

SILENT MENTORING: A SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM

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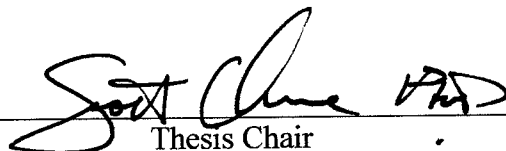
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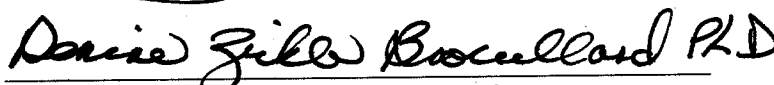
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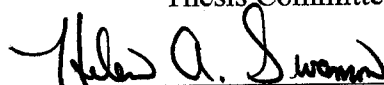
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ABSTRACT

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As a result of the media's attention to recent school shooting tragedies, school violence is now a major concern of educators across the United States. There are many theories of causes of school violence and many different attempts to prevent or reduce the likelihood of violence occurring at schools. This paper will review and analyze the literature related to one of these attempts; school-based mentoring programs. School-based mentoring programs many times are aimed at increasing students' self-esteem by gaining one-on-one attention from an adult as well as by providing them with a positive role model who can serve as an emotional outlet. The main objective of these programs is to allow students to develop trusting relationships with staff members so that the mentees themselves are less likely to act out violently and also so that they will be more likely to report any suspicions of other students planning to act out violently. One mentoring program that has been developed is designed to provide a significant relationship with an adult to a child with low self-esteem who is at-risk for acting out

violently. This program is unique in that the students being mentored do not know that they are in the program. This paper reflects a number of mentors' opinions of the effectiveness of this program. Results indicate a positive response to the program overall. Mentors generally felt the program was a good start and would recommend the program to other districts.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For the past few years, the phrase “school violence” has sent shudders down the spines of educators around the United States. School violence is a devastating event that is seemingly unpredictable. Today, we wonder what we can do to prevent school violence from occurring at our schools. The answer is as complicated as the concept of school violence itself. In order to prevent school violence from occurring in schools, three things must be understood: the definition of school violence, the causes of school violence, and the effective preventative measures that can be implemented in a school. The following paper will address these issues as well as one new prevention model that has been implemented in a small Wisconsin elementary school.

### Defining School Violence

In order to define “school violence” as a working term, one must look at the events that shape this term. The string of school shootings in recent years seemed to culminate in Columbine, Colorado with a highly publicized school violence event. School violence is occurring all over the United States. Perpetrators have been male and female (Treisand & Cannon, 2001). The definition, therefore, must not lie within a context of a type of person or school district. Rather, school violence is an *event* that must be defined in terms of an action, or actions.

The causes of school violence seem to be more difficult to understand, which may be due to the plethora of characteristics in school districts where school violence has occurred, victims of school violence, and perpetrators of school violence. As mentioned above, the schools where violent events occur have changed to include not only predominately African American, lower class, inner-city schools, but also rural and

suburban, middle- and upper class, and predominately Caucasian population school districts (Serrano, 2000). It is more difficult to pinpoint an environmental causal factor when the scope of environments where school violence occurs is so broad. Instead, we turn to the victims of school violence for answers.

The victim characteristic of school violence has also expanded to include all ages, genders, ethnicities, and religious affiliations (Binns & Markow, 1999). Adults and students can and have been victims, as well as males and females. Victims of school violence have included middle- and upper class Caucasian students. Long gone is the belief that only the African-American male students involved in gangs are the victims of school shootings. The religion of victims does not appear to be consistent across incidents of school violence (Binns & Markow, 1999). In a few instances, victims of school violence were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were not killed for a specific, personal reason; instead, they were killed because of their physical presence. Now, it is more believable to think that *anyone* can be a victim of school violence. The cause of school violence may lie, perhaps, on the shoulders of the perpetrators themselves.

The perpetrators of recent school shootings (e.g. the incident at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado) have involved Caucasian male shooters. However, perpetrators of other school shootings have been younger and from different cultural backgrounds. It is evident that school violence needs to be defined out of the context of perpetrator characteristics.

