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A Qualitative Exploration of Multiple Case Studies of the Perception of School Social Workers Concerning Their Roles in Public Schools

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Alesha Nicole Morrison

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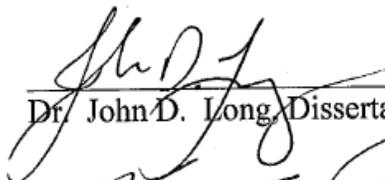
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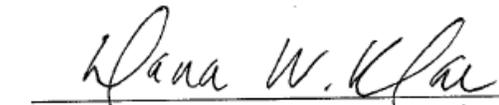
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Date

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 here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Signature: *Alesha Nicole Morrison* Date: 3-18-16

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Abstract

This qualitative exploration in the form of multiple case studies interviewed a group of seven social workers from the St. Louis Metropolitan area to gain their perception as school social workers concerning their roles in public schools. The literature on school social workers indicated that school social workers brought unique knowledge and skills to the school system and the student services team. School social workers were instrumental in furthering the vision of the schools to help provide an improved setting and environment for teaching and learning.

This study conducted case studies of the social worker in the professional environment to document the types of activities conducted in the workplace and perceptions of the social workers regarding their place in the school setting.

To gather the qualitative data necessary to answer the research questions, participants provided responses to a survey, kept a log of activities, and participated in interviews. Qualitative data was coded for indicators of the role of social workers and their best strategies, on the job. Five major themes emerged from the study. The first of these was Monitoring Attendance and Tardy Issues. This role took much of the time during the day for social workers regardless of setting.

Home Visits to Assess Family Needs was the second most common job duty of the participants. Connecting Families to Resources did not take as much time, however was regarded by the social workers as the most important. Individual and Group Counseling was a common tool for trying to improve student behavior or coping skills. This was not a frequently used as the social workers desired. Crisis Intervention occurred on an as needed basis and required the use of the skills learned in their college training.

The other major conclusion was in the difference between the single site and travelling school social workers. All of the travelling social workers thought they would be more effective if they were in only one school full time. Overall, the participants reported that they loved their job in spite of the challenges they faced.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The need for social workers in the school setting is more essential than ever before. Schools have had to service an increasing number of students with social and mental health problems, with school social workers as the major providers of mental health services to children (Cepeda, 2010). With the rise of social media and other avenues of bullying, the need for school social workers had increased. The presence of school social workers in school buildings was growing rapidly around the country. These professionals were equipped with the knowledge and skill set to help handle and tackle these issues head-on with students. This research study was a learning project that focused on the role of social workers in public schools in the Midwest. This study examined not only the role of a social worker, but also looked into the areas of need for school social workers in schools. School social workers provided an array of services for both the students and their families, inside and outside of the school building. While there was no one definite school social work job description, school social workers provided aide to the teachers and administrators in the areas of achievement and discipline interventions for students.

Many schools had begun to implement school wide positive behavior reward systems to confront this problem head on. Some believed that if students were rewarded for doing the right thing they would make better choices; this in turn would reduce school referrals. By reducing the amount of school referrals and discipline issues, it was believed by some it was more likely that students would spend more time in the classroom as opposed to in school or out of school suspension, and in turn increase their academic achievement.

These new types of reward systems and incentives often involved the school social worker's expertise or input to help assist in obtaining resources and funding for the rewards. Parental involvement and family structure played a huge role in student achievement and discipline methods implemented within the school system. Without the proper backing from the student's parent or guardian, the school administration had a harder time getting through to the students. Also without the needed support at home with schoolwork, students may struggle academically. Parental involvement was essential to the success of the child. If the child did not know that they had someone holding them accountable as well as backing the school, the rules, and the expectations that were set in place for the students, then they may have felt that they had no one rooting for them or no one to make proud.

All of these problems and more were what a school social worker may have faced on a daily basis. When social workers were placed in a school with high poverty levels, high discipline referral levels, and low academic achievement levels, their role changed and they were responsible for helping in all of these areas. The school structure determined how they carried out their job and what their daily job duties may have entailed. Depending on the placement of a social worker, the specific job functions, and interventions that social worker needed to use would vary. Not every school social worker had the same job description. In fact, depending on the population, location, and needs of the school, one school social worker's job may look very different from another school social worker's job. For instance, some social workers worked primarily on school truancy and attendance issues, and finding resources for families in need. Other school social workers were to conduct counseling sessions, small groups, and provide

input and verifiable social worker minutes to the students who required special services. No matter what their specific task or job description was, school social workers were essential to the school system, and there was a great need for them in every school building to work with students and their families.

Background of Study

A school social worker was a specialized subset within the social work profession. School social workers brought to the table a distinctive form of knowledge in the school setting. School social workers were an active part in furthering the purpose of the school system. School social work practitioners were in schools to help improve academics, to help students connect their home and school lives, and to help them connect with the needed resources in the community. The overall role of a social worker was to help break barriers that may have been in the way of a student's learning through interventions, coping skills, and monitoring. Often students struggled with learning and felt they had no support because for children it may have been embarrassing to ask for help; but the purpose of a social worker and other school-based professionals was to come together and provide that support and resources that the student may have lacked. When possible obstacles were in the way of a child's education, it was a part of the school social workers job to join forces with all stakeholders to come up with ways to improve the child's environment. (Allen-Meares, Washington, & Welsh, 2000). Germain (1999) described the school in this way:

> real life ecological unit, beyond the realm of metaphor or analogy. The child
>
> clearly is in intimate interaction with the school, second in intensity only to the
>
> interaction of the child and family. But the school social worker literally is

located at the interface where school and child transact. . . Actually, the school

social worker stands at the interface of not only child and school, but family and

school, and community and school. (pp. 35–36)

In reality, there could be no real definition of the role of a social worker. A

school social worker wore so many hats, that the job description changed from day to

day, from school to school, from city to city. What type of population the school social

worker was serving determined the day-to-day job duties the school social worker would

have been expected to perform?

When school social workers were first implemented in some school settings, they

typically were there to build a bridge between the school and the community (Constable,

2009, p. 13). It was later that they helped assist with IEP (Individual Education Plan)

meetings and special education students. After those meetings, social workers were to

provide the social work minutes necessary to aid that particular student in social skills to

help their learning. Additionally they were in schools for crises. In the researcher's

personal experience as a school social worker, they not only did those duties, they also:

identify homeless students, reach out to families for parent involvement, advocate for

students in need, connect families to resources, implement interventions, and much more.

There was no one specific job description when it came to a school social worker. No

one workday would look exactly like the other. The variety of roles that a social worker

played may have been different in each school. The role of a social worker, psychologist,

and school counselor did not have clear boundaries when it came to the school setting.

Their roles were often time interchangeable.

The school social worker profession had transformed to meet the needs of the American culture of the 21st century. From its origin in the early 1900's, the school social work system's role has evolved, but still tackled some of the same issues as when social work began (Constable, 2009). However, throughout the 1900's until this writing the school social worker continued to serve schools, playing a crucial role in the overall wellbeing of the students and their families. As school social workers set out to break barriers and help students to alleviate problems concerning their education, they met with obstacles of their own.

Some school districts felt that they could just contract with outside service to help meet the needs of their students and their families. While this may work for some school districts who did not face many problems, this was not the case for other school districts. In the researcher's personal experience, school social workers were vital in the school's functioning because their day-to-day tasks involved building a relationship with the students in order to meet their needs. Outside social workers did not have the opportunity to build a rapport with students. They did not have the opportunity to build the trust with students and they did not have the time to help meet the student's needs according to their individual situations. In the researcher's personal experience as a school social worker, when a school social worker was present in the building the students were able to become familiar with them and the school social worker became a trusting adult that the students could confide in, talk to, and reach out to for help when they were going through difficult situations.

Purpose of the Dissertation

The researcher in this qualitative case study interviewed a group of seven social

workers from a Midwestern Metropolitan area. The literature on school social workers indicated that school social workers brought unique knowledge and skills to the school system and the student services team. In order to satisfy a variety of students' complex needs, school social workers aimed for systemic change through targeted and sustainable interventions across the home, school, and community (Kelly, Brezin et al., 2010). School social workers were instrumental in furthering the vision of the schools: to provide a setting and environment for teaching and learning, as well as attending to the social and emotional needs of students.

It was the intention of the study to expand the knowledge base and add to the literature on school social workers in terms of the activities they participated in and their perceptions of the activities. An additional goal was to shed light on their role within the school system and examine if there was a need for them in every school building across America. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of school social workers related to their roles in the school and their job satisfaction. The information gained provided insight into the range of social worker experiences for a specific subset of social work professionals. Literature at the time of this writing suggested that undergraduate/graduate curriculum prepared graduates to be social work generalists. School social workers dealt with some of the same general issues that all social workers dealt with, however they also dealt with specific educational-related issues, such as school attendance, behavioral issues, mental health, and community resources, just to name a few.

Rationale

The role of the school social worker has changed and there was little research to

indicate whether school social workers were adequately prepared to handle the ever-changing day-to-day needs of the students, families, and staff members they now served. The social work literature noted the rapidly changing nature of social work practice, stressing the need for academic programs to continually seek empirical information about current practice trends in the field in order to remain relevant (Bogo, 2005; Jarman-Rohde, McFall, Kolar, & Strom, 1997; Lager & Robbins, 2004; Shera & Bogo, 2001).

Most experiential research on this topic focused mainly on which interventions the social workers used in their daily operations:

Historically, school social work practice focused on individual levels of intervention encouraged by policy mandates. However, the ecological perspective embraced by social work encourages school social workers to view students' problems as situated within their environment (for example, school, home, neighborhood, peer group). (Dupper, 2003, p. 5)

The researcher wanted to not only look at which interventions worked, but also wanted to explore more in depth the role of the school social worker. Because school social work was a complex subspecialty of the social work profession, these professionals should be prepared to help serve different populations in different types of settings. There was little published research about the day-to-day activities and the roles of school social workers and the impact of school social workers on the school environment.

This research used case studies of the social worker in the professional environment to document the types of activities carried out in the workplace and perceptions of the social workers regarding their place in the school setting.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: What are the daily activities and experiences of school social workers, both full-time and traveling, and their self-perceptions of those activities and experiences?

RQ2: How do the adult-employee perceived experiences compare between schools that have full-time school social workers in the same school building all day and schools that do not have full-time school social workers in the same school building all day (i.e., traveling-school social worker)?

Limitations

The potential limitations of this study were researcher bias, the number of social worker participants, as well as the measurement used. First, the primary researcher was a school social worker, which may have created a bias in the research study. Because of the researcher's passion for this topic, it may have created a potential bias in the study. The number of school social work participants was another limitation. Initially 12 social workers were approached about participating. After that contact, 10 responded and stated that they would participate. Only nine school social workers returned the first questionnaire, and after the nine weeks of collecting data, six school social workers were still participants. This may cause a limitation because there were fewer school social workers than originally intended for this study. However, the ones that did participate were passionate about the topic as well and participated fully. The last limitation was the instrument used to collect the data. The researcher created and used a survey on Google Docs, and while all the areas deemed necessary for this research study were included, it was not previously tested for validity.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study could have an impact on future research and practice. While there had been research on school social workers in the past, few had involved the researchers actually following the social workers on their jobs to examine their roles and their need in schools. As of this writing, not all schools have an in-house school social worker. Some had a traveling school social worker, which was a school social worker not housed in one building, but assigned to multiple school buildings throughout the same school district. They were not able to allot and invest time in one school, which is invaluable for building meaningful relationships with the students and their families. There was a need for school social workers to be in every school building every day. This report went into depth in understanding that need.

Definition of Terms

- **Achievement Gap-**The difference between the academic performance of students in various subgroups, particularly the subgroups of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability status (Smith & West Virginia Department of Education, 2009).

- **Full-Time School Social Worker**- For the purposes of this study, it is defined as a school social worker that is assigned to one school building and is there every day all day.

- **Office Discipline Referrals-** A documented violation of a school district's code of conduct, or the policies and/or procedures in a school building (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005).

- **Parental Involvement-** refers to school social workers making contact with

parents via telephone calls, letters, and conferences at home or at school. In addition, parental involvement refers to school social workers involving parents in volunteer opportunities that result in support for their children at school (Hall-Haynes, 2007).

- **Poverty-** "the economic condition in which people lack sufficient income to obtain certain minimal levels of health services, food, housing, clothing, and education generally recognized as necessary to ensure an adequate standard of living" (Poverty, 2015, p. 1).

- **School Administrator**- For the purpose of this dissertation, the school's principal, assistant principal, or guidance dean.

- **School Counselor-** Professional school counselors support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school com- munity (Sandhu, 2000) and address the needs of all students through culturally relevant prevention and intervention pro- grams that are a part of a comprehensive school counseling program (Lee, 2001).

- **School Discipline**- Generally, *school discipline is* defined as school policies and actions taken by school personnel with students to prevent or intervene with un-wanted behaviors, primarily focusing on school conduct codes and security methods, suspension from school, corporal punishment, and teachers' methods of managing students' actions in class (Cameron, 2006).

- **School Social Worker-** School social workers are hired by school districts to enhance the district's ability to meet its academic mission, especially where

home, school, and community collaboration is the key to achieving that mission (School Social Work Association of America, 2005).

- **Suspension, In School-**An alternative setting that removes students from the classroom for a period of time, while allowing students to attend school and complete their work (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997).

- **Suspension, Out of School-** A fixed amount of time a student is not allowed to attend school or be on school grounds (Skiba et al., 1997).

- **Traveling School Social Worker-** For the purpose of this dissertation, a traveling school social worker is a school social worker that is not housed in the same building, but assigned to multiple school buildings throughout the same school district.

Summary

The world of education was changing and so was the role of school social workers. It was because of these changes that the school social worker profession had evolved as well. In schools, school social workers were one of the key elements that helped put interventions in place to help students overcome obstacles and barriers that may have interfered with their educational needs. The school social worker bridged the gap between students, their teachers, family, as well as the community. Because school social workers were not given clear expectations, their profession was often over looked in school budgets or not identified as a specific need for every school building. However, the role of the social worker was needed in education more than ever.

Chapter Two presents a brief history on how this profession came about and then gives insight on how school social work had changed through time and how school social

workers are helping students even as of this writing. The chapter gives an idea of the

day-to-day operations of school social workers and the variance in the tasks and

demands. These task differences depend on the demographics of the school as well as the

interventions utilized and current expectations of school social workers.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the history of social work in America from the 1800's to the writing of this document. The beginning contains information on the roles, responsibilities, and activities of school social workers. This is followed by a brief look at poverty and the implications of poverty as it applies to schools and students. The final section discusses how the school social worker attempts to mitigate the problems and struggles of students in schools.

Overview of Social Work

Social work is a very wide-ranging field, with multiple roles and tasks that are required of the social worker (i.e. advocacy, mentoring, casework, counseling, etc.). According to Constable, McDonald, and Flynn (2009), the seven functions of school social workers were: 1) direct counseling with individuals, groups, and families, 2) advocacy, 3) consultation, 4) community linkage, 5) interdisciplinary team coordination, 6) needs assessment, and 7) program and policy development. A broader definition of the role of school social worker as school social workers was emerging as social workers attended to a range of social and emotional needs of students (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Social workers worked in child and family services, the military, the medical and health field, mental health, schools, and many other entities. School social work was a specialized area of practice within the broad field of the social work profession. Social workers had a broad role. They performed a mixture of both indirect and direct roles, that varied by school (Constable & Montgomery, 1985).

