better controlling or eliminating violence in schools. The research will include how school violence affects people in the United States. It is important to note that Columbine and other more recent acts of school violence reported in the media are not the only cases, but they are the ones that have been covered by the national media (Muschert, 2009). It seems for each publicized school shooting, there are several more that only affected a few individuals (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004, p. 1195). Violence in schools will be examined in order to determine the causes and the ways in which educators can help prevent violence (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004). Furthermore, a descriptive analysis of the causes of violence in schools over the past decade will be presented.

If approval is given, Southwest Missouri superintendents will be contacted via email after contact information is collected from SWMASA. The superintendents will be informed of the research, and a survey link will be attached to the email. Through the link, the superintendents will agree to participate in the research and will answer the survey questions. No one will be forced to participate. The survey will be anonymous. No cost will be incurred other than the 5-10 minutes the survey will take. Participants will be asked about their views regarding parental abuse and neglect of students in their districts, the possible bad effects of religious beliefs, and other potentially offensive matters.

Approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions of concerns about participation at ███████████ or ██████████████████████. You may also contact Dr. Shelly Fransen, at ███████████ or ████████████████████. A copy of this letter and your written consent should be retained by you for future reference.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ahlam Krimid

Doctoral Candidate

Permission Letter

I, ██████████, grant permission for Ahlam Krimid to obtain email addresses from SWMASA superintendents in order to study the perceptions of school superintendents in regards to school violence and prevention. By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to protect the   participants:

1. I may withdraw my consent at any time without   penalty.

2. The identity of the participants will remain confidential and anonymous in the dissertation or any future publications of this study.

I have read the information above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. Permission, as explained, is granted.

██████████   March 4, 2016

President SWMASA   **Date**

Appendix E

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE: March 23, 2016

TO: Ahlam Krimid

FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [875364-1] Perceptions of Southwest Missouri
                   Administrators in regards to school violence and
                   prevention

IRB REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: March 23, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: March 23, 2017

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project.
Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission.
This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein
the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this
approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal
regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the
study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form.

Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of March 23, 2017.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.If you have any questions, please contact Megan Woods at (636) 485-9005 or mwoods1@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to mwoods1@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

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