“School violence” will be defined as “social relationship crimes that stem from school experiences and are committed by students through the use of firearms,” solely for

the purposes of this paper. Social relationship crimes refer to the belief that offenders kill because of negative social experiences. Although school violence involves harm inflicted by any type of weapon (or action), this paper will focus on incidences involving the use of firearms, since firearms are some of the more lethal means used most recently in school violence incidences across the United States, and therefore demand more immediate attention.

### Identifying Causes of School Violence

Defining school violence leads us to the puzzle of understanding the causes of school violence, and why students kill. Finding commonalities in these perpetrators does not seem to be as easy as looking at superficial statistics. We are forced to look deeper, into the personal characteristics that may appear in many or all of the perpetrators. By identifying characteristics of perpetrators of violent events that have already occurred, we may be able to identify the same characteristics in other students--those who have not yet acted out, and try to prevent them from hurting themselves or others. For example, Glasser (2000) noted that, unhappiness, along with a belief that others should be punished for this feeling, is by far the main reason that anyone acts out against another person.

Two characteristics that have been perceived as fairly common among perpetrators are the presence of low self-esteem and a limited number of positive interpersonal relationships in their lives (Pietrzak, Petersen, & Speaker, 1998). Perhaps the students have one or two close friends and are not very close with any adults in their lives. These students may not have anyone to talk to about their feelings. If they are being teased or mistreated often by others, they have a natural need to vent their frustrations. If no one is there to act as a sounding board or to guide them through tough

times, these students may be more likely to act out in a violent manner, oftentimes toward whoever was teasing them (i.e. bullies) or whoever was unable or unwilling to protect them (i.e. teachers, administrators). This is not to say that all students who are bullied are going to act out; rather, one hypothesis could be that they are more likely to act out violently than their peers who are not bullied.

### Preventing School Violence

Finally, a look at preventive measures includes the question of what to do to help children who display these potentially dangerous characteristics. Some schools install metal detectors or set up hotlines for students to report suspicious classmates. Other schools may simply try to provide more positive and open environments for their students. One program, called the “Silent Mentoring” program, implemented by a guidance counselor at a rural elementary school in northwestern Wisconsin, consists of pairing each of these students up with a mentor, or a person who attempts to establish a connection with that student. The Silent Mentoring program is an attempt to offset the effects of negative characteristics that are possessed by, or imposed on certain students. These characteristics include being socially isolated or teased often, or having low self-esteem or few significant relationships with adults, that may put the student “at risk” for acting out violently, according to the guidance counselor. Please note that this “at risk” is not the same as the “at risk” identified by some school districts as students “at-risk” for school failure. “At-risk” students in the Silent Mentoring program are those students identified by classroom teachers who are ignored by most students, are often teased by other students, or have only one or no significant relationships with adult staff in the school. Significant relationships are defined by the guidance counselor as relationships

where the adult knows the student's parents' names, knows one thing outside of school that the student enjoys, knows about the student's home life, or has significant contact with that student at least once a day (e.g. says hello, how are you).

The purpose of the Silent Mentoring program is to furnish "at risk" students with positive role models who can provide guidance and care to them. In order to prevent these students from realizing that they have been identified as "at-risk" for acting out and perhaps lowering their self-esteem further, the mentor-mentee relationship is only known as such to the mentor and the mentee is unaware of the program.

The mentor is expected to attempt to establish rapport with the student and form a meaningful and lasting relationship with him/her. This relationship should be based on trust. The mentor says hello to the student each day, asks him/her if he/she needs anything, tries to get to know about his/her interests, and has lunch with him/her once or twice a month. Mentors are encouraged to try other activities with their mentees as well, such as completing art projects or working on homework.

Research has shown that having significant relationships with adults is beneficial to children (Speaker & Petersen, 2000). Although this is important, the fact that poor self-concept may be a contributing factor to school violence is also noteworthy (Pietrzak, et al., 1998). Many of the programs that have been implemented in order to prevent school violence are completely untested, so outcomes are not even known (Hoagwood, 2000). Mentoring programs, on the other hand, have proven to be effective in increasing self-concepts of mentored youth and in forming significant relationships with adults (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), 1997). As such, the research hypothesis for this proposed study is that data collected from mentors in the

Silent Mentoring program will demonstrate that this program is effective in increasing mentored students' self-concept and in their forming significant relationships with adults. If this program is deemed effective in reducing negative characteristics of students, it would be beneficial for other schools to implement such a program in an effort to prevent or reduce school violence.