School social workers brought unique knowledge and skills to the school's multi-disciplinary team. School social workers were instrumental in furthering the purpose of the schools: to provide a setting for teaching, learning, and for the fulfillment of competence and confidence. School districts hired school social workers to enhance the district's ability to meet its academic mission, especially where home, school, and community collaboration was the key to achieving that mission (School Social Work Association of America, 2005). The profession of school social work was the intersection where social work services/resources met education,

> School social workers currently contend with contracting funds for both education and social services, alongside new challenges such as spikes in youth and family homelessness, renewed attention to peer harassment, and violence in schools, and federal and state pressure on schools and students for improved achievement.
>
> (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013, p.19)

One group of researchers pointed out the potential of school social workers. They stated, "School social workers help support student learning and well-being through direct service, service coordination, and advocacy in an academic setting" (Franklin, Kim, &Tripodi, 2009, p. 667). The school social worker acted as a support to aid students with coping, improved behavior and academics, as well as work with families for support. This assisted in increasing school attendance and implementing academic intervention plans to recover grades.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school social workers had a strong directive to work in the public school system (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The law included a definition of related services as Health, nursing,

and social work services (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The explanation went on to list the services school social workers provided:

> Preparing a social or developmental history on a child with a disability; Group and individual counseling with the child and family; Working in partnership with parents and others on those problems in a child's living situation (home, school, and community) that affect the child's adjustment in school; Mobilizing school and community resources to enable the child to learn as effectively as possible in his or her educational program; and Assisting in developing positive behavioral intervention strategies. (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, para. 17).

Although this law was a formal endorsement of the need for social workers and the services they provided in schools, some felt that the law was vague and left many gaps.

Social workers that practiced in schools were able to reach and help students at risk. Recent practice innovations—such as school-specific, evidence-based social work practice—promised to bolster practitioner efforts to improve school support to students and, ultimately, student outcomes (Kelly, Raines, Stone, & Frey, 2010; Raines, 2004). Their unique skill and knowledge base provided the tools necessary to bridge the gap between the school system and community resources. Resources included, but were not limited to, counseling services, mental health services, and community based resources. School social workers provided resources to the students and their families and provided a support to help the child's learning. Often students struggled academically because they focused on, or worried about, issues at home rather than learning what they needed to at school.

The need for school social workers had grown day by day with all the needs of

students and their families. School officials, as well as others that worked within the

schools, sometimes questioned the effectiveness of social workers in the school setting.

They felt that a school counselor or someone else in the building could do the tasks done

by the social worker. Accordingly, school social workers had to demonstrate how well

the services they provided affected school attendance, grade point averages, and overall

student success. School social workers across the United States became more aware of

the necessity of demonstrating their value in order to convince school decision makers to

invest in their services. In fact, one of the major responsibilities of school social workers

was to provide evidence of their effectiveness (Allen-Meares, 2006). Thus, many school

social workers faced the task of documenting their legitimacy and worth in the K–12

educational setting. School social workers were placed in the position of demonstrating

that the services they provided were efficient, productive, and cost effective in

augmenting and enhancing student achievement (Newsome, Anderson-Butcher, Fink,

Hall, & Huffer, 2008). Many barriers stood in the way of the school social work

profession; however, social workers were experts and trained to overcome obstacles that

stood in their way. There was a growing trend in the school social work research

literature indicating a need to systemically identify and strategically plan for what

constituted barriers and facilitator's to school-based social work practice (Adelman &

Taylor, 2005).

History of the School Social Worker

The school social work profession emerged in the early 1900's out of the

settlement house movement and were first known as visiting teachers (McCullagh, 2004).

The settlement house movement was a social movement that began in the 1880s and

lasted until about the 1920s in England and United States. The purpose of the settlement house movement was to get the rich and poor society to live closely together. Visiting teachers or school social workers were initially in schools in Boston, New York City, Chicago, and Hartford. During that time, education was evolving. Allen-Meares (2004) noted, "As education became increasingly regarded as a right for every child, the importance of linking school and community took on more significance" (p. 23).   It was believed that in the fall of 1906, the principal of the Second North School, Arthur Derrin Call, contacted the superintendent of the Hartford Charity Organization Society regarding a 13-year-old child, Nellie K, who had been in the first grade for seven years and still could not read a complete sentence (Bivin, 1907, p. 1242). At that time Bivin, a social caseworker, was sent by the Hartford Charity Organization to "Investigate and assist" Nellie, her parents, and teachers in figuring out what the issue was (Call, 1907-1909, p. 12). Citizens and politicians looked to schools to smooth societal transitions brought on by urbanization, immigration, and industrialization by socializing individuals and promoting literacy and basic academic skills (Greenberg, 2007). Educators, however, found many of their new pupils difficult to engage and keep enrolled (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen 1985; Tyack, 2003), given many children's continued wage-earning opportunities and many new students' unfamiliarity with, and distaste for, formal schooling.

Social workers at that time assisted students with social needs and served as a stronger bridge between students, teachers and school staff, and their parents. School social workers provided a fundamental connection between the child's school, home/families, and the community. The school social worker's role in the United States was typically set in the context of the ecological systems approach, and included

interventions at multiple points of the environment, including work with individuals, families, classrooms, teachers, schools, and communities (Constable, 2009). Research on the role of the school social worker continued to return to the themes of social, emotional, and behavioral support for students (Allen-Meares, 1977; Costin, 1969; Kelly, 2008). Early visiting teachers focused on issues of school attendance and student behavior and worked with parents both to explain schools' requirements and to encourage the use of other social and medical services for their children (Knupfer, 1999; McCullagh, 2004). From a recognized gap in services, improvements in method led to this form of practice: part education and part social work. Early visiting teachers and their supporters moved these innovated School Social Work (SSW) practices through clear mobilization and structuration stages. Organizations like the Public Education Association and the Committee on Social Education in New York City mobilized support for early SSW. These mobilization efforts appear to have been effective, as was suggested by school districts' increased funding of visiting teacher's salaries during this period (McCullagh, 2004).

During the 1960s, the school social work literature reflected an extended use of helping approaches in schools and a growing interest in wider concerns influencing specific populations of students in schools. At the same time, the social work profession faced a transformed focus on social reform. "The education literature, critical of the current organization of schooling and of the effectiveness of education, was preparing the way for school reform" (Constable, 2009, p.19).

Prior to the formation of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), state and regional associations circulated field knowledge and facilitated discussions

about the visiting teacher's qualifications and roles through conferences as well as research-based and promotional publications. Studies of SSW (McCullagh, 2004) also contributed to the field's common body of knowledge and the framing of practice standards. In 1973, The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) met for the first time and identified many issues facing school social workers: inflation, budget cuts, attack of the public school system, dual roles within the school and community, and other school personnel claiming roles similar to those provided by school social workers (Allen-Meares, 2006). Later studies in school social work moved towards a model emphasizing home-school-community relations; while still focusing on problems faced by individual students. There were different organizations and associations put into place to help develop and advance the field of social work.

> The professional organization for Social Worker describes themselves in this way: The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with 132,000 members. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies. (NASW, 2015, para. 1)

In 1976, the NASW developed the first standards for school social work services. The standards included attainment of competence, organization and administration, and professional practice. An important theme across all standards was prevention (Allen-Meares, 2006). During the 1980s and 1990s, more changes and recognition for the profession of school social work occurred. For example, school social workers were

included as "qualified personnel" in Part H of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986 (Allen-Meares, 2006).

Following the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), the education for all handicapped children rose in importance. Because of this law, more people were needed to provide services for students. A multi-disciplinary team, that might include school social workers, provided services to students with disabilities, including learning disabilities, speech and language delays, developmental disorders (e.g., autism), severe cognitive impairments (e.g., mental retardation), physical disabilities, or serious emotional disturbances (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

This team helped provide well-rounded interventions for special needs students. Having this team in place to help aid and guide not only the student but also their parents and teachers on their educational journey was a remarkable tool to have in education. Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), and the Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988 (P.L. 100-297), stated that schools must provide services to special needs and at-risk students (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). The school social workers role in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process was to provide input to the team of professionals and then provide any services necessary that would help the student achieve their educational goals. The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1975 specified that school social workers would take the role of gathering and writing social histories, counsel children and families using group and individual methods, mobilize community resources, and work with home, school, and family to facilitate student adjustment (Humes & Hohenshil, 1987). These laws significantly

amplified the existence of social work services in the schools. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (P.L. 103-382) also increased social work presence in the schools, because this act provided funding to school systems to raise academic skills of low-income and at-risk children (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

In 1989, nationally recognized experts in school social work developed a list of 104 tasks falling along five job dimensions (Constable, 2009). The five dimensions included relationships with and services to children and families; relationships with, and services to, teachers and school staff; services to other school personnel; community services; and administrative and professional tasks (Constable, 2009). Gianesin (1996) stated that school social workers began getting recognition for their use of a "systems approach" and that was the difference from other counseling service providers (p.36). Within this recognition, there was a need for adopting and communicating clear professional roles (Tower, 2000).

More recently, school social workers were called on to address violence in the schools, such as bullying (National Association of School Workers [NASW], 2000). Allen-Mears et al. (2000) suggested that throughout the 20th century the social work profession had been preoccupied with answering the question of "Who is the school social worker?" (Agresta, 2004, p. 152). Agresta (2004) found that school social workers should embrace roles that position school social workers to influence policy in the education arena. School social workers were different from other counseling providers because they tended to use a systems approach. School social workers had proven to be a strength for many school districts because of their desire for change and their ability to advocate for children and their families.

The school social work profession had evolved through the years, and was still developing as of this writing. There have been many changes in the profession; however, one thing remained the same. There were not enough resources. Often the lack of resources put the school social workers jobs at jeopardy. If resources were not available, then school social workers could not effectively complete their job and service their students and their families. With the constant changes, social worker's job duties were also changing, unfortunately without many resources. Although the school social work profession has been around since the 1900s, just like other professionals social workers were also facing economical hardships and shrinking school budgets (Pace, 2008). Because some schools do not understand the roles of school social workers their; and some did not see an immediate need, the school board members were cutting the budgets, which meant some school social workers were being cut as well. The value of school social workers was not always recognized within school districts because they were not being used to their full capacity as needed. More and more school social work practitioners are entering the field with little to no job opportunities because of school districts shrinking budgets.

Theoretical Framework of School Social Workers

Many theoretical frameworks, perspectives, and practices drove the social work profession. Theories and methods utilized in social work practice were to be dependable and operative. School social workers used the theories to guide them through how to understand, explain, or make sense of certain situations with a student or their family that they may be dealing with. Every social worker practices from a theoretical framework whether they recognize it or not (Coulshed & Orme, 2006). This section will focus on

one theory of social work practice: systems theory. In addition, it will focus on the

strengths-based perspective and the ecological perspective of social work, as well as

several social work practices (i.e. problem solving, task centered, and solution-focused).

Siporin (1975) defined systems theory as, "a holistic, organized unit of

interdependent, transacting, and mutually influencing parts (individuals or collectives and

their subunits) within an identifiable (social ecological) environment" (p. 106). The

systems that the students encountered had an impact on their ability to function. The

school social worker's job was to identify and examine the multiple systems in which the

student was functioning. The school social worker analyzed and assessed if the different

systems that the student was involved in caused the student to act a certain way or if the

student affected the environment in ways that created behavior. Systems theory focused

on the relationships among individuals, organizations, groups, and communities. This

theory broadened the school social worker's understanding of human behavior within the

social environment. The Systems theory also allowed school social workers to take the

systems that the student was a part of into consideration when they were carrying out or

implementing an intervention.

According to Saleeby (2006) the core values of strengths-based social worker

practice could be found in a few core words or concepts utilizing "CPR" (p. 10). **C** stood

for competence, capacities, courage; **P** stood for promise, possibility, positive

expectations; **R** stood for resilience, reserves, resources. Saleeby further stated six

principles for assumptions when practicing strengths-based social work practice:

- Every individual, group, family, and community has strengths.

- Trauma and abuse, illness and struggle may be injurious but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity.

- Assume that you do not know the upper limits of capacity to grow and change and take individual, group, and community aspiration seriously.

- We best serve clients by collaborating with them.

- Every environment is full of resources.

- Caring, caretaking, and context.

These principles for assumption when practicing strengths-based social work practice were to help the practitioner to understand the client's strengths from a more general standpoint and based their interactions off those general strengths. When the practitioner was able to use these assumptions it allows the work they do with their clients to have a foundation and they can work from there. By using these assumptions as a basis, the social worker was able to build off of them and work from the clients strengths through their issues.

The ecological perspective was a framework that laid the foundation for the social worker practitioner to effectively connect to, and aide their students. The ecological perspective guided social work services in schools (Allen-Meares, 2004). In efforts to link parents and schools school social workers were in a position to assume leadership roles (Broussard, 2003; McDonald, Fineran, Constable, & Moriarty, 2002). This perspective allowed the social worker to view how the student interacted with their environment and how their environment affected them as a whole. Allen-Meares (2010) came up with practice principles for assessment. These six principles for assessment were: collecting data from multiple systems such as school, home, and community;

collecting data from all data sources; collecting data on all the demographic variables describing the student; collecting as many data components as possible; incorporating the data into a comprehensive picture of the student; and connecting the assessment with appropriate interventions (Allen-Meares, 2010, p. 80). An ecological perspective provided the framework for understanding the nature of the transactions between the students and their environments (Allen-Meares, 2004).

Previous research studies suggested that the ecological perspective of practice was the most useful for the school social work profession; this perspective enabled social workers to attain social work goals and to direct their practice (Allen-Meares, 2004). It also allowed the practitioner to work effectively with five basic client systems: the individual, the family, the small group, the organization, and the community. Pardeck (2015) stated:

The ecological perspective not only helped the social worker impact a client system through policy and planning activities but also through psychotherapy and other micro level approaches. Thus, direct and indirect practice strategies for intervention can be combined into a congruent practice orientation when working with a client system through the ecological approach. (p. 134)

This perspective, like others, considered the student's whole environment and analyzed how the environment may affect the student as a whole. This perspective took into account the child's home environment, which affected the level of a student's measured intelligence and success in school (Allen-Meares, 2004). The NASW (2000) stated:

Social work practice consists of the professional application of social work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain tangible services; counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health services; and participating in legislative processes. The practice of social work requires knowledge of human growth and actions; of communal organizations; and of the collaboration of all these factors. (para. 1)

The social work practitioner utilized many different practices while working with their clients/students. For example, problem solving was one of the social work practice models used by social workers. Problem solving meant identifying a client's problems, understanding them, and then engaging with the client in a process to solve the identified problems.

Another social work practice model commonly used was task-centered. Research findings supported the effectiveness of the model. With the task-centered model, the social worker attempted to develop a considerate, cooperative connection with the client. The social worker used the client's input to develop a plan for interventions and problem solving for the client. According to a study conducted by Reid,

In an assessment of the task-centered model as a means of remediation of school problems, an experiment was led by a team of advocates of a task-centered approach and advocates of a rival program in which students were given cash payments for improved performance. The objective problems (largely academic and attendance difficulties) seemed to be on a descending course the majority of middle school children in the control groups showed a declining of their

problems. Task-centered intervention formed a small amount of development, but

intervention was not strong enough to produce a lasting effect (1997).

This approach created a relationship between the student and the school social worker to

build trust and allowed the student to use their problem solving abilities.

Another practice that school social workers used was solution-focused based therapy

(SFBT). This therapy had an emphasis on goal formulations that focused on the clients

strengths. This type of therapy became a sensible alternative in the school setting.

Solution-focused work aimed to help people find solutions in the most comfortable and

fastest way possible. It did this by helping people to attain their goals by recognizing

what they needed to do and how they made it possible to reach those goals. The model

built on the strong points that people had and the things they were already doing to help

themselves. It tried to enhance people's self-confidence and ability to take the steps

towards the future. SFBT was a progressive model that focused on strengths and

solutions rather than problems and deficits (Corcoran, 1998). Practitioners focused on

changing behavior while using SFBT in school settings, by constructing behavioral tasks

that led to rapid solutions for youths (Franklin, Biever, Moore, Clemons, & Scamardo,

2001). Solution focused practices taught the students, no matter their background or

upbringing, how to not focus on the problem, they in turn focused on the solution. When

students focused on the solution, they gained a sense of relief knowing that the problem

they had would not last forever, because they were working towards a solution instead.

To enhance and shift behaviors, multiple techniques in the SFBT model have been

discussed to help facilitate practice with at-risk youths (Corcoran, 1998; Franklin,

Corcoran, Nowicki, & Streeter, 1998).

All of these theories and practices set the foundation for the social worker profession. School social workers were able to set these in place and utilize them when necessary for their students. These theories set the tone for how school social workers conducted sessions with their students. The systematic guides for sessions with students served as a guide for school social workers to use. Theories were overall descriptions of the person in environment outline.

School Social Worker Role and Empowerment

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2000), school social workers function to maximize students' social and emotional, psychological, and family wellbeing. Over time, the school social worker's role had changed, but one thing remained the same, social worker's ultimate purpose was improving the quality of life for others through research and practice. The foundational goals were social welfare, social change, and social justice. So one may ask what was the exact role of the school social worker. There was no one textbook answer for this question. In the school setting, social workers roles varied. Their education and personal experience may not have adequately prepared them for all of these roles. However, it was a common characteristic of the social worker to be committed to helping others in what they do. Leyba (2009) stated:

> School social workers work diligently to achieve a multitude of complex,
> important tasks within their roles. Although some universal standards are
> required in school social work, each practitioner's position is different and
> requires individualized adaption. By spending time identifying what aspect of
> their roles they would like to keep and what they would like to cut, school social

workers can systematically reflect on their roles to identify the more efficient job

description for their unique position. (p. 225)

Although social workers did not have one specific role in any setting they worked in;

almost all social workers worked long hours and often had paper work and reports that

had to be submitted to those they worked for. Leyba (2009) described the situation like

this:

> Many social workers work efficiently, for long hours, and with professional
>
> integrity and artistry. However, a number of these social workers have so many
>
> tasks that it is very challenging for them to fulfill mandates, pursue new
>
> initiatives, or complete certain activities at a professional level. (p. 219)

This caused burnout in social workers and left room for less productivity within the

school building. When social workers, or any employees for that matter, were not

productive in their job duties, this caused the administration to overlook their value and

the need for that position. In this case, school social workers. However, when social

workers operated effectively, they carried out the goals and purpose of social work and

empowered their students to overcome obstacles that they were facing.

The issue of poverty had become a very daunting issue for Americans. The

poverty level was continuously increasing from day to day. Lack of resources may have

been financial, emotional, or physical. Poverty had a direct effect on students who lacked

the resources needed at home to achieve at their highest level of academic ability. A

report by Thomas concluded that children from lower income households score

significantly lower on measures of vocabulary and communication skills, knowledge of

numbers, copying and symbol use, ability to concentrate and cooperative play with other

children than children from higher income households (Thomas, 2006). This topic was important because teachers and other school staff needed to understand completely what their students were going through. Techniques and strategies needed to exist in order for teachers to better help their students succeed and to close the achievement gap. This was another hat that school social workers were expected to wear. They sought to bridge the gap with students that were struggling academically in school due to the student's situation at home. School social workers helped teachers find resources and outside services that would assist in their teaching strategies to help the students to be successful.

Poverty and education were directly connected, but not only from the student's home life; no, individual schools and entire school districts were in poverty as well. This caused a lack of resources and quality teachers on the educational side, in turn causing poor education for students that resulted in problems in the future with gaining employment. When school districts lacked resources, this affected the budget, in turn caused the school district to not hire as many teachers as needed or quality teachers. Demir (2009) touched upon the effect of student-teacher ratio on academic achievement, and suggested student-teacher ratio is the most significant predictive of academic achievement. When students were had hindrances such as teacher-student ratio, this too affected their achievement, thus adding to the cycle as well. When children did not receive the proper resources to help them overcome poverty issues, it perpetuated a cycle that saw them raise their own children in poverty.

One of the main poverty symptoms that school social workers faced was the issue of homeless children and families. The number of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness has been on the rise in recent years (Swick, 2005). A study

titled "Working with Homeless School Aged Children: Barriers to School Social Work Practice" covered the McKinney-Vento Assistance Act (MVA), (which is a federal law that ensures immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless children), and the role of school social work personnel when it comes to homeless children in schools. This qualitative study explored 201 school social workers and the barriers they faced to school social work practice. The most common barriers were parental issues and support when dealing with poverty and homelessness (Groton, Teasley, & Canfield, 2013).

Students who faced poverty and homelessness typically had educational difficulties. "A host of social and behavioral challenges beset homeless children that become formidable barriers to school attendance and academic challenges" (Groton et al., 2013, p. 38). It was often the school social worker's job to not only find resources for these students and their families, but also to also help ensure that the students got to school. Missing important lessons was a result of missing school. Another duty for SSW's was empowering the student so they did not feel out of place because of their situation. Often school social workers conducted social groups that covered issues such as self-esteem and empowerment.

The authors of the study "Empowerment groups for academic success: An innovative approach to prevent high school failure for at-risk, urban African American," described the challenge of offering quality education in low-income families who were culturally diverse (Bemak, Chung, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005, p. 377). The authors also discussed the challenge that school counselors (or school social workers) faced to "Assume leadership roles in reducing academic disparity" (Bemak et al., p. 377). School counselors' and social workers' job descriptions may have differed depending on the

school. For example, in some school districts school counselors and social workers jobs went outside the limits of their actual job descriptions. Ultimately, counselors and social workers needed more time to serve their students more effectively. This factor alone made the challenge of closing the achievement gap even more perplexing.

The youth described in this article were facing day-to-day problems because of their environment. Some researchers believed that the inner-city environment contributed to adverse social conditions, subsequent impact on educational performance and overall negative school climates (Chein, Gerard, Lee, & Rosenfield, 1964; Harries, 1990). Researchers referenced that inner-city youth experience stating, "Elevated rates of delinquency, higher incidents of violent and aggressive behavior, greater degrees of psychological problems, heightened behavioral problems, and educational and occupational expectations that are discouraging rather than hopeful" (Bemak et al., 2005, p. 378). Because of these occurrences and the overload of school counselors and social workers, Bemak et al. (2005) set out to develop and present a groundbreaking approach to group counseling called Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS). This new approach occurred in an inner-city high school in the Midwest whose students were going through pressing issues such as: teen pregnancy, poverty, poor academic achievement, suspension, and expulsion.

The essential purpose of the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success was to advance academic performance and attendance; with the goal of supporting the students and helping them deal with social and personal problems. The group consisted of seven 10th grade African American students identified through staff surveys as being at high risk and referred to the group after an interview and prescreening process. The

facilitators of the group were two European Americans (one male, one female) and two Asian Master's degree level interns (both female). Due to previous failed school interventions to these problems, EGAS took a different approach. Members of the group determined the dynamics of the group through choosing the content and the way the group sessions went. They thought that facilitators should not control the group. In order for students to experience, true empowerment members of the group should choose topics and run the group (Bemak et al., 2005).

The group was successful in that students learned how to open up, communicate, and effectively express their feelings properly. Students were able to speak about topics of death, abuse, difficult teachers, at home responsibilities, abandonment, treatment of others, social problems, and emotional struggles. Students were also able to triumph and celebrate progress in attitudes, behaviors, and positive decisions. The group allowed students to develop ownership of their choices and members started to become closer and think of each other as a second family. "During the course of the group, members actually started referring to the group as a family, and they regularly discussed the idea of the facilitators being surrogate father and mother, this was a replication of a healthy family" (Bemak et al., 2005, p. 385). Often students with such indicators come from less healthy family structures. Most were probably living in a one-parent home or with a grandparent or another relative. The group was able to give them that sense of a healthy family dynamic.

At the end of the year, the group took a trip to the university to present about their experience in the group to a graduate class. This trip also included a visit to the university's art museum and lunch at an Italian restaurant. The students were able to

overcome their perception that college students would view them as ignorant and the college students were going to act stuck up or better than they did. The researchers stated, "The entire day was journey into another world 5 miles away and a glimpse and realization that graduate students and a university life were attainable with hard work and effort" (Bemak et al., 2005, p. 384). Through this visit, the students were able to open up to strangers about their great experience and the impact the group had on them. They were also able to visit an "expensive" restaurant, which most of them had never done before.

At the end of all this some of the students struggled with the fact that it was the end and had to grasp the fact that they would not be meeting with their family any more. Six months after the group was over, students spoke about what they remembered most about the group. One year after the group was over researchers surveyed both students and leaders. Both indicated that the group positively affected all the students. A year later, they were making better choices, doing more schoolwork, improving their attitudes. All students thought about their future, aspired to go to college, and wished the group could continue. The only factor not reported (due to unexpected events) was the student's actual academic records. This posed as a large limitation to the research. There was no solid data the students progressed in student performance or attendance. This left the research as only an overview of the empowerment group, not a direct reflection of the possible results the groups yielded.

This research study showed that it was a part of the school counselors and social workers role to empower their students to become successful in the school system they were in no matter what barriers may stand in their way. This was a direct reflection on

one of the interventions put into place by a school counselor/social worker to empower students, give them an outlet through counseling, and potentially help with attendance rates, raise test scores, and close the achievement gap.

Poverty and School Achievement

Students faced many problems from their home environment that had a direct effect on their achievement in school. The social work perspective presents a person-in-the-environment approach—that is, it emphasized the individual's relationship with the environment rather than concentrating on the inner psychological experiences of people or the social structure (Heiononen & Spearman, 2010). One of the bigger issues that social workers noticed that students dealt with was the issue of poverty. The relationship between student success (defined by attendance, grades, and discipline) and the residential arrangements of students due to the marital status of parents had become more apparent in recent decades and had created a new at risk indicator (Amato, 2005; Grych & Fincham, 1990). Some argued that these were just children and they should not have to worry. This was true, however when children do not know where their next meal was coming from or where they were going to lay their heads that night, then they were not really worried about the next math concept that their teacher may be presenting that day in class. Social workers all too often had to assure their students every day that everything was going to be all right in their home lives, even though they may not have believed it themselves. School social workers were equipped with the tools to help students overcome these challenges and be successful. Counseling, mentors, and parental involvement were tools used by school social workers to ensure the success of students (Chapman, 2003).

Income inequality in the United States, or the discrepancy between the "haves" and the "have-nots," had increased during the decade before this writing and had become an urgent social issue. This issue was not one of race, but one of class; it did not matter the color of your skin because low-income students in urban communities were not achieving at the same level of educational performance as their more affluent peers in the suburbs. Although some did not like to admit this, the issue of poverty had a direct effect on behavior and achievement when it came to students. Lee (2009) conducted a longitudinal study looking at reading scores of children who lived in persistent poverty, temporary poverty, and no poverty at all. Children who lived in temporary and persistent poverty had lower reading scores throughout childhood (from ages 5 to 12) than those children who did not live in poverty. Children who lived in persistent poverty also experienced larger gaps in reading scores than children who lived in temporary poverty, particularly as they got older (Lee, 2009, p. 84, 86). This connection between poverty, even temporary poverty, and achievement in reading scores demonstrated the wide array of effects of poverty on a young child's academic development.

Often students who grew up in an impoverished environment did not have all of the resources and support that needed to succeed in school due to no fault of their own. In studying the effects of poverty on student achievement, Fram, Miller-Cribbs, and Lee (2007) looked at the structural factors influencing schools in high-poverty areas. They found that in high poverty areas, schools had teachers with lower credentials, were more likely to use universal standards of assessment (as opposed to individualized standards), had a higher proportion of below grade-level readers, and students' tested lower (Fram et al., 2007, p. 316). These findings, mainly the lower test scores and greater number of

below-level readers in these high poverty areas, showed that poverty might have resulted in lower academic achievement through community-level factors, such as the neighborhood where the school was located. The school environment played a huge role in the child's success. With lack of resources in the school district, school officials were unable to meet the needs of the students sufficiently. Along with the increased demand for school social workers to serve students with developmental disabilities, it was also necessary that they assisted with issues of a more diverse student population, increased poverty among children and families, increased violence, increased social issues, decreased funding, and decrease in quality in some schools (Allen-Meares, 2004).

In these cases, underpaid teachers lacked resources of their own to effectively teach their students. Taking all of this into account students did not have the necessary quality of education to succeed. Coleman, a sociologist, did a study in 1966 titled, "Equality of Educational Opportunity*,"* this report stated:

Using data from over 600,000 students and teachers across the country, the researchers found that academic achievement was less related to the quality of a student's school, and more related to the social composition of the school, the student's sense of control of his environment and future, the verbal skills of teachers, and the student's family background. (Coleman et al., 1966)

This was not to say that every child born in to poverty would not succeed or would have behavioral issues. Nor did it mean that all children who came from prominent families succeeded.

Although the school environment played a role in the student's success, other factors influenced the student's environment. The community or neighborhood in which

a student grew up could also have an effect on the student's achievement. At the neighborhood level, Chapman (2003) found that for children living in high-poverty areas, neighborhood safety was associated with school attendance (p. 11). This was significant because, as Chapman pointed out, school attendance was essential to all other interventions. The reasons for poor school attendance, such as neighborhood safety, needed consideration when SSW's worked on low attendance and achievement with students from high-poverty areas (Chapman, 2003, p. 13). The influence of neighborhood safety on school attendance and thereby other means of participation, established in this study provided insight into what factors were at play when working on attendance issues with students living in poverty. Children were products of their environments; but they could also overcome obstacles, succeed, and accomplish tremendous things. It was with the help of not only family members but also people like teachers, administrators, coaches, counselors, and school social workers that gave children the empowerment tools and resources to break the cycle of poverty by breaking down any barriers that may have stood in their way.

Previously experienced relationships influenced children's behavior. Children often formed either a secure relationship with their parents or caregivers, or insecure relationships. Children, who had secure relationships, tended to do better in school and behave well. Children however had other relationships that they formed in school with their peers. These relationships sometimes led to poor behavior because of fear of rejection. School socialization pressured children to act like their peers for acceptance. In Chapter Two of Jensen's (2009) book titled, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind* he stated:

Socioeconomic status forms a huge part of this equation. Children raised in

poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced daily with

overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their

brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school

performance. Let us revisit the most significant risk factors affecting children

raised in poverty, which I discussed in Chapter 1 (the word *EACH* is a handy

mnemonic):

- **E**motional and Social Challenges.

- **A**cute and Chronic Stressors.

- **C**ognitive Lags.

- **H**ealth and Safety Issues.

Combined, these factors presented an extraordinary challenge to academic and

social success. This reality does not mean that success in school or life is

impossible. On the contrary, a better understanding of these challenges points to

actions educators can take to help their less-advantaged students succeed. (pp. 14-

15)

Often social workers were overworked dealing with the issues of their students

and did not have the time or resources to help all of their students with what they needed.