### Purpose of the Study

This study is a review of the Silent Mentoring program. Most mentoring programs are open, meaning that the mentor and mentee know the purpose of the program and why they are involved. Silent Mentoring, on the other hand, refers to a program where the youth do not know that they are being mentored. The purpose of this proposed study is to describe the effects of the Silent Mentoring program implemented in a rural elementary school in northwestern Wisconsin, as measured by surveys of mentors involved in the program.

### Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it will evaluate the effects of a mentoring program that is unique to mentoring programs. Other mentoring programs involve adults paired with youth in order to increase self-esteem of the youth and to provide youths with an emotional outlet. The program in the proposed study, the Silent Mentoring program, possesses this basic format. What makes it unique from other mentoring programs is that the youth in the Silent Mentoring program do not know that they are being mentored. Also, the Silent Mentoring program is in effect at the elementary school level, and most other mentoring programs are implemented at the middle and high school levels (Speaker & Petersen, 2000). If this program shows positive effects on students that are being

mentored, it may be useful to implement the same program in other elementary schools across the United States in order to help prevent school violence.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Review of Relevant Literature

Previously, school violence was thought to be only violence in schools, meaning that bad kids just happened to commit violent acts at school as well as in the community (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1997). It was believed that violence was limited to schools with high gang activities or schools in bigger cities. In the wake of the more recent school shootings that have occurred across the nation, we have been forced to alter our beliefs of school violence. Even more alarming is the fact that research has shown that although school violence overall is on the decline (Monmaney, 2000), school violence in suburban schools is on the rise (Serrano, 2000).

#### *Defining School Violence*

Furlong and Morrison (2000) maintained that a distinction between the phrases “school violence” and “violence in the schools” must be observed. They claimed that violence in the schools pertains to violent incidences that occur at school, but may not necessarily be stemming from school experiences, such as gang-related fights. School violence, on the other hand, pertains to violent acts that occur *as a result of* the school experience, such as reacting to a poor grade or negative peer relationships.

According to Henry (2000), a definition of school violence must include levels of the perpetrators’ place within the social structure of the schools. For example, Henry’s “level 1” type of school violence would include those violent offenses committed by students on either other students, teachers, or on the school. Other levels include teacher offenses, school board offenses, and state and national educational policy offenses. In this manner, all student offenses are categorized into the same level, allowing for a more

focused definition. Drawing from this definition, Henry divided the student offenses into further categories, including economic crimes (stealing by the use of violence), drug crimes (gang turf wars), and social relationship crimes (acting out violently to resolve issues of being isolated from others) (2000).

For the purposes of this paper, the definition of school violence will be “social relationship crimes that stem from school experiences and are committed by students through the use of firearms.” The basis for this decision is that the more recent incidences appear to have involved students shooting other students or school staff members for reasons resulting from negative social and school experiences.

#### *Identifying Causes of School Violence*

Because acts of school violence are committed by individuals, each situation will have different causal factors. There have been many attempts to create a checklist of student traits that may indicate a higher risk for acting out violently; however, according to Rappaport (2000), none have been comprehensive. What is attempted in the creation of these checklists is to discover a few common underlying characteristics or influences that may or may not be present in the offenders’ situations in *most* of these acts. It is important to stress that no one factor can predict whether or not a student will lash out. A number of factors must be put into play before an individual is at risk for being potentially violent.

Two studies conducted by Binns and Markow (1999) and Scitovsky (1999) found that boredom is a significant factor in school violence in the United States. Forty-six percent of teachers surveyed thought that boredom or lack of motivation to learn had a major impact on school violence (Binns & Markow, 1999). The Scitovsky study (1999)

noted that although there were other causes of school violence, boredom could lead to violence if an individual did not find stimulation through peaceful activities.

Other studies have revealed illegal drug/alcohol use or abuse as a possible contributor to school violence (Binns & Markow, 1999). Besides illegal drugs, psychiatric drugs have also been credited with contributing to school violence (O'Meara, 2000). The effects of these drugs may cause violent outbursts or increased levels of aggressiveness, which may lead to violence. Violence in the media is also blamed by many as the root of school violence (Bennett, 2000). Students today are exposed to much more violence on television, in movies, and in video games. This exposure may lead to aggressive behavior or imitation of what has been seen. The media is also blamed for sensationalizing school violence events, especially the tragedy at Columbine High School. Students see on television how school shooters got revenge on their enemies, and how they got attention. If attention is what these students are seeking, the media has demonstrated the immense amount of attention that school shooters have gotten in the past.

According to Francis (2000), the media exploited the shooters of Columbine and turned them into racist members of the clique known as the "Trench coat Mafia." It turns out, however, that students at Columbine reported that the shooters were not members of this clique; also, it was later noted that the website designed by one of the shooters expressed hatred *against* racism (Francis, 2000). The media's attention to incidents of school violence has an effect on all individuals, including students. What needs to be determined is the extent of this effect, which is still unknown.

Others argue that the availability of guns is the main cause of school violence (Wenner, 2000). Wenner argues the point that Japan's pop culture is much more violent than that of the United States, but Japan's murder rates are lower because people in Japan do not have ready access to guns.

Barnard and Pirozzi (1999) argue that abuse of animals is a significant indicator of violence in youngsters. Although school personnel may not always be aware of students who engage in such acts, Barnard and Pirozzi suggest that they be aware of this warning sign and respond with concern when animal-abuse situations are brought to their attention.

People perceive the fact that students need and deserve significant contact and interaction with adults (Pietrzak, et al., 1998; Verdugo, 1999). When this need is not met, it appeared in certain cases to be a causal factor of school violence (Raywid & Oshiyama, 2000).

One of the main factors that was reported to increase the perceived likelihood of a child engaging in violent acts was consistent lack of parental involvement (Cloud, et al., 1999; Pietrzak, et al., 1998; & Speaker & Petersen, 2000). Also, parents may serve as negative role models for their children (i.e. alcoholism, physical/sexual abuse, etc.), which can end up being detrimental in the development of personality. When children do not gain the appropriate emotional support from their parents that they so desperately need, the next most logical setting to look for this adult support would be school. One study went so far as to claim that only two groups of people can prevent adolescents from harming themselves, and that was parents and teachers (cited in Glasser, 2000). This implies that the responsibility for students' well-being lies not only on the shoulders of

parents but also on the shoulders of teachers. However, Raywid and Oshiyama (2000) noted that with an increase in the size of schools and the larger student-to-teacher ratios, school staff members are having difficulty continuing to provide this emotional support to students. With the trend being that adults spend less time with children, these children are forced to look elsewhere for support (i.e. in the community), and, unfortunately, not all of them find it.

Without emotional support from adults, a child would likely feel some sort of negativity towards him/herself. Pietrzak, et al. (1998) noted another possible cause of school violence was that students' poor self-concept was perceived as strongly influential in causing or contributing to school violence. Thus, the students who do not care about themselves may be more likely to carry out violent acts that harm themselves as well as others. There are a number of reasons that students may have poor self-esteem. One of these reasons is bullying.

### Bullying

Bullying is another factor that has come under the scrutiny of school violence researchers. According to a 1995 survey by the National Center for Education Statistics, 17 % of middle school students admitted to being intimidated, assaulted, or robbed in school (cited in Kiger, 2000). Bullying can be found at all levels of schooling, from elementary through high school. The effects of bullying are many times long-lasting. A narrative by Meredith Mintor Dixon (2000) detailed the daily beatings she endured growing up, and how teachers and administrators looked the other way. Ms. Dixon even chose her college because it had smooth walls—walls that would not scratch her as she was being pushed and shoved against them. Effects of constant bullying permeate the

victims' lives and almost always interfere with the development and maintenance of positive self-concept. Being a victim of bullying can frustrate students, and when students do not have someone to go to with these frustrations, they will struggle to release their anger in other ways.

In conclusion, there are a myriad of causes and factors that emerge with each violent incident. Studies have presented conflicting results and/or theories, which suggests that there are many factors that come together to result in school violence. In order to prevent these incidents from occurring, many schools have attempted to address some of these causal factors by implementing measures linked to offsetting specific factors.