School social workers had the knowledge, tools, and skill set, to reach out to find other

outside resources for students. Connecting students, as well as their families to these

services, helped the child succeed in school. Jonson-Reid (2008) also noted the

empowering potential of communities when fostering school success and, in turn,

encouraged social workers to collaborate with communities to enhance the success of

their students (p. 131). One such collaboration, as detailed by Cook and Orthner (2001),

involved working with community social services to provide an afterschool program for children whose families were receiving aid from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). This collaboration proved to be extremely effective: with significant improvements in end-of-the-year reading and math tests for students who were in the program for a year, and increases that were even more significant for students who were in the program for two years (Cook & Orthner, 2001, p. 101). This intervention included community collaboration and early intervention, another resilience factor, in order to increase academic performance for children living in poverty. It was stories like these that social workers could tell all across America.

School Social Worker's Role: Discipline and Achievement

Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) described the correlation between the achievement gap and the discipline gap. A disproportionality of discipline data showed that racial and ethnic patterns in school sanctions might have had an effect on the achievement of students of color (Gregory et al., 2010). Many minority students faced more severe discipline consequences than their majority White peers (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Exclusion was the primary discipline strategy across the board. Exclusion could contribute to low academic achievement. "Racial discipline gap influences racial patterns in achievement, and why low income status, low achievement, and rates of misconduct contribute to why Black, Latino, and American Indian students are over-selected and over-sanctioned in the discipline system" (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 59). The researchers also looked at methods of research in this area of study and the challenges that may come up during research.

Ultimately, the researchers wanted to get the message across that disproportionately applied discipline might contribute to low achievement among students of color.

Researchers described the students as repeat offenders, meaning that once they were suspended or a part of the discipline system they remained there and continued to get in trouble; this practice of pushing kids out of school and toward the juvenile and criminal justice systems has become known as the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Flannery, 2015). However, why was this? Previous studies have presented that ethnic subgroups are more probable to be detained because they are more likely to be selected out for misconduct in spite of comparable stages of violation (Piquero, 2008). This was true for the school and their disciplinary system; students of minority groups received harsher disciplinary consequences. Patterns of negative teacher-student interactions and stereotypes also had an impact on the discipline gap These dealings were powered by White teachers' overdramatizing and relying on labels to interpret Black students language and physical countenance (Ferguson, 2000). School employees described these students as troublemakers and targeted them for discipline, while overlooking students of other races with similar behavior.

There were other factors contributing to the discipline gap. Violence or negative behavior caused students who were a part of the discipline system to act out. Some students who were living in low-income urban neighborhoods experienced hardship, which included violence and substance abuse; this increased the likelihood of receiving school punishments (Brantlinger, 1991). This was not saying that every student living in a low-income household was likely to get in trouble in school; it was saying that some students exposed to this type of behavior might choose to act out and take on their

environment. These violence-exposed children suffered from other factors that caused them to act negatively at school, but their environment very well may have played a part in it as well. Another thing that needed consideration were students who lived in low-income homes was the fact that parents may have had lower education levels and be unable to help these students with their homework. When a student did not know something in class, he or she tended to act out or behave badly as they sought attention. The family structure of these students living in low-income families needed consideration. A student from a single parent home often had more responsibilities at home, which caused him or her to fall behind in school and widen the achievement gap.

Another factor contributing to both a discipline gap and an achievement gap was low achievement itself. Students who had lower achievement caused disruption in the classroom, which in turn caused office disciplinary referral and they fell even further behind in their studies. Under performing students can become frustrated and have low self-confidence when they are having academic struggles, this can in turn cause disruptions within the classroom (Miles & Stipek, 2006). All of this tied into the discipline system as well. Should students be given more chances? Should the disciplinary system be revamped? The researcher of this study pointed out that research was done on a set of students and in one year, "Suspended students were 3 grade levels behind non-suspended peers in reading" (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 61). This showed that when students were sent out for disciplinary sanctions, this factor alone appeared to have an impact on the achievement gap. "Students who are suspended miss anywhere from one class period to 10 or more school days, depending on the violation and school policies" (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 60).

The measurement of both the achievement gap and the discipline gap was rather complex, similar to data for special education research. The difficulty of measurement limited future research in this area. The lack of an adequate measurement instrument hindered the ability of researchers to find ways to close these gaps (Bollmer, 2007; Skiba& Sprague, 2008). The researchers knew little about gap reducing interventions, what type of interventions helped close the achievement gap, and the discipline gap. These factors posed a challenge for future researchers, but with the right tools, closing these gaps was possible.

The issue of discipline caused a trickledown effect to other issues that the students were facing. Students may act out because of what was going on in their home due to poverty, or perhaps they were acting out because the work was simply too difficult for them to grasp and in turn they acted out as a way to get ejected from the class as a form of work avoidance. Whatever students were facing, usually schools who had "repeat offenders" with discipline used the school social worker to "figure out" what was really going on in students' environment that was causing them to act out, which was also causing their test scores to be lowered.

Truancy

Administrators labelled younger children as "chronically absent" rather than truant, because they presumed that they could not miss school without their parents' knowledge. Young children (K–3) missing 10% or more of school each year were considered chronically absent (Chang & Romero, 2008, p. 1). Truancy on the other hand was defined as unexcused and unlawful absence from school without parental knowledge and consent (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994). Truancy was distinct from absenteeism in

that "The truant child typically spends his or her time away from home (that is, absent from school) and tends to conceal absences from his or her parents" (Lee & Miltenberger, 1996, p. 474).

According to Fantuzzo, Grim, and Hazon (2005), truancy seemed to be a major issue for students, parents, schools, communities, and society. Truancy was a growing problem within schools as of this writing. More and more students were missing school for several different reasons. Although there were many reasons a student may be absent, or chronically absent, from school, there were a few main reasons that were more prevalent when discussing truancy in schools. Those reasons included family factors, economic factors, school factors, and student factors.

The broad range of risk factors related to truancy had important implications for programs and activities. A literature review commissioned by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) found correlations between truancy and four categories of risk factors:

1. Family factors (lack of supervision; poverty; alcohol or drug abuse; lack of awareness of attendance laws; attitude toward education)

2. School factors (school size; attitudes of students, staff, and teachers; inflexibility toward meeting different learning styles; inconsistent procedures for dealing with chronic truancy)

3. Economic factors (employed students; single parent homes; high mobility; parents with multiple jobs; lack of transportation)

4. Student factors (drug and alcohol abuse; lack of understanding of attendance laws; lack of social competence; mental and physical health problems) (Baker,

Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001, p. 2). It should be noted that schools and communities

were concerned about the effects of bullying on truancy. Although there was little

evidence to suggest a strong direct linkage between bullying and truancy, an

OJJDP study found that if bullying results in the victim becoming less engaged in

school, that victim was more likely to cease attending and achieving (Seeley,

Tombari, Bennett, & Dunkle, 2011).

Among the many risk factors related to truancy among young children, family and

economic factors had the greatest impact on chronic absenteeism in early elementary

school. A national report by the NCCP (Romero & Lee, 2007) showed that chronic

absenteeism was highest among children living in poor families.

The U.S. Department of Education (2006) had identified several factors that

contributed to truancy. School factors included safety, school size, and attitudes of staff,

failure to communicate with parents, failure to meet the academic needs of the students,

and the failure to consistently, follow the attendance policy. Other factors noted by the

department included family background and systemic issues in the family, transportation,

employment, teen pregnancy, truant friends, lack of awareness of the attendance law as

well as other emotional and social issues (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

School social workers were trained and skilled in evaluating the needs of students

and were knowledgeable in recognizing the cultural differences of students. "School

social workers who seek to reduce truancy rates must evaluate the context in which

truancy occurs, including individual and developmental factors and parental, family,

socioeconomic, and community influences" (Teasley, 2004, p. 118). School social

workers conducted home visits and lined up resources within the community.

Additionally, they conducted groups that would spark the student's interest so they would want to be in school. Anderson-Butcher and Ashton (2004) described the interventions of school social workers. Their idea was that school social workers were put into place to deliver services in schools. School social workers were trained to also address individual, peer, family, and community risk factors. With this training they could address social support needs as well as promote home-based interventions that supported families and encouraged parent/guardian involvement within the schools. Social workers also provided teacher support strategies that enhanced the school climate. Practitioners of social work also brought in resources to the school by developing community partnerships (Anderson-Butcher &Ashton, 2004).

Although school social work interventions addressed the multiple risk factors associated with truancy and academic failure, little research, as of this writing, had explored the overall effectiveness of social work interventions in schools (Franklin, 2001). There were several key studies, however, that had begun to assess their efficacy. For example, Newsome (2004, 2005) found that solution-focused school-based social work groups were instrumental in building social competencies and enhancing academic performance among youth participants. Others have documented specific outcomes associated with various types of school-based social skills programs and mentoring supports (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Nay, 2003). The school social worker facilitated these preventative measures which changed a student's attitude about school. These wrap-around services created a healthy environment and allowed the student to feel a sense of belonging and possibly help cut down on the issue of truancy in schools.

It was not only the school social worker's role to serve the students, but to serve their families as well.

School social workers often received referrals from teachers and administrators when students were having emotional or behavioral issues or when they were chronically absent from school (Teasley, 2004). School social workers provided early identification of students at risk of truancy and monitored the attendance of the students. The school social worker responded and contacted other school personnel as well as the parents of the students to find the underlying cause of the attendance issue. School social workers were usually the experts called upon to address the issue of truancy, which was the first indicator of dropping out of school (Teasley, 2004). It was then that the school social worker determined if there needed to be a referral made to the juvenile court, depending on their assessment thus far. After a referral, the school social worker worked with juvenile court to come up with a truancy plan for the student and their family. If the student and their family could not comply with this plan, then the courts enlisted help from outside social service agencies to help further assist the family. If the family did not still comply then the student (depending on age) or the parent had to pay a fine or face possible jail time.

Historically, school social work practice was rooted in casework and has had a school-home-community focus (Allen-Meares et al., 2000; Jozeforwicz-Simbeni, Allen-Meares, Piro-Lupenacci, & Fisher, 2002). The school-home-community focus covered multiple areas. In fact, the role of school social workers was so broad, that no one school social worker's role looked like another. Social workers developed prevention efforts that targeted at risk students. Their prevention efforts geared more towards lowering the

dropout rates of students. Students who were truant were more likely to participate in at risk behaviors that would eventually place them in the juvenile justice system. School social workers played a key role in assuring that student's attendance was accurate and that students were showing up to school and showing up on time.

There were many factors that played into why a student was chronically absent from school. Sometimes families were in transition and did not have a stable home to stay in or did not stay in the same place every night. Although the school was required by law to accommodate these students and make certain they had a spot in school as well as clothing and other necessities, sometimes parents did not know that these resources were available. Providing resources and connecting families with appropriate social services helped reduce family problems and improved the student's attendance (Kim & Streeter, 2006). Homelessness was a common reason why some students were truant. Reid (2005) indicated that homeless students struggled to attend school because they did not have a stable home and that they were often in transition (moving from place to place). Family problems such as unsteady employment, lack of reliable transportation, divorce, and family conflict all affected student attendance and performance (Kim & Streeter, 2006). School social workers bridged the gap and assisted in making the child feel comfortable while at school by coming up with a plan to help ensure that the child was at school. Along with other school-based staff and officials, as well as outside social services agencies, school social workers provided wrap-around services to help the family with their needs so that the child could be at school. School social workers could work with at risk students and their teachers to build attendance improvement plans, and school social workers could work with parents to overcome the barriers to getting

children to school (Kim & Streeter, 2006). The issue of truancy was not new. Social workers were placed in some schools to track and monitor the attendance of students, and then help aid in the process of home visits, address verification, and the whole process of truancy with the courts. School social workers also helped in activating resources so that students could attend school and be on time every day. Schools needed social workers to provide equal opportunity to students experiencing disruptions in social cohesion to reduce the number of students falling behind grade level and dropping out (Huffman, 2013).

Research over the last two decades clearly identified truancy and chronic absenteeism as early warning signs of youths headed for problems in school and life. In addition to the potential problems associated with truancy and chronic absenteeism, many have discussed the difficulty surrounding the issue. As recognized by K–12 educators and administrators, truancy was a perplexing issue affected by several factors that had an immediate and significant influence on youths and their success in school settings (Evans, 2000). Truancy and high school dropout rates were a growing problem in the United States. According to a 2008 U.S. Census Bureau report titled *School Enrollment in the United States: 2008*, "in 2006, 3.3 million people, or 11 percent of people aged 18 to 24, were high school dropouts" (Davis & Bauman, 2011, p. 4). Statistics such as these underscore the importance of school success for students. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2015), in October 2014, 16.9 million persons age 16 to 24 were not enrolled in school (p. 2).

Although truancy had become a growing problem in many schools, school social workers helped develop a system of interventions and incentives to improve student

attendance within the school. While truancy was a problem with in school districts, the schools were putting together teams of law enforcement, social services, teachers, and parents to prevent, plan, and implement truancy plans to help tackle the issue. Research supported the collaboration process where school social workers and other educators worked with outside partners to support school attendance among high school students (Newsome, Anderson-Butcher, Fink, Hall, & Huffer, 2008). Truancy programs were effective if they urged students to form good attendance habits by creating relationships between teachers and students before they become truant.

Social Work Interventions

School social work referrals could be multifaceted. School social work interventions consisted of counseling for students, phone calls to parents, sending letters to parents, home visits to encourage parental involvement while interpreting the compulsory attendance law, and referrals to outside agencies like the juvenile courts (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). Analysis of administrative data indicated that the three most common referral reasons were family issues, attendance problems, and academic concerns. One-third of all cases had three or more referral reasons (Jonson-Reid, Kontak, Citerman, Essman, & Fezzi, 2004). School social workers used interventions to tackle common issues with students. Social workers used these interventions one time depending on the student or at length with either individual students or a group of students. Practitioners of school social work targeted four levels of intervention: individual, family, community, and societal (Allen-Meares, 2004). As a profession, school-based social work had recognized the ethical need to offer school-based practitioners ways to critically appraise the research evidence and, therefore, be able to

offer youths the most effective and evidence based services to meet their needs (Powers, Bowen, Weber, & Bowen, 2011). Choosing the best options for each individual student's circumstances was a key function in school's social work practice. School social workers were also involved with crisis intervention and provided assistance in helping students move back to normal levels of functioning (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). School social workers often played a vital role in crises and were equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to calm the situation. School social work practitioners across the world were increasingly being expected to operate from an evidence-based practice (EBP) framework, implementing interventions that offered the best evidence to intervene with a particular problem (Powers et al, 2011).

In the decade prior to this writing, schools had looked to a three-tiered model with many of their school wide intervention practices. The three-tiered models gave the schools three levels at which to tackle the problems, often Tier 1 was the universal piece that geared towards all the students within the school and used as more of a preventative tool for students. A teacher, social worker, or other professional delivered Tier 1 interventions to the whole school, usually in a classroom setting. Approximately 85% of students did not need intervention beyond this level (Allen-Meares, Montgomery, & Kim, 2013, p. 253). These interventions were intended to prevent the development of problem behaviors and may develop specific social behaviors in the classroom that were positively reinforced school-wide (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Next, the Tier 2 interventions were more selective and geared towards a smaller percentage of students. Tier 2 interventions were more intensive and typically delivered in a small-group setting. An estimated 10 to 15% of all school-age students were in need of Tier 2 level interventions to be successful

in the school setting (Lindsey & White, 2008, p. 666). Last, the Tier 3 interventions were more rigorous and were for single students identified on that level. Literature existed examining Tier 1 and Tier 2 across national school-based social work interventions (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Social workers were often asked to help with all three levels of interventions, Tier 1 typically with classroom meetings or school wide assemblies, Tier 2 typically with a small group setting, and Tier 3 typically with a one-on-one setting with individual students.