#### *Preventing School Violence*

Cloud, et al. (1999) noted that some schools are using metal detectors and employing police officers to impede the attempts and ability to bring weapons into schools. Having these present may act as a visual deterrent to students who may be interested in bringing a weapon to school. The police officers may also serve as a visual deterrent for misbehavior in general. Curwin and Mendler (1997) reported that stationing adults throughout the school building is by far the most effective deterrent for violent outbursts. One program, Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads Of Great Students), uses father figures to prevent school violence (*About Watch Dogs*, n.d.). In this program, fathers, grandfathers, and stepfathers are encouraged to come into schools at least one day a year and serve as positive role models while acting simultaneously as security monitors, mentors, or sports referees. This program is unique in that it involves families in the security issues surrounding schools today. Although no empirical data was presented as

to this program's effectiveness, Watch D.O.G.S. has been recognized by the United States Department of Education and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Cloud, et al. (1999) and Portner (2000) cited another tactic becoming more common is to require that a school uniform be worn by all students. These uniforms can be made so that weapons cannot be hidden in them. School uniforms may also prevent the normal scrutiny that many students pay on appearances—children of low-income families will be as well-dressed as children of affluent families, thus reducing the embarrassment of those less fortunate, who may sometimes be teased due to their clothing.

Others reported that hotlines are also being implemented in some schools in order to provide an opportunity for students to remain anonymous when reporting their school-related difficulties (Newcomb, 2001; Spencer, 2000). These hotlines have been used for students to report concerns or problems to adults without fearing repercussions. The WAVE (Working Against Violence Everywhere) program is a program in effect in a high school in North Carolina. This program involves a toll-free number that students can call to anonymously report any classmates they deem as potentially dangerous (Spencer, 2000).

Addressing the issue of self-esteem, some schools may choose to adopt certain philosophies rather than specific programs. Educating students in a personal atmosphere is one example. Getting to know students is one way to reach out to those who have less-than-ideal home situations. Greeting students, calling them by name, and getting to know their interests are all effective ways to connect with students on an emotional level.

Finding out what students are good at and building on these talents is another idea. These simple ideas can increase positive student-teacher interactions and can also increase students' self-esteem.

These ideas can also be found in mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, which have been effectively implemented in community settings (OJJDP, 1997). Youth in these programs usually have low self-esteem, poor family and economic situations, and few positive role models in their lives. The objectives in mentoring programs are consistently the same: to provide youth with positive role models, to increase youths' self esteem, and to provide an emotional outlet to youths. Mentored youth in these and similar programs are less likely to hit others, to drop out of school (OJJDP, 2000), and to initiate drug/alcohol use, and they show improved relationships with their parents and peers (OJJDP, 1997). Due to their proven effectiveness in the community, many schools have begun to use mentoring programs in their daily routines.

One group reported that school-based mentoring programs are being implemented in an effort to provide a meaningful relationship with an adult in students' lives (Cloud, et al., 1999). These programs are sometimes easier to implement, as they do not always require involvement from parents or individuals outside of the schools. Mentors can consist of any adults, including school staff members. The mentors assist students with all types of concerns, including academic and emotional, and they can also serve as positive role models for students who may not have them at home. Mentors provide individual attention to students, which may also help to boost students' self-esteem. They serve as emotional outlets to students who often need to vent their frustrations to someone who will give them their undivided attention.

One avenue that has not been thoroughly investigated, however, is mentoring programs that are silent, meaning that the students do not know they are being mentored. A student in a silent mentoring program may perceive this sudden interest from the mentor positively, which may also help to boost their self-image.

Silent Mentoring programs seem to be gaining in popularity. Web searches reveal a number of school districts around the country that have reported implementing various forms of Silent Mentoring (Baker, 2002; Hamm, 2001; Office of Student Assistance and Prevention Programs, n.d.). No empirical data has been collected to examine the effectiveness of these programs as of this date.

It is important to note that the majority of these preventative measures are implemented at the high school level, and sometimes at the middle school level (Pietrzak, et al., 1998). Mentoring programs are largely implemented in middle and high schools, but rarely in elementary schools (OJJDP, 2000). Programs are not often implemented in elementary schools, even though it is during the elementary years that prevention models focused on at-risk children have been shown to be effective (cited in Speaker & Petersen, 2000). Speaker and Petersen's research (2000) revealed that there has been an increase in the frequency of violent acts at the preschool/elementary level, which in turn demands attention from school officials, and prompts the need to start prevention models at an early age.

### The Silent Mentoring Program

A guidance counselor at a rural elementary school in northwestern Wisconsin, decided to focus on students' low self-esteem and their need for emotional support from adults in the development of her Silent Mentoring program. This program is based on the

assumptions that some students do not obtain the emotional support they need from adults at home or in the community, and these students may also have low self-esteem. These factors, when paired with unpleasant school experiences, can put students “at-risk” for acting out violently in school.

Selection of students to be mentored in the program was determined by a number of criteria that were addressed by classroom teachers in the entire school. Teachers were provided with an all-school list of students and asked to make a mark by the students with whom they have a “significant relationship.” “Significant relationships” were defined by the counselor as “relationships where the teacher knows the student’s parents’ names, knows one thing outside of school that the student enjoys, knows about the student’s home life, or has significant contact with that student at least once a day (says “hello, how are you”).” Teachers were instructed to *not* leave marks by those students who appeared to be isolated from their peers or who were teased often, *unless* he/she had a significant relationship with the student. In other words, if the student was teased often by his/her peers, but had a significant relationship with that teacher at the school, the teacher would place a mark by the student’s name.

Volunteers, consisting of any willing members of the school staff, were then paired with students who only had one mark or who had no marks by their name. Mentors and mentees were matched randomly. Mentors were instructed to attempt to establish a significant relationship with the student based on trust. This was encouraged by building a relationship with the student, which can be done by initiating contact with the student each day, assisting the student with homework, having lunch periodically with the student, or making projects with the student. The hope for this program is that by

providing attention and care to these students in a one-on-one setting, they may be less likely to act out negatively.

### Critical Analysis of the Research

A great deal of research has been done to determine causes and corresponding prevention models of school violence in recent years. Most programs used to prevent school violence involve middle and high school students, perhaps because the majority of school violence events occur at those levels (Pietrzak, et al., 1998). However, research has also pointed out the fact that there is an increase in violence occurring at the elementary level, and preventative measures at the elementary level have been proven effective (Speaker & Petersen, 2000). It appears that although schools have been putting forth effort to help out middle and high school students, they have not focused as much on addressing the issue of school violence at the elementary level, when it appears that there is a growing need for this.

Studies have not produced consistent results indicating a certain number or group of characteristics that can be considered causes of school violence. Further research needs to be completed.

Prevention models are not comprehensive, as it is unknown what factors are present at all incidents of school violence. Studies and reports indicating effective prevention models also conflict and identify a number of possible interventions that can be attempted. Due to the varying causes of school violence, prevention also varies from school to school, depending on their perceptions of the causes of school violence.

Along with other programs, mentoring programs have been used to address the issue of building students' self-esteem (OJJDP, 1997). These programs have been largely

community-based, but have slowly been incorporated into schools in recent years. These mentoring programs have shown promise in building trusting relationships between adults and students, as well as increasing students' self-concept (OJJDP, 1997). A silent mentoring program implemented at the elementary level is the focus for the current study. The study was designed to add to the research of the effectiveness of mentoring programs at the elementary level aimed at reducing school violence, and also to introduce new research on silent mentoring programs. The following chapter addresses how this research was carried out, as well as its significance.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the need for the study in relation to past research.

Methods for the study are addressed, as well as significance of the research.

Based on past research, it is evident that few school violence prevention models have been implemented at the elementary level (Speaker & Petersen, 2000). Research has shown that mentoring programs are effective in increasing mentees' self-esteem (OJJDP, 1997). Low self-esteem appears to be one of the factors that precedes school violence. Programs aimed at building self-esteem therefore may assist in reducing the likelihood of school violence.