School social workers often created interventions and plans to not only helped the students cope at school but in the outside world as well. Social workers were uniquely equipped to intervene with at-risk youths in the school settings, because the field of social work emphasized training and understanding of youths affected by severe poverty, abuse, neglect, and disabilities (Allen-Meares, 2010). School social workers provided resources for in and out of school that served as intervention plans for students. Outside factors and incidents going on at home were what drove the school social workers to come up with interventions to service the students properly.

Although most school social workers were successful in providing interventions for students, there were times where some interventions did not work for a certain child or family. There were many reasons that may have contributed to an intervention not working. Low access and involvement by parents and teachers, low resources, time constraints, or poor relations with school teachers and administrators have all been identified as barriers to school social work intervention (Adelman & Taylor, 2002; Gerardi, 2008; Ruiz, 2008; Teasley, Gourdine, & Canifield, 2010). Whether the intervention worked or not, the social worker developed a plan to help guide the student

towards a successful school year no matter the barriers.

Parental Involvement

The role of school social workers also included the tasks of reaching the parent and involving them in their child's education. Parental involvement could often be a daunting task. Parental involvement was also one of the key components of the latest legislative effort to reform the nation's school systems (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2001). One would think that parents would want to be involved when it came to the education of their child; however, there were some cases where the parents were not easy to reach when it came to matters within the school building. Researchers showed that parental involvement helped student achievement. When parents were involved effectively in their children's schooling, student achievement typically improved (Jeynes, 2005). Parents who were actively involved in their child's education were more likely to recognize when their child was having problems or needed help School-developed homework encouraged parent-child interaction. When children knew their parents were involved and concerned about their learning they wanted to do better.

Parental involvement also helped in the area of discipline. It helped the school hold students more accountable when the parents held the students accountable at home as well; but in order for this to occur there had to be someone at home supporting the school based decisions as well as enforcing the school rules and policies (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2000). Open home/school lines of communication before there was a problem helped because when problems did arise, emotions were involved and sometimes communication was not effective. Children who had involved parents were less likely to have discipline problems while in school. Students whose parents were actively engaged

during their children's elementary and secondary education had fewer discipline problems at school (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), performed better academically (Hill & Craft, 2003), had higher educational aspirations (Trusty, 1999), and were more likely to graduate from high school (Anguiano, 2004).

As school systems worked to increase parent involvement in education, scholars had begun to examine key stakeholders', such as parents and teachers' perspectives on parent involvement as a way of strengthening partnerships between parents and schools (Barge & Loges, 2003). It was often one of the school social worker's tasks to actively involve the parent in their child's education. That involved helping with ideas for the PTO (parent teacher organization) meetings, planning, and helping with family nights. Other examples included Muffins with Mom, or Donuts with Dad, and Grandparents day. Any way the social worker could help and get the parents in the school building, built the foundation for a relationship between the teacher and parent. Anderson, Hicock, and McClellan (2000) found that parent involvement increased as a result of providing special school activities (e.g., family night) and education-based resources to parents, as well as increasing positive communication between teachers and parents. When there was some type of previous relationship and the child was having a problem with his or her learning, the teacher was able to use that relationship and have an open line of communication so all could work together in helping the child succeed. Partnerships between schools, families, and communities created safer school environments, strengthened parenting skills, encouraged community service, improved academic skills, and achieved other desired goals that benefited students of all ages and grade levels (Rutherford, Anderson, & Billig, 1997).

Epstein (1995) of Johns Hopkins University developed a framework for defining

six different types of parent involvement. In 1995, Epstein developed a framework of six

types of school-family-community involvement. The six types of involvement were:

> 1) parenting- helping all families establish home environments that supported
>
> children as students; 2) communicating- designing and conducting effective forms
>
> of communication about school programs and children's progress; 3)
>
> volunteering- recruiting and organizing help and support for school functions and
>
> activities; 4) learning at home- providing information and ideas to families about
>
> how to help students at home with school work and related activities; 5) decision-
>
> making- including parents in school decisions, and 6) collaborating with the
>
> community- identifying and integrating resources and services from the
>
> community to strengthen and support schools, students, and their families. (p.
>
> 704)

Social workers developed different practices to foster each of the six types of

involvement. The objective, however, was for schools, families, and their surrounding

communities to aid each other in rearing healthy, successful children. Learning at home,

having a supportive home environment helped aid teachers, and supported what they

were teaching. When a child learned a concept in school and there was someone at home

quizzing him or her or going over that concept, then it was easier for that child to retain

the information. Supportive home environments, including the supervision and structure

that parents gave children outside of school to support their education, such as limiting

television viewing time and providing structured time for homework and learning were

important for student success (Shumow, 2001; Xu, 2001).

There were many reasons that factored in why parents were not involved in their child's education, but it was up to the social worker to reach out to them by any means necessary to get them involved. Single parents, parents employed outside the home, parents who lived far from the school, and fathers were typically all less involved, on average, at the school building. The exception was when the school organized opportunities for families to volunteer at various times and in various places to support the school and their children (Epstein, 1995, p. 703). Many parents used the excuse that they had to work and could not attend family nights or things in the evening. Social workers had to come up with ways to get them there in the daytime. Some parents did not have transportation while others had other children and did not have the means to pay for daycare to attend a school event. Factors such as the timing of activities, the distance parents were from the school, work, household chores, lack of transportation, and day-care obligations were barriers to parent involvement in education (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). It was a part of the school social worker's job to help break down these barriers and to help make the parents feel welcome, no matter their background, education level, or other obligations. The social workers were to help bridge the gap between home and school and help the parent understand how important it was to be involved with their child's education. Epstein (1990), however, argued that all schools could encourage greater participation among all families, including minority and low-income families, by developing comprehensive programs of partnership that built meaningful connections between families and schools. Based on earlier data, she contended:

Status variables are not the most important measures for understanding parent involvement. At all grade levels, the evidence suggests that school policies, teacher practices, and family practices are more important than race, parent education, family size, marital status, and even grade level in determining whether parents continue to be part of their children's education. (p. 109)

No matter what was standing in the way of parents becoming actively involved in their child's education, there was always hope that the school system and parents could work together and build a working relationship for the benefit of the child. School social workers were skilled in working with parents, so although their efforts for getting a parent involved could be difficult, when the child had a working support system, and there was a change in their grades, it was worth it.

Current Trends of Social Workers

School social workers had been practicing in school systems for over the last century as of this writing. School social Work Practitioners had evolved into a profession that offered the school system a specific skill set and knowledge and training. Trends in 2015 indicated that the school social work profession was growing. The different populations that school social workers served were growing more and more each day. In response to these trends, Denise Duval, PhD, LCSW, (of Child Therapy Chicago, a practice serving children and young adults) Duval says, social workers must stay true to the profession's focus on looking at the underlying issues that influence children's behaviors. "The biggest thing is not to forget to understand the people and the families and the nuances that form who the kids are," she says (Reardon, 2011).

Many different components contributed to the changes in the social worker

profession. Examples included decreased school budgets, increased poverty rates among children and their families, the rise of the social media era, changes in laws and healthcare reform, as well as the increase in violence. One way social workers have been trying to create compassionate school environments is in preventing bullying targeted at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youths. Such bullying has gained national attention in the wake of several instances of gay teens driven to commit suicide (Reardon, 2011).

All of these things factored in the changes in the school social work profession. The need for school social workers was growing in schools, with social media becoming popular and the occurrence of more bullying and school violence. However, with decreased budgets some school districts actually had to eliminate the school social workers they had because they could not afford them.

There were many trends that school social workers faced; the top three trends for social workers included: children's mental health, school violence, and bullying, and social media. Mental health dealt with the social and emotional state of the child. School social workers served as the primary mental health providers for students. They may have been the only counseling professionals available to students and their families to initially identify and provide interventions for those issues (Early & Vonk, 2001; Hennessy & Green-Hennessy, 2000; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010). School social workers training allowed them to meet the social and emotional needs of students while in the school building. They often provided mental health services to students who were struggling with some type of trauma or mental illness. Schools were one of the first places where mental health issues were recognized and addressed (Hennessy & Green-

Hennessey, 2000). Once a student was identified as needing mental health services it was up to the school social worker to determine if he or she could meet the student's needs or if the student needed to be referred to an outside resource for additional assistance. In a 2008 survey of school social workers, only 11% of respondents reported all or most students on their caseloads received counseling or therapeutic services outside of school (Kelly, Berzin et al., 2010). Not only did school social workers help aid students in connecting to outside mental health services, they also helped connect their families as well if they identified a need.

School violence and bullying was a second growing trend. More recently, school social workers addressed violence in the schools, such as bullying (NASW, 2000). Although a number of definitions existed, bullying was commonly identified as physical, verbal, or social forms of aggression perpetrated by an individual or a group of individuals against another particular individual (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). School social workers were at the forefront of school violence prevention. They played such a crucial role within the school system they often sat in and helped administrators get to the core of the problem was causing the violence and/or bullying. School social workers helped children gain social competence and decrease violent or aggressive behaviors, while influencing the school to be more aware and responsive to the needs of the children (Germain, 1999).

School social workers must have a solid understanding of the environments that made up the child's ecological system, such as school, community, and family (Kelly, Raines et al., 2010). Practitioners of school social work came up with interventions that prevented bullying or helped tackle the issue head on. If relational aggression

interventions were ineffective, the National Association of Social Workers' School Social Work Standards bound the social worker (Alvarez et al., 2012) to make adjustments to serve the students. This entailed consulting the family and school about the issue and its resolution as well as developing evaluation forms for counseling groups to address the presenting problem(s).

> School violence is youth violence that occurs on school property, on the way to or from school or school-sponsored events, or during a school-sponsored event… Youth violence includes various behaviors. Some violent acts—such as bullying, pushing, and shoving—can cause more emotional harm than physical harm. (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015, p. 1)

School violence and bullying were at the center of school district topics around America. Bullying was one of the most prominent forms of aggression in schools, and being a victim of bullying was a predictor of future acts of school violence by that victim (DeVoe, Kaffenberger,& Chandler, 2005).Perpetrators of school violence were often previously bullied by their own peers (Anderson et al., 2001). In order to break the bullying cycle, it took school personnel such as school social workers to get to the heart of the problem and come up with solutions for school districts to implement.

Many people questioned why students were so violent and what made them begin physical altercations or bully their peers. Influences associated with risk for bullying and violence in the schools were family conflict, exposure to violence, lack of neighborhood role models, and peer influences (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2008). Children and adolescents viewed reality television shows in which relational aggression quickly escalated into verbal and physical altercations. In addition, students had access to

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, where incidents of cyber aggression escalated into verbal and/or physical altercations. With this exposure to violence and bullying, it was very important for school districts to have preventative measures in place to address the issues before they happened. School social workers were often in the lead as schools confronted the problem of violence among students. Because school administrators were legally obligated to protect the students in their care, they frequently turned to school social workers to help identify those who both needed protection or were likely perpetrators (Hermann & Finn, 2002).

The last major trend school social workers faced was an increase in the use of social media. As already discussed, students were exposed to a great deal on Facebook, Instagram, and other social media outlets. These social media outlets were a platform that allowed students to express themselves; however, some students were not responsible enough to express themselves appropriately. Some students expressed themselves at the expense of others and by hurting other's feelings. In May, 2010, Massachusetts enacted some of the strictest anti-bullying legislation in the nation requiring schools to address cyber bullying, even when occurring off school property, "if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school" (An Act of Bullying in Schools, 2010).

School social workers needed to first educate themselves on the student's most frequented social media outlets. Then they educated the staff members and school official so they knew how to tackle issues that came about with students dealt with cyber or social media. School social workers had to set up preventative measures so they could

try to prevent cyber bullying and social media abuse from occurring within their schools. This involved providing input on the student conduct guidelines and rules for the school. Under the Massachusetts legislation, all public schools were required to submit a *Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan,* developed in consultation with school and community representatives, by the end of December, 2010 (An Act of Bullying in Schools, 2010). .

Social workers also provided workshops or information for students on technology usage and the responsibility that came along with using social media. Last, school social workers provided interventions to both the victim of cyber bullying as well as the perpetrator. School social workers provided emotional support bullying victims and they had to sometimes provide outside resources for counseling as well. As for the students who may have done the cyber bulling, school social workers had to attach consequences to their actions as well as counsel and meet with them. They may have also needed outside resources for psychological and emotional support. Additional social media outlets were starting almost daily. It was up to the school social worker to stay up to date and know about these new social media outlets and how they operated so school officials were alert and able to handle situations when they came about.

Tying it All Together

The school social worker profession had evolved in the previous century. School social workers faced many challenges in their day-to-day job duties and tasks; whether it be dealing with a student with mental health issues, or helping a student and their family find a place to stay for the night. School social workers roles varied from school to school and from student to student, but ultimately they were there to be a help to the

school staff as well as serve as an advocate and liaison for their students. Like social workers in other fields, their caseloads were often high and may have become overwhelming at times. However, with all the pressures and obstacles that came during a typical school day, most social workers said that although they may sometimes find their job challenging, they also found it very rewarding in being able to help students overcome barriers to achieve and be successful in school. School social workers had the opportunity to improve the lives of the students and families they served. The job became rewarding when the school social worker knew that students were making gains in their learning, progressing in the social skills, and had parents who were actively involved. When everyone was doing their part, the social worker felt accomplished in helping that child along the way in their success.

From the beginning of the social work profession, social workers had proven to be of great help to school administration, students, as well as the staff. The need to tackle mental health issues and family issues was very widespread in school buildings as of this writing. The school social work profession had proven to be an asset within the school system and filled a growing need. Some school employees failed to see the need to keep school social workers in schools dealing with discipline, poverty, achievement, and truancy. School social workers had established their value.

Summary

This chapter was able to give an inside look at the profession of school social work; it began with the history and covered the different roles that school social workers had. Along with the theoretical framework of school social workers, this chapter also discussed issues that their students faced on a day-to-day basis, as well as school social

work interventions, the idea of parental involvement and how social workers worked tirelessly to get parents actively involved in their child's education. The literature was able shed light on other views of the role of social workers in schools, the challenges they faced in their day-to-day duties, as well as the need to have more school social workers present within the school system. The need for school social workers was often over looked in the school district's budget because central office administrators did not always know the specifics of the school social workers job. Increasingly, the school social worker operated as a member of the school team to provide interventions to help youth in need. The next chapter will outline the methodology used in this study to gather data on the work experiences of school social workers in a variety of settings.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology of the research study. The researcher conducted the study by interviewing school social workers working in a variety of settings by phone as well as collecting answers from them to open ended questions. They additionally kept time logs of their activities for analysis. The researcher qualitatively analyzed the responses using open coding that allowed themes to emerge.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of school social workers related to their roles in the school and their job satisfaction. The information gained provided insight into the range of social worker experiences for a specific subset of social work professionals. Their input also showed the day-to-day routine as well as outside job duties.

The literature review suggested that undergraduate/graduate social work curriculum prepared graduates to be social work generalists. The school social worker dealt with some of the same general issues that all social workers dealt with. However, they also dealt with specific educational-related issues, such as school attendance, behavioral issues, and community resources, as well as family issues that may spill into the child's school day. School social workers dealt with so much in their daily routine that some argued that they were not as prepared as they needed to be arriving from their college classroom straight into the schools. However, with time and experience they were able to get the job done.

Research Questions

The study explored the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the daily activities and experiences of school social workers, both full-time and traveling, and their self-perceptions of those activities and experiences?

RQ2: How do the adult-employee perceived experiences compare between schools that have full-time school social workers in the same school building all day and schools that do not have full-time school social workers in the same school building all day (i.e., traveling-school social worker)?