Silent Mentoring is a relatively new program designed to address the issue of school violence prevention at the elementary level. Because it is "silent" (the mentees do not know about the program), this program is unique, and there is no current research on the program's effects on student behavior. The study focused on the following objectives:

1. Identify what activities current mentors in the Silent Mentoring program have participated in with their mentees.
2. Identify the number of mentors who feel that they have established a meaningful relationship with their mentee.
3. Identify the change, if any, in the behaviors of student mentees, according to their mentors.
4. Identify the change, if any, in other interpersonal relationships of the mentee (aside from the mentor-mentee relationship), according to their mentors.

## The Study

### *Site Selection*

The site selected for this study is a rural elementary school in northwestern Wisconsin. The Silent Mentoring program was operating for approximately two school years when data was collected. The reason this site was chosen is because it is a pilot program that appears to be a pioneer for elementary-based violence prevention programs.

### *Selection of Participants*

Participants asked to complete surveys were those adults who were currently mentors in the Silent Mentoring program. Mentors were staff members who volunteered to be paired with a student. Mentors and students were matched randomly.

### *Selection of Research Techniques and Instrumentation*

Data was collected through paper-pencil surveys in the late spring of 2003. Survey questions can be found in Appendix A. Questions address issues including: what activities have been conducted by the mentor and mentee as part of the Silent Mentoring program; what type of relationship is perceived as having been established between the mentor and mentee; any perceived behavior changes noticed in the mentee outside of the mentor-mentee relationship; and any perceived changes in the number or quality of interpersonal relationships that the mentee has outside of the mentor-mentee relationship. Answers are grouped by similarity and qualitative summary information is reported.

### Significance of the Research

The current study provides data on the effectiveness of this program, and will also add to research on school violence prevention at the elementary level.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter includes the results of completed surveys. Responses are reported qualitatively and grouped by similarity for each question. Eight out of 10 possible mentors completed surveys.

*1. What activities have you participated in as a mentor with the student you have mentored?*

Seven out of the eight mentors surveyed completed an activity or made it a priority to speak with their student at least one time. Saying hello, complimenting the student, and making conversation about common interests were noted as communication tactics. Mentors reported playing catch, playing games, eating lunch, taking a walk, participating in a chess club, playing with a pet crab, and being a playground buddy as activities they have participated in with their students. One mentor reported that he/she has not had the opportunity to work with his/her student yet.

*2. Please describe the relationship between you and the student you have mentored.*

Mentors reported the relationship to be respectful, friendly, and fun. One mentor noted that his/her student seeks help from the mentor more often. Two others reported that the mentors inquire about the students' interests and life outside of school.

*3. Have you noticed any behavior changes in the student you have mentored outside of your mentoring relationship with him/her?*

Responses to this question were mixed. Fewer referrals to the principal, being more positive, respectful and cooperative, plays with other students more, and seeks attention outside of school from the mentor are responses reported by mentors. One mentor noted that behavioral changes in the student were evident but could not

necessarily be attributed to school or the mentoring program. Only one mentor reported seeing no behavioral changes in his/her student.

*4. Have you noticed any changes in the number or quality of peer relationships that the student you have mentored has?*

One mentor reported noticing that the student is more widely accepted by peers. Two others reported they were unsure if there was a change. Four responded seeing no change in the students' number or quality of peer relationships.

*5. How has the Silent Mentoring Program affected you?*

Six mentors reported feeling positive effects, including feeling rewarded, being more conscientious about students' feelings in general, being more patient with "troublemakers," and getting to know more students on a personal level. One mentor reported that they did not feel comfortable with the fact that the program was silent. Another reported feeling no effect yet, because he/she did not participate in any activities with their student.

*6. What strengths and weaknesses do you see in the Silent Mentoring Program?*

Strengths reported included: recognizing at-risk kids and trying to help them, giving kids someone to turn to, building rapport with students, improved self-esteem of students, positive relationships, everyone can participate, and it can change the attitude of staff.

Weaknesses reported included: need more training to develop techniques to help at-risk students, difficult to approach the student because the program is silent, need more formal activities, need to have student paired with teacher at same grade level to provide more opportunities for interaction, and perhaps we can do more—we may be missing

some students.

*7. Are there any changes you would like to see in this program and why?*

Two mentors reported wanting more time to spend with staff sharing experiences and suggestions. Another would like to see the mentoring program not be silent. Two would like suggestions for more activities or how to approach the student and for the counselor to check on them more often. Two mentors reported wanting more involvement from other staff members and possibly community members. Three mentors reported no changes they would like to see.

*8. Would you recommend this program to other districts?*

The responses to this question were unanimous. All reported that yes, they would recommend this program to other districts.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### Response Themes

Overall, the attitudes of the mentors surveyed appear to be positive. Two noteworthy themes emerged in their responses to survey questions. The first theme was that mentors felt good about the fact that the program was in place in order to help children who are at-risk. They seemed to like building closer relationships with students, which the mentor program may have helped to facilitate. All mentors reported that they would recommend the program to another school district.

The second theme was that the mentors felt the program was a good start, but that it was a work in progress—meaning the program needs to make some changes in order for it to run more smoothly and possibly be more effective. A number of mentors reported desires for more guidance or suggestions for working with their student. Some wished that the program was not silent. The suggestions and concerns reported by mentors do not appear to be significant problems that would be difficult to implement. These types of concerns should not be considered unusual since the program is still fairly new and has not been formally evaluated yet.

### Elements that May Improve a Silent Mentoring Program

Based on the responses provided in the current study, it appears that mentors spend approximately 0-30 minutes per week on average interacting with their student mentee. Perhaps setting aside 10 minutes per day for alternate activities or projects may provide staff with structured, consistent time that can be used for mentoring.

Another suggestion is that formal training be developed and completed on staff participating as mentors. Regular meetings could be implemented by the program's

facilitator in order to discuss ideas, concerns, and to set goals for student mentees.

Contacts could be logged and discussed at meetings. Data can be collected and compared through these meetings as well, including number of principal referrals, observations of peer interactions, and mentee-initiated interactions with mentors.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study present some ideas for areas of future research. To evaluate the effectiveness of such a program, a number of different routes may be taken. The number of student referrals before and after the implementation of the Silent Mentoring program could be compared. Students in the program could be interviewed and/or observed before and after the program's implementation. If the program is changed or altered, a similar survey could be completed to compare mentors' perceptions of its effectiveness. Another avenue to compare overt mentoring and silent mentoring programs could be used to evaluate effectiveness.

A web-based search indicates that silent mentoring is being implemented more and more around the world. Testimonial evidence suggests that the simplicity of this type of program is what drives its popularity. However, further outcome-based evaluations must be completed in order to determine how effective silent mentoring truly is.

### Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the current study. One limitation is that, if no school violence incidents occur, it will never be known if the program prevented school violence or if other factors came into play. We will not be able to attribute students' lack of acting out solely to the program. We will only be able to speculate whether the

program was effective in contributing to the prevention of school violence.

Another limitation of the study is that the results cannot necessarily generalize to all populations. This study is based on one program implemented in one setting, a small town with a predominately Caucasian population in Wisconsin. If this program is deemed effective, it may not be as effective (or it may be more effective) if implemented in other settings, such as in a bigger city or in a southeastern state. This program may need to be altered in some way in order to adjust to different types of settings.

The third limitation of the study involves reporter bias. Participants may feel obligated to report only positive information about the program, or they may elaborate answers to make their roles as mentors seem overly effective.

A final limitation of the study involves the data collection. Although surveys were completed by mentors and sent to the researcher, the researcher did not have direct access to mentor information. Surveys were initially sent to The guidance counselor, who in turn distributed surveys to the appropriate, eligible participants. Questions were completed in paper-pencil format, and no follow-up questions were asked.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears that the Silent Mentoring program is one that fosters relationships between students and teachers. To assume that it may prevent school violence would be precocious. There does not appear to be one simple solution to making schools safer. A Silent Mentoring program could be used as part of a comprehensive, school-wide violence prevention program.

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## APPENDIX

## Survey Questions

1. What activities have you participated in as a mentor with the student you have mentored?
2. Please describe the relationship between you and the student you have mentored.
3. Have you noticed any behavior changes in the student you have mentored outside of your mentoring relationship with him/her?
4. Have you noticed any changes in the number of or quality of peer relationships that the student you have mentored has?
5. How has the Silent Mentoring Program affected you?
6. What strengths and weaknesses do you see in the Silent Mentoring Program?
7. Are there any changes you would like to see in this program and why?
8. Would you recommend this program to other school districts?