Research Site

This study was a qualitative study. The researcher used seven mid-western school social workers. All seven worked at different schools with students ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade. The seven social workers worked at three different school districts. All three school districts represented were in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. Of the schools represented in this study, one school district was located in St. Louis City, while the other two are located in St. Louis County. All three school districts were highly populated and served students and their families from a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures. The school social workers participating in this study had all been working in these school districts from two to 30 years.

Participants

Initially the researcher approached 12 social workers. Ten responded and stated that they would participate. Nine school social workers returned the first questionnaire, after the nine weeks of collecting data the researcher had seven school social workers still participating. Those seven social workers also followed through until the end and

completed an exit interview as well. Each school social worker worked at either a public elementary or middle school. Some were traveling school social workers and worked at more than one school per week. Each participant had been in his or her school district for different amounts of time. The participants came from a variety of backgrounds as a social worker prior to school social work. Not all social workers were full time at one particular public school. Some of the school social workers travelled throughout their day to more than one school.

Table 1 shows the background information for the participants of this study. The majority of participants, four (57%) were licensed at the Masters of Social Work (MSW) level, which meant their job did not require a license, but they did however obtain a master's degree in social work. While two (29%) had their License in Clinical Social Work (LCSW); and one (14%) social worker was a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW). Their average years of experience as a school social worker was nine years, with six (86%) of the participants having worked for one to 10 years and one (14%) who had 31 years of experience.

Participants specified the type of school they worked in and its geographic setting. Of the participants, two (29%) worked in an urban setting and more than half of the participants five (71%) worked in a suburban school district (Table 1). It was most common for participants to have had experience working in an elementary school and least common for respondents to have worked in a high school setting. Of the seven participants, four had experience working in only an elementary school two had experience working in a combination of elementary and middle school settings with the

least (*n*=1) working in only a middle school setting, and no participants working in a

high school setting.

Table 1

Background Information

	Count *n*=7	Percent (%)
License Held		
LMSW	1	14
LCSW	2	29
MSW (No License)	4	57
Years As Social Worker		
1-5	2	29
6-10	4	57
31-35	1	14
Geographical Setting		
Rural	0	0
Urban	2	29
Suburban	5	71
School Setting		
Elem. (Only)	4	57
Elem. & Middle	2	29
Middle (Only)	1	14
High School	0	0
Number of Schools		
1-2	3	43
3-4	2	29
5 or More	2	29

The researcher gave all social workers a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

Because the interviews and questionnaires asked them to give personal opinions about

their jobs, the researcher wanted them to know that they would remain anonymous for

this study. The participants were as follows:

- Christie has worked as a school social worker for seven years; she worked in a

  suburban school setting. Christie was responsible for five elementary schools

(traveling school social worker). Christie spent one full day per week at each school. Christie also had her MSW (Masters in Social Work).

- Elena has worked as a school social worker for two years; she worked in a suburban school setting. Elena was responsible for four elementary and middle schools (traveling school social worker). Elena spent one and a half days per week at each school. Elena was also a LMSW (Licensed Master Social Worker).

- Kimberly has worked as a school social worker for seven years; she worked in a suburban school setting. Kimberly was responsible for five elementary schools (traveling school social worker). Kimberly spent one day per week at each school. Kimberly also had her MSW (Masters in Social Work).

- Sophie has worked as a school social worker for four years; she worked in an urban school setting. Sophie was responsible for one elementary school. Sophie spent five days a week at her one school. Sophie also had her MSW (Masters in Social Work).

- Margie has worked as a school social worker for 31 years; she worked in a suburban school setting. Margie was responsible for four elementary schools (traveling school social worker). Margie spent one day per week at each school. Margie also had her LCSW (License in Clinical Social Work).

- Casey has worked as a school social worker for six years; she worked in an urban school setting. Casey was responsible for two elementary and two middle schools (traveling school social worker). Casey spent two days at one school and three days at another school per week. Casey also had her LCSW (License in Clinical Social Work).

- Nicole has worked as a school social worker for nine years; she worked in a

  suburban school setting. Nicole was responsible for two middle schools

  (traveling school social worker). Nicole spent two or three days per week at each

  school; she rotated Wednesdays so that each school got the same amount of days

  per month. Nicole also had her MSW (Masters in Social Work).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The school social workers completed an introductory questionnaire (Appendix C).

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather demographic data about the social worker

and their school(s) and district for comparison purposes. The researcher gave the social

workers a calendar of nine weeks with random times. The school social workers

completed a multi-entry log (see Appendix B). The day-of-the-week and time-of-day

were randomized over a nine-week period. Each week the participants received a list of

two to three random time slots from two to three random workdays for which they

entered log entries on a Google Document Survey Form. The form contained prompts

for what they were doing at that time, as well as space for other activities not included in

the prompts. An additional space for comments, feelings, and reflections was also

included on the form.

The purpose of having social workers enter entries for nine weeks was to look at

examples of what each school social workers daily procedures, duties, and expectations

were in each school. The researcher made sure they were given the dates to keep a log,

so everyone was keeping the journal on the same dates. The researcher also gave each

participant an introductory questionnaire and conducted a one-on-one interview

(Appendix D) at the end of the process. Because the jobs of school social workers can

become very time consuming, they had the option to enter the entries at their own pace by the last date on the calendar.

The questionnaire and one-on-one interviews consisted of different types of questions. Overall, the theme of the data gathering was what were the most important types of student problems these social workers faced every day, what types of interventions they used to tackle these student problems, and how participants spent their time daily in their role as a school social worker. This also helped get a closer look at the need for school social workers in each building.

The researcher qualitatively coded the log entries, looking for commonalities and differences between the participants, as well as emerging themes. The commonalities, differences, and themes were used to develop additional participant follow up questions in the exit interview.

Examining different components gave insight and a broader view of the data from different angles. Looking at the social worker's point of view of their job position gave a firsthand view of their perceptions and job satisfaction. The log sheets given to each social worker to log their daily job duties allowed each social worker to quickly give a detailed description of their job and what they were working on those particular days. This tool enabled a compilation of the daily answers by day and time so the researcher could actually see what each school social worker was doing at the times given to them.

Developing the Intervention

The researcher believed completion of the log would gather pertinent information about each school. This was needed because not all schools had a permanent social worker; some had a traveling social worker that was only present part of the time as

opposed to full time. The researcher believed this was important because with the issues that arose; this data showed that there might be a need for a full time social worker to tackle these issues on a daily basis.

The researcher believed this study could provide a tool for schools and school districts to analyze their own schools and see what social workers should be doing, what they were doing, and what they could be doing. If they did not have a school social worker then it would perhaps give school and school districts a view at what the full time social worker could provide. It was the researcher's intention that this study would also shed light on the social work profession for the benefit of school districts as well as for social work departments in universities as a curriculum evaluation tool. Some universities that had well regarded social work departments provided curriculum and training for social workers, but did not hone in on the school social work profession.

Some universities only train their students on the overall social work profession and do not give the extra training in the area of school social work. This means that some social workers did not have the background or experience with school social work. However, they were able to bring their expertise in from a social services agency and use that background in serving their students and their families. Moving forward, this study provided a positive outlook so there could be more school social workers trained properly and highly qualified for school districts interested in hiring them.

Analysis

After following these social workers for nine weeks, the researcher compiled all of their answers and constructed tables visually representing the data from their surveys. The researcher made a table of the top five problems that school social workers faced, top

five interventions school social workers used, and the top five daily duties that school social workers did throughout the school day. The researcher identified the top five problems, interventions, and daily social work duties. She compared these with the types of schools that the social workers worked in. The researcher was able to have a more in-depth view of what each social worker did in each building depending on school type and the amount of time they spent in the school.

After gathering the responses to the introductory survey, the open-ended questions during the nine-week data collection, and the exit interviews, the researcher transcribed the answers. The researcher analyzed the answers using open coding to look for emerging themes. These themes were in the areas of problems, interventions, and roles. The specifics of these themes will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Summary

The researcher believed that gathering this type of data allowed her to move forward with this study. This chapter outlined the methodology and connections to how it related to the research questions. The research site as well as participants were described and the reader was given an in depth look at their background information. The researcher explained the data collection procedures and analysis along with the idea of developing interventions towards this area of study. The next chapter will focus on the research questions more in depth in reference to the similarities and differences that the researcher came across while doing the study.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

In this chapter, the research questions were analyzed and broken down to give a more in depth look at the similarities, differences, and common themes of each question. The researcher examined and analyzed the social worker's roles and perceptions. By looking at these areas, the researcher was able to analyze the participant's responses and look at the similarities and differences within each of their roles. The researcher was able to see how they perceived their positions individually, whether they were a traveling school social worker or a school social worker that remained in their building full time.

Overview

This study consisted of seven highly qualified school social workers from the St. Louis Metropolitan area. Of the 10 school social workers who stated that they were interested in the study, seven completed the introductory questionnaire, completed the daily logs, and completed the exit questionnaire for the study, for a response rate of 70%. The researcher presented the study findings in three sections: understanding role of school social worker, self-perceptions, and common themes in accordance to each research question.

After following these social workers for nine weeks, the researcher compiled all of their answers and constructed tables representing the data from their surveys. The researcher made a table of the top five problems that school social workers faced, top five interventions school social workers used, and the top five daily duties that school social workers did throughout the school day. By identifying the top five problems, interventions, and daily social work duties and comparing them with the types of schools

that the social workers worked in, the researcher was able to have a more in-depth view

of what each social worker did in each building.

Table 2

Common Themes

Top 5 Problems
Behavior Challenges
Poor Attendance
Lack of Parental Involvement
Low Academic Achievement
Lack of Resources for Families
Top 5 Interventions
Wrap Around Interventions
PBIS- Positive Behavior Intervention Supports
RTI- Response To Intervention
Attendance Interventions
Crisis Interventions
Top 5 Roles of School Social Workers
Monitor Attendance & Tardy Issues
Home Visits to Assess Family Needs
Connecting Families to Resources
Individual & Group Counseling
Crisis Intervention

Research Question One: Similarities

RQ1: What are the daily activities and experiences of school social workers, both

full-time and traveling, and their self-perceptions of those activities and experiences?

Role of School Social Worker

The role of school social workers looked differently depending on which type of

school the social worker worked. For instance, if the school was in a high poverty area

then the social workers tasks were geared more towards handling attendance issues and

providing resources for families that were in need. The role of a school social worker

was not as clear-cut as one may think. Their role was not simply defined. Some of the

school social workers duties were as follows: identified homeless students, reached out to

families for parent involvement, advocated for students in need, connected families to resources in the community, served on numerous education problem solving teams within the school district, implemented bullying seminars, led the behavior intervention team, served as a liaison with families and teachers, conducted individual and group counseling, dealt with adolescent issues, and the list went on and on. There was no one specific job description when it came to a school social worker. No one school social worker's workday would look exactly like another. The variety of roles that a social worker played may have been different in each school.

The researcher looked at the questionnaires that the participants filled out and was able to identify the top five roles of the school social worker. They were to monitor attendance and tardy issues, conduct home visits to assess family needs, connect families to resources, conduct individual and group counseling, and implement crisis interventions. Christie reported:

> The attendance issue has become a very big part of my daily duties; I have to keep an on-going report of students who were absent three or more days; I have to send letters and do home visits for students who are chronically absent; sometimes I feel like a truant officer than a school social worker.

For a majority of the participants, verifying/monitoring attendance was reported as one of the primary roles as a social worker at their school. In fact, five out of seven social workers listed monitoring attendance and dealing with tardy issues as one of their top roles as a social worker in their schools. Although attendance was a very important part to ensuring that students were overcoming the obstacles to their education, a school social worker should not be the sole person responsible for handling the attendance. There

should have been others in the building, such as attendance secretaries or truant officers, who assisted with the other duties that came along with handling student attendance.

Another one of the top five roles that the participants of this study listed as a part of their roles as a school social worker was to conduct home visits to assess the family needs of students. Elena stated:

> Often times we're asked to conduct a home visit to not only assess the needs but to assess the environment in which the child was coming from but to obtain an idea of what the child may have been going through at home.

Home visits allowed the school social worker to gain a clearer picture of the puzzle when it came to their student's backgrounds and at home environments. Sometimes school social workers made home visits just to connect with parents they were not able to reach. Christie reported, "Today, I conducted a home visit regarding a student's attendance issues, medication, and an IEP meeting. Mom could not be contacted because she did not have a working phone." Kimberly indicated:

> Home visits are a very crucial part of my job. I feel that it gives me an idea of what the home environment is like for the child. Often times I conduct home visits if a student is chronically absent, or if someone from the school is trying to get a hold of a parent who does not have a phone or is not answering the phone. I enjoy doing home visits for my student.

Another role or daily function of the school social worker included connecting families to resources. This is key; sometimes when a student was struggling in school, it was a cry for help because something else was going on at home. Often circumstances or issues that occurred in the home, gained students focus, and would spill over into the

student's school day and affect their attention and ability to learn. The school social worker was important in this process because their ultimate job was to break down the barriers to education for students. Social workers had the skills and the training to more fully investigate the situation, get to root of the problem, and then in turn help aid the student and their families in finding the resources that they needed. Casey stated:

> Sometimes students come to school with a heavy load and a lot that they are concerned about at home, by connecting their families to the proper resources necessary, we removed that barrier and allowed the student to learn and not have to worry about what was going on at home.

All of the participants listed conducting individual and group counseling as one of their primary roles as a school social worker. Some of the school social worker participants explained that they conducted group sessions as a preventative measure for problems that occurred within the school, and others said they used them as an intervention for students. Elena said, "I view the one on one counseling sessions with my students as a safe haven for students to express themselves to a trusting adult in the school setting." Nicole reported, "Sometimes the counseling sessions are not always easy, but once I am able to connect with a student, I look forward to the sessions and the students do too." School social workers' training equipped them with the tools to connect with the students on a different level than a classroom teacher who has to be responsible for other students as well. Some students connected with their teachers, however school social workers not only had the training, but the time to dig deeper and tackle some of the tougher issues with the students over a period.

The last of the top five roles that the school social workers listed was crisis

intervention. Often when a child or their family was going through a crisis situation that occurred in or around the school, or directly affected the students learning, the school social worker was called upon to assess the situation and develop goals and an action plan moving forward. Sophie indicated, "Crisis intervention is one of the major tasks that they dealt with on a day-to-day basis." Margie expressed that:

> No matter if the situation was big or small I was usually called upon to help out in the situation to either calm the student down or assist and aid in helping the child move forward so the crisis situation would not stunt their academic growth.

School social workers picked up where teachers and administrators left off. They were qualified to address the psychological and social issues that obstructed the student's academic progress. Through counseling and following up with the students they helped the students overcome what they were going through and were able to put them back on the right track.

Even though the researcher highlighted the top roles that the school social workers of this study dealt with, the school social workers handled many, many more tasks throughout their workday. One day on the daily log Christie entered, "I was doing school personnel consultation with the counselor regarding a mentoring program." On another day Casey entered, "Meeting regarding a morale boost for students before state testing begins. Discussing ways to boost the self-esteem of students in regards to testing." The daily logs gave an insightful view of not only the school social worker's daily duties, but also their emotions around the job. One day Nicole logged:

> It has been a long morning; I had to pick up resources for a family from our food closet, then I had to deliver the resources to two families; I am truly grateful for

the McKinney-Vento Education Assistance Act, that we are able to help our

families as we do.

School social workers were not classified as teachers but they were not classified

as administrators either, in some schools they were the in between person that at the end

of the day had a lot put on their plate. Social workers trainings equipped them to deal

with this type of work on different levels and in different professional settings; they had

the ability to put out fires and fix problems. However, this type of work caused burnout

and caused some of the school social workers to feel like they had nothing else to give.

The next section will give the perceptions of the school social workers concerning their

roles.

Self- Perception

The school social worker's perceptions of their jobs was mixed, some felt that

their role was too much and wished they had a more defined role, while others indicated

that they liked the flexibility of the job and enjoyed the fact that one day did not look like

another. Some social workers felt that they were required to do too much outside of their

job duties or profession when they worked in a school. Sophie stated:

> I understand that working in a school, you are a part of the staff and you have to
>
> do what the principal asks of you. I also understand that doing recess duty helps
>
> build relationships with students that I may not otherwise have the opportunity of
>
> knowing in my job. However, I cannot help but feel that while I am doing recess
>
> duty every day the paper work that I could be catching up on and the work that is
>
> not being done because I have to help with recess.

While some school social workers did not mind helping out with recess duty, morning

duty, and after school duty, they felt that doing it every day would sometimes cause issues because if they had meetings to attend, or a home visit to conduct, there was no one to cover their post.

Kimberly explained, "I understand the culture of our school building is all hands on deck per se; however it is sometimes difficult to be a recess monitor when I have a IEP meeting to attend or a crisis to help out with." The school social workers felt that their job description caused blurred lines within the school, and they did not really know how to address that with their administrators in their building. They all felt as if they wanted to help where needed in their buildings, but they also felt that they sometimes had other obligations that should come first. Some expressed that they had held these conversations with their administrators, but it was harder to get through to them because their administrators did not clearly understand their roles. Casey indicated that she had gone above her building administrator and talked to the director of special education (whom she reported to within her district). She stated:

> I talked to my special education director and expressed my frustration with having
>
> to fill in in the building, and how it was affecting my paper work; she handled it
>
> and now my principal has a better understanding of what I should be doing.

Other school social work participants expressed that they wished their building administrators had a better understanding of their roles.

Social workers felt that they could not complete their work because they were asked to do many other tasks not related to their jobs. Elena articulated, "It would be helpful to have a more defined role instead of trying to be a jack of all trades, it can get difficult sometimes, and it gets tiring." Therefore, this showed that some school social

workers felt the pressure of the job. They felt spread thin and they felt that because of this they could not do their job to the best of their ability because they did so many other duties. They also felt that their administrators did not fully understand what their roles were. Therefore, administrators viewed them as an extra adult in the building that they could call to do odd jobs.

Another issue the participants expressed concerning their roles was the fact that they had the skills and knowledge to handle certain issues, but they felt they were too busy handling issues that did not fall under their job description that they did not have the time to do what they were trained to do. For example, Margie explained that she had to sit in on meetings that dealt with a child's behavior with the assistant principal and help contact parents. The administrator then expected her to develop a viable consequence for the child's actions. While the school social worker could help with these types of activities, this ultimately was the principal or assistant principal's job. The school social worker's job was to develop incentives and help prevent the undesired behavior from happening, or develop interventions for after the consequences to prevent the behavior from happening again. For example, if the child was in trouble for fighting, then after he or she served their detention, suspension, or other consequence, the school social worker might develop a group that worked on how to deal with conflict or how to be a friend to help the child from getting into another fight in the future. Margie felt that her administrator was not clear on what her roles was and what she needed to be doing; and in turn she was not being used to her full capacity.

Common Themes: Research Question One

The common themes of the school social worker participants understandably included their roles. Some other perceptions of their roles varied, but their frustrations were the same and their joy with the job was the same. Social workers in any setting had a lot of required paper work as a necessary part of their job. Most of the school social worker participants shared the frustration that they wore many hats within the school building and they did not have enough time to complete paperwork and other work that needed to be completed because they are frequently handling other issues that keep them tied up for the majority of the day.

The school social worker participants however shared their joy with their job when it came to changing the lives of their students and being able to make a difference in their educational process. The participants were all content with their current jobs and the school districts they worked in. Kimberly stated, "even though the job may become overwhelming at times knowing that they are changing lives daily made it all worth it in the end." The social worker participants felt that the reward was in knowing that they were helping change lives every day by helping the students and their families within their school. Nicole had this to say about her job satisfaction: "I have been in this profession almost 10 years, and it is knowing that I am helping break down barriers to learning, that I get my strength to keep going and continue in this profession." The school social workers had a lot of paperwork to complete, and sometimes that created burnout in the job, but these participants expressed their joy in the job outside of the paperwork and reports that they had to write. They shared their joy coming from the one-on-one interactions with the students and assisting the staff with helping their students

learn better. Christie was able to sum it all up when it came to how all the social worker participants felt about their job. She stated:

> Social workers are so important to school districts. Social workers can have a positive impact on others. Social workers as practitioners work with a varied and diverse group of people, to learn and experience a multifaceted life that is consistently dynamic and evolving. Social workers tackle issues, to help empower others to solve their own problems, to make a difference, and to help individuals live. Social work teaches the different aspects of humanity and allows you to learn a lot about yourself. Social work allows you to work on varying levels of society. Being a social worker could literally mean the difference between life and death for one person and to me that says it all and therefore makes social workers worth having. Social work is a true profession and worth fighting for and continually developing it for a better understanding.

One of the major common themes that the school social work participants shared was the fact that their role within the school was made more difficult because of the lack of parental involvement. Some of the social work participants felt that their job was more difficult to complete because they had to hunt parents down and go find parents when they needed them to be a part of meetings concerning their child's education or behavior. The school social workers also felt the lack of parental involvement that this also affected the child's education tremendously. Casey stated:

> I feel when my parents are not involved in their child's educational decisions and the whole process of the IEP that it makes it harder on the team as a whole to

implement and reinforce the plan; it is almost as if the child knows that their

parents do not care, so why should they care.

When the child knew that their parent did not invest something that the school was trying

to implement, it was harder to get the child to buy in to it and carry it out successfully.

Parental involvement was a huge piece to the educational puzzle; when it was not there it

was harder to wrap around services and implement goals and plans successfully for the

child's sake. The lack of parental involvement brought on frustration for the school

social workers in their jobs; they felt as if they could not effectively do their jobs when

the parents were not actively involved. Sophie stated:

> Although I find it very frustrating when parents are not actively involved in their
>
> child's education, I have to get over it and move on from it; I do not let it stop me
>
> from doing my job and helping the child overcome the obstacles that they may
>
> have to their education.

Research Question Two: Differences

RQ2: How do the adult-employee perceived experiences compare between

schools that have full-time school social workers in the same school building all day and

schools that do not have full-time school social workers in the same school building all

day (i.e., traveling-school social worker)?

Role of School Social Worker

School social workers' roles can look very different if they have to travel between

schools compared to a single site school social worker. Because school social worker

roles were not as defined, the role of traveling school social workers became even more

complicated to define. A traveling school social worker was one that was responsible for

more than one school building. For example, a school social worker might spend two

days at one school and two days at another school and then rotate Fridays at each school.

Some school districts utilized one school social worker for multiple buildings to cut down

on the cost. Other school districts did not really see a need for a school social worker in

every building so they did not have one in every school building. Some school districts

used traveling school social workers because this was preferable to having to contract and

pay for outside social workers from agencies.

Traveling school social workers experienced more of a workload and more

paperwork. Because they were in multiple schools, they had a lot more information on

various students and situations to retain. It was almost as if the traveling school social

workers had double the caseload because they dealt with students from two different

schools. Some school social workers had more than two schools and this caused even

less time to gather information and effectively do their job. Kimberly explained, "I do

not feel I have time to process the difficult things I hear from students and parents before

I have to move on to the next school; this can become emotionally draining."

School social workers that had to travel and were responsible for more than one

school had more of a workload. They felt that there was not enough time to get things

done because they were not at one school full time. Travelling school social workers felt

that there was more of a need for a permanent school social worker in their buildings

because when problems occurred and they could not be there because of other schools,

demands or needs, and their absence became more evident. The school social workers in

this study felt that there was not enough time in the week to get all of their tasks done.

They felt that they took more work home. Once they entered their buildings, they hit the

ground running. There was not enough time in each day to complete what administrators expected of them at that particular school, as well as the necessary paperwork for their jobs.

Compared to a school social worker that worked in the same school building five days a week, the roles look a little different. For example, school social workers that are only responsible for one school could map out and plan their weeks and their groups and duties according to the climate of the building. Although a crisis may arise, and their scheduled plans could change, for the most part non-traveling school social workers roles looked a little different from a traveling school social worker. For instance, a traveling school social worker not only had to complete what they planned to do for the work week, but they also had to solve problems and put out fires for the incidents that occurred in their absence while they were tending to their other school(s). The traveling school social worker could not efficiently get things done when they were working on issues that occurred while they were not in the building. This also caused them to put off dealing with issues that were occurring while they were in their current building as they dealt with the previous school's problems from a distance. It was as if they had to prioritize the needs of the school and get the most pressing issues handled while they were in the building. Calling parents and handling other issues outside of the workday or on days when they were in other buildings became routine. The school social workers in this study felt that having more than one school building was manageable if they had been working in this profession for a while; however, they felt that it was a bit of a work overload in some schools that presented many issues and required a lot of social work attention.

Margie stated:

Being a traveling social worker was okay in my old school district because the two schools that I had there were not a lot of issues, now in my current school district I feel overwhelmed with work and I take a lot of work home to get done that I am not able to complete while at work.

Casey agreed with this. She stated, "School social workers are already asked to do a lot within their school buildings, I feel that it is a bit much asking them to do that much in between two or even three school buildings." Out of the seven school social worker participants of this study, only one was a non-traveling school social worker; three had one or two schools; two had three or four schools; and two had five or more schools.

Elena gave very good insight with her feelings of being a traveling school social worker. She said:

I do not have any statistical data about the productivity of full time (at one location) staff versus those who "travel" – but I do feel like travelling affects my mental health and productivity. There are some benefits to seeing how things are done at different buildings and getting to know students as they move from elementary to middle school. I also feel that because I travel, my caseload is overwhelming. I do not leave a family because I am physically at a different school. I really value our monthly social worker meetings and getting together with the social workers outside of school. I am learning to balance work and home life, but I do not feel like the current system of servicing four buildings is very sustainable over the long term

Self-Perception

Each of the traveling social workers had different story to tell when it came to his or her experience. Some felt that it was okay while others shared their frustration with not being in one place all the time. Overall, many of the social worker participants felt that they were not able to build solid relationships with the students because they were always in and out of the building. Relationships were important to the progression of the child. In order for a student to trust the social worker, he or she had to know the worker and make a personal connection. Often it was hard for students to build a trusting relationship because when issues occurred or things happened that they wanted to share with the school social worker, the social worker was not readily available because he or she was serving in another school building. Kimberly expressed:

It is hard to build lasting relationships with my students when I only get to see them once or twice a week. They are not able to build that trust with me because they do not see me on a daily basis, as they would another adult in the building.

In order to build the trusting relationship and gain buy in from students, school social workers needed to be within reach when they were going through a crisis or when they needed them the most.

Another self-perception that the school social worker participants admitted was that by being a traveling school social worker, often they did not have their own workspace or place to work when they got to the schools. Depending on how many schools they were responsible for, traveling social workers were only in their school buildings once a week. If school social workers were only in a school building once per week, it did not make sense for them to have their own office. School social workers

dealt with very confidential issues with their students and their families, not having their own workspace caused them to be less effective. For instance, meeting with a student in a hallway or in a room they shared with another adult or students, the student did not feel comfortable sharing all the details of their situations. Margie said:

> In a school that I used to work in I had to meet with my caseload and do my groups in the hallway, it caused a distraction and I felt that it was not as effective as my meetings and groups in my other schools where I had my own office.

Common Themes: Research Question Two

Along with the self-perceptions one of the common themes was that traveling school social workers could not build relationships or trust with their students when they were not in the building every day. However, a few of the school social worker participants brought up another aspect about relationship building as well, Elena stated:

> It is hard to feel connected and invested when I do not feel that I am a part of the school community; we (school social workers) are kind of outsiders; being an outsider is not all bad, but it can become difficult.

> Kimberly had similar feeing about being in multiple schools. She stated:

> I feel that as a traveling school social worker, no one building is my home; meaning I do not really feel a part of a staff; I understand that we do not come to work to be friends with our coworkers, however it does happen, so that sense of not feeling like I am even a part of the staff. I feel that the staff members have to feel a sense of trust as well because if they do not trust me then they will not reach out to me for helping them when it comes to their students.

In order to help work together as a unit; building relationships with other staff members helped. When teachers needed the social worker's expertise, they felt more comfortable calling upon them and asking for their input when they had some type of prior working relationship.

Another common theme among the school social workers was that they felt their profession in a school setting was not valued; especially if they traveled versus a single site, this made the job even harder. These school social workers felt that the lack of support for their profession caused a lack of funding for school social workers to be present in every school building. The school social worker profession was not new; however, some school districts did not see the need or allow the funding to have school social workers in every building. Nicole stated:

> I believe social workers in my district make a huge impact on students and families. I look at the many things that we do that would go UNDONE if we were not there doing them. I also feel families would not make the connection to others if they tried to do what we do.

Since their role could not clearly defined, school social workers felt administrators did not fight for or ask for funding and their role in schools was not as valued as it should have been.

Summary

The role of a school social worker is very broad, because of the location, the population, the geographical setting, the school setting, and other factors that may come into play. Although one school social worker's role may not look like another's; one thing remained constant, that their overall job was to look out for the best interest of the

child and help break down barriers that stood in the way of their education. The school social worker's daily activities and experiences, both full-time and traveling, their self-perceptions and common themes were all consistent among the school social work participants of this study. The main theme through all of their responses was the need for school social workers in every school building. The frustration of the school social workers that school administrators did not value their profession in the school setting was evident; however, these school social workers did not let that stop them from completing their jobs and filling in at schools that did not have a full time social worker. The overall job satisfaction and joy of being a school social worker was also consistent; even though at times the job became overwhelming, all of the school social work participants were satisfied with their job, and all found it rewarding to help students and their families.

In this chapter, the researcher examined the research questions as well as the participants' responses. The researcher highlighted the similarities, differences, and common themes. The school social workers gave insight on their roles as well as their perceptions of their jobs as a whole. The traveling school social workers gave their view of the job versus the full time social workers that did not travel or have many schools. Over all, the insight gave a more in depth view of what school social workers did in their jobs, what types of problems they faced, what type of interventions they used, and how they handle issues in their day-to-day jobs.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Reflection

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher offers a reflection of the results of the study and discusses the research questions' relationship to the literature. The researcher also makes recommendations for future research. The researcher's personal reflection will also give insight on her own experience as a school social worker. These findings show some of the day-to-day job experiences and roles of school social workers from their perceptions. This research also adds knowledge to both the education and social work fields. The findings emphasizes the importance of school social worker and how there is a need for them in every school building.

Research Question One

RQ1: What are the daily activities and experiences of school social workers, both full-time and traveling, and their self-perceptions of those activities and experiences?

The data shows that the daily activities and experiences of both full time and traveling school social workers jobs are very important within their school system. The role of school social worker is not as clearly defined as it needs to be. Social workers do a lot outside of their social work jobs to help the school day run smoother. Social workers both full time and traveling have their work cut out for them when it comes to the students and families they serve. While the job is not always easy and can become stressful, the job has was necessary. Most of the social workers of this study stated tracked attendance. While in some schools, a secretary or an in-house truancy officer tracked this, over the years the school social worker completed this task in order to efficiently track student attendance and find ways to get absent students back into school.

Social workers have so many day-to-day tasks they have to complete the workload can sometimes become overwhelming. All of the top five tasks that the school social workers reported doing in this study were all important and true to many school social workers across the country. However, it is harder for these tasks to be completed efficiently with the other job duties that school districts often require school social workers to perform. When school social workers do things outside of their social work job to help the school and other employees in the school, it takes away from the value of what the school social worker is actually there to do. It also adds more stress and makes the social worker do the job of social work less efficiently. For example, one of the participants of this study mentioned having to do recess duty. This duty takes up a large portion of her day in the middle of her day. This can cause other tasks to remain uncompleted for that day. When the school social worker is finally able to do tasks such as paper work, they may not be as detailed and efficient.

Some of the school social work participants expressed a wish for a more defined role. This is understandable. To be effective it is often better to prioritize your tasks. This is difficult when given other job duties outside of your own to complete. Not having a defined role can sometimes become overwhelming. Some school social workers report directly to their principal. Others are placed within the special education department and report to the district special education director; even though they are housed and placed within the schools they serve. This can become overwhelming, because though they report to the special education director, there still may be demands that the principal of the school requires of them as well. This makes it harder to prioritize and determine what tasks to do first.

Other school social work participants of this study say they enjoy the flexibility of their jobs and the option of one workday not looking like another. One of the reasons many people enjoyed social work was the lack of confinement to a desk doing paper work all day. By doing home visits they can to connect with families and learn more about their students than what they see in school. They can get to know their families, the history behind their behavior, and their day-to-day functions. They also get to connect with community partners and tap into different resources for their students and their families. They get to attend community meetings to help aide in community development and partnerships for the school and surrounding area. The flexibility some enjoy can make a school day more interesting.

Overall, the perceptions of the experiences and daily functions of the school social workers of this study reflect the personal experience of the researcher. Although the job can become overwhelming, being a part of the process and being able to impact, advocate for, and assist in someone's education is very rewarding and makes the difficulties of the job worthwhile.

Research Question Two

RQ2: How do the adult-employee perceived experiences compare between schools that have full-time school social workers in the same school building all day and schools that do not have full-time school social workers in the same school building all day (i.e., traveling-school social worker)?

The data showed regardless whether the school social workers were full time or traveled between schools, their roles were still not as defined as they should be. In fact, the traveling social workers' roles were even more complex because they were not able to

be in both places at once. Having two offices (or no space for an office at all), two sets of students, two sets of staff members, two different principals, two different schedules, and in some cases more than two of each of these things can become very overwhelming and stressful. Because some school employees do not see the value or need for a school social worker, they can often overload one person and not know it. Social workers traveling building to building are invisible to the administrators when they are gone from their building. The administrators overload the social worker when they are at their building because but they did not take into consideration their duties at the other school.

Traveling school social workers can become frustrated, burnt-out, and less effective when performing their job duties. When people feel burnt-out on their job, they will not perform their job duties to the best of their ability.

Relation to Literature Review

Overall, the participants of this study share a similar description of their job to that in the literature review. The social worker's role, dealing with truancy, and the lack of parental involvement in education are three of the main. Over all the school social worker participants roles were consistent with that of the literature given within this study School social workers work diligently to achieve a multitude of complex, important tasks within their roles. Although some universal standards are required in school social work, each practitioner's position is different and requires individualized adaption (Leyba, 2009). School social worker participants dealt with truancy issues but also had to take into consideration the influences for the truancy issues. "School social workers who seek to reduce truancy rates must evaluate the context in which truancy occurs, including individual and developmental factors and parental, family, socioeconomic, and

community influences" (Teasley, 2004, p. 118). For social workers dealing with parental

involvement and discipline it helped when parents were supporting the social workers

and school administrators with discipline issues with students. It helped the school hold

students more accountable when the parents held the students accountable at home as

well; but in order for this to occur there had to be someone at home supporting the school

based decisions as well as enforcing the school rules and policies (Chrispeels & Rivero,

2000).   The perceptions of the school social workers of this study showed that they were

in fact in tune with other school social workers around the county when it came to their

roles. The existing literature illustrated what the social worker participants were saying

about their roles and duties within the schools in this research study.

Social Worker Role and Empowerment

The school social worker participants in this study described their role as being

broad and complex. According to one researcher, "School social workers work diligently

to achieve a multitude of complex, important tasks within their roles… school social

workers can systematically reflect on their roles to identify the more efficient job

description for their unique position" (Leyba, 2009, p. 225). The social work participants

in this study stated that they sometimes work very long hours and have expertise in this

field to help advocate for their students. Leyba (2009) stated:

> Many social workers work efficiently, for long hours, and with professional
>
> integrity and artistry. However, a number of these social workers have so many
>
> tasks that it is very challenging for them to fulfill mandates, pursue new
>
> initiatives, or complete certain activities at a professional level. (p. 219)

Largely both the existing literature and the social worker participants expressed their satisfaction with the job when it comes to improving lives. Over the course of the last 100 years, the school social worker's role changed. However, one thing remained constant: social workers' ultimate purpose was improving the quality of life for others through research and practice with the goal of social welfare, social change, and social justice.

Truancy

The school social worker participants of this study listed attendance and tardy issues as one of their top five roles. The existing literature also ranks attendance and truancy issues as one of the top job functions of school social workers. School social workers often get referrals from teachers and administrators when students are having emotional or behavior issues or when they are chronically absent from school (Teasley, 2004). School social workers provided early identification of students at risk of truancy and monitored the attendance of the students. The school social worker responded and contacted other school personnel and the parents of the students to find the underlying cause of the attendance issue. It is because of school social workers' identification of the problem that they can help reduce truancy rates within their school buildings. "School social workers who seek to reduce truancy rates must evaluate the context in which truancy occurs, including individual and developmental factors and parental, family, socioeconomic, and community influences" (Teasley, 2004, p.118). School social workers conducted home visits and arranged for resources within the community. In addition, they conducted group sessions they hoped would both spark the student's interest in school and promote a positive school environment.

Parental Involvement

The school social worker participants saw connecting families to resources as one of their top five roles in their schools. This act of pulling in and engaging the family in their child's education can be a hard task. However, social workers have become the go to person within the school when it comes to contacting or reaching out to the parents. There were many reasons that factored in why a parent was not involved in their child's education, but it was up to the social worker to reach out to them by any means necessary to get them involved. The literature confirms this as well. It was often one of the school social worker's tasks to actively involve the parent in the child's education. That involved helping with ideas for the PTO (parent teacher organization) meetings, planning and helping out with family nights, Muffins with Mom, Donuts with Dad program, or having a grandparent's day where grandparents come and attend a portion of the school day with their grandchild. Any way the social worker could help and get the parents in the school building, built the foundation for a relationship between the teacher and parent. Anderson et al. (2000) found that parent involvement increased because of providing special school activities (e.g., family night) and education-based resources to parents, as well as increasing positive communication between teachers and parents.

Personal Reflections

I believe this research is important to the advancement of the social work field. Although social work is broad and there are so many avenues and paths to take within the field, I believe that this research helps shine a light on the discussion of school social work. School social work is not new; however, it is not as well known in the field of social work. Although the area of school social work is similar to others areas of the

social work field, many people do not understand the roles and responsibilities of school social workers. I hope that this research and others like it will give a better understanding of the need for school social workers in every school building across America.

In my opinion, school social workers are needed for a school to function effectively, as much as the administrators and the teachers. I believe without school social workers there would be a lot of confusion within the schools because often school social workers help students and their families in ways that other school officials really cannot help. This lack of help is simply because it is not their area of expertise. I believe without school social workers, many students would fall by the wayside and many problems would go unnoticed because they would just blend in with the rest of the school population. School social workers help identify and work with those introverted students that would otherwise go unobserved.

It is because of my passion and because I understand the need that I can identify with the social work participants of this study and recognize that what they do, what we do, is influential in the lives of children every day. It is because I understand that I will fight and advocate for this profession in this particular area to evolve and progress for years to come.

Recommendations for Schools

This research is important and helps add knowledge to the fields of social work and education. The research highlights the tasks and daily functions of school social work as well as highlighting the great need for school social workers within the school system. What else will help move this profession forward? It begins with federal and the state laws and regulations. The laws regarding social workers vary from state to state.

For example, Illinois required additional college courses past a master's degree and a state certification test for certification in the area of school social work. Missouri only required a master's degree in social work to work in the schools. The requirement for additional training and certification helped; it set a higher standard for school social workers working in their schools. Although the extra training is helpful, it often deters social workers from getting the extra certification and becoming school social workers and the need in the schools continues to grow. The researcher strongly believes the states should mandate school social workers in every school building.

Also important is expanding the college and university training for school social workers. Colleges and universities should have school social work curriculum as a part of their social work departments. This will allow additional social work students to become interested, trained, and desirous of this area of social work. If more states required the training, and colleges and universities offered the programs, then there would be more social workers in this area of social work.

In order to get to a place where there are in fact more school social workers, it is up to social workers themselves to advocate and fight for the profession. The profession of social work is evolving, however it could grow further and faster if social workers stood up and asked for additional help in their jobs and held schools and school districts accountable for providing needed services.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several areas of future research needed in the area of school social work. One area of need is the education and licensing/certification process of school social workers. For states that do not require a certification or licensing, perhaps the

colleges and universities are not aware of what they could be providing to their students. This area would be beneficial because it would reflect not only what this study has shown, the role of school social workers, but also it would show how the school social workers were prepared and trained to do the work that they do.

Another area of exploration is how school social work looks in high schools. The participants of this study did not work at high schools with in their districts. There are certainly similarities between those working with the elementary grades and high school social workers, but there are some differences. It would be interesting to involve social workers that work in the high schools to get their insight as well.

This study's sample size was smaller, due to a lack of participation by some of the social workers contacted. In the future, conducting a similar study with a bigger sample size, with a greater variety of school social workers, working in different settings, and possibly different states would be beneficial. This would give a broader view and offer more insight into the field of school social work. Because this study included social workers in a more urban school setting, further research to investigate what school social work looks like in a more rural setting could be beneficial. There may be differences in what their day looks like and what difficulties and triumphs those school social workers may have with the students they serve.

Last, research is needed with male participants. There are male social workers working in other areas doing social work, but there are not as many male school social workers. It would be beneficial to gain the male's point of view and perceptions of the job, the workload, and the overall role as a school social worker. Often in schools, there

are male administrators, but a study of how a male school social worker adds to the value of the team and how they are able to assist and help the students would be helpful.

Conclusion

The participants of this study are very similar to the literature and other research that conducted. However, the level of frustration was tangible and understandable. If nothing changes, it will be hard to attract people to this profession. Children are in need of school social workers and often they are the only people some children can depend on. The need is there, but others in the school system, in higher education, and even on the state level do not always see the value that they add to the educational system as a whole. School social workers are often the glue that can hold all the pieces to a child's education together, if given the proper tools, resources, and time. It is because some do not know or understand the school social worker's worth and all that they can bring to the table that there are not more school social workers in school buildings today. It is up to the current school social workers to take a stand and fight for their profession. Social workers historically advocate for their clients. School social workers need to get involved on a local, state, and federal level to advocate for policies and reform in the area of school social work. On a national level, school social workers should be fighting for a more concrete description of what their role should be as well as their practice parameters. School districts should be more informed and educated on their role so school social workers can perform their job duties within their trained skill set and not be pulled in so many other directions within the school.

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Appendix A

Invitation Letter

Dear School Social Worker,

This letter is to invite you to participate in a research study that explores the perceptions of school social workers concerning their roles in public schools. I will be exploring the day-to-day experiences of social workers in various school settings. Your input will help expand the information base concerning these perceptions of the day-to day-activities, the successes, and the frustrations associated with the role of the school social worker. Your contribution will also help gain insight on the possibility that every school needs to have a school social worker.

This study grew out of my experience as a school social worker interested in finding out what other social workers are doing in their schools. The literature on school social workers indicates that school social workers bring unique knowledge and skills to the school system and the student services team. School social workers are instrumental in furthering the purpose of the schools: to provide a setting for teaching, learning, and for the attainment of competence and confidence. It is my hope that I will expand the knowledge base and add to the literature on school social workers.

Participants (School Social Workers) will be asked to participate in the keeping of a log with four daily entries, three days a week, for 9 weeks. To help in this process you will receive a prompt sheet to guide your entry with categories of activities, as well as a place to insert your personal thoughts and reflections on those activities. Each participant will also participate in one face-to-face interview, lasting 30 to 45 minutes. To ensure confidentiality, each participant will not be identified; in fact, each participant will be given a pseudonym, and that pseudonym will be used throughout the research to represent each participant of this study.

To be eligible for the study, participants must:

- Be a school social worker currently working in a Midwest metropolitan area school district.
- Have at least one full school year of experience working as a school social worker in the current school district.

If you have any questions I can be contacted via email, anm934@lionmail.lindenwood.edu, or by phone at 217-553-8361

Thank you,
Alesha Morrison,
Instructional Leadership Doctoral Candidate
Lindenwood University

Appendix B

School Social Worker Role Log

School Social Worker Role Log

Each week you will be given three days and four specific times to log what you were doing. Once you log what you were doing, please take the time to explain and reflect your personal thoughts about that specific activity you were doing at that time.

* Required

Name:

School/Grade Level

Please indicate the time and day *

| Month | Day | 2014 | 📅 | | Hr | : | Min | AM |

At the times given, what were you doing? *

Direct Practice (individual/group counseling, crisis intervention, family counseling, parent education)

Indirect Services (prevention services, school-wide intervention, school personnel consultation, multidisciplinary team collaboration, administrative duties, tasks involving no direct student contact)

Professional Development (providing professional development supervision, attending professional development)

Case Management (referral, abuse/neglect, community collaborative services)

Other (anything other then what is listed above)

If you checked "other" please specify what you were doing

Please insert your personal thoughts and reflections on the activities you listed above *

100%: You made it.

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Appendix C

Introductory School Social Workers Questions

1. How many years have you been employed as a school social worker?

2. How many years have you worked for this school district?

3. Currently, how many full time school social workers do you have in your district?

4. What are the licensure and degree requirements for school social workers within your district?

5. How many schools are you responsible for in your school district?

6. How much time do you spend in each school per week?

7. Please explain what your role as a school social worker included in your school?

8. Of the roles that you listed, what would you prioritize and say is your primary role as a school social worker? (What do you spend the most time on in your daily tasks?)

9. What do you perceive to be some of the critical issues and needs of the schools that you service?

Appendix D

One on One School Social Workers Interview Questions

1. How much time do you spend in each school per week?

2. Please explain what your role as a school social worker included in your school?

3. Of the roles that you listed, what would you prioritize and say is your primary role as a school social worker? (What do you spend the most time on in your daily tasks?)

4. What do you perceive to be some of the critical issues and needs of the schools that you service?

5. What teams and certain tasks are you responsible to participate in and complete in your school district?

6. Who do you report to? How do you report out in your school district? How often are you expected to report out?

7. What suggestions for improvements/changes are necessary in the school social work services that you provide in your school district?

8. How do you feel the social workers in your school district benefit your students?

9. Please feel free to provide any additional information that would contribute to this research.

10. (additional questions developed from the coding process may be included)

Vitae

Alesha Morrison was born and raised in Springfield, Illinois. Before attending Lindenwood University, she attended Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work, as well as a Master's Degree in Social Work, along with her Illinois Certification for School Social Work. Alesha also attended Salem International University and received a Master's in Business Administration.

Currently, Alesha is a School Social Worker in East St. Louis, Illinois. Prior to that position, Alesha has served as a School Social worker in school districts, both in Illinois and Missouri.