

SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PERCEPTIONS ON THEIR PREPAREDNESS TO
IMPLEMENT SCHOOL'S CRISIS INTERVENTION PLANS AND TO
COUNSEL DURING TIMES OF GENERAL CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

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This research profiled the school counselors' beliefs about implementing their schools intervention plan and counseling staff and students in times of crisis. The study took place in the fall of 2002. All school counselors in a small Midwestern School District were asked to participate by returning a twelve-question survey presented to them at a district-wide pupil services meeting. The information obtained from the counselors measured perceptions on their preparedness to counsel during crisis and implement their schools' crisis plans. The outcome of this research project was made available to the school counselors involved in the survey.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

September 11, 2001. Another date where everyone will remember where they were and what they were doing. In a time when our country was in turmoil, what was happening with America's children?

In the past two decades, parents have sent their children to school expecting them to be educated and to be safe. As our history unfolds around us, we have constant reminders that our schools are not always safe havens from violence, disaster, and tragedy. The majority of a child's day is spent in their school. Inevitably, this is the setting in which they become aware of events such as September 11, the Challenger explosion, and the Oklahoma City bombing. This gives our nation's educators the immense responsibility of answering questions, calming fears, sharing in emotional unrest, and role modeling positive coping skills for young people. According to Hoff (n.d.), “the differing responses and the ways students may mask them, most experts say, put teachers, principals, and school psychologists on the front lines to ensure that students are screened for psychological disorders, that they receive professional help if needed, and that they begin to heal from events that otherwise could leave life long scars” (p. 2). Children across the United States are affected by the crises that have occurred in our country; far more are impacted than just the children in the city in which it happens. After the tragedy at Columbine, high school students across America feared that there would be a similar shooting in their school. After September 11, 2001, school counselors became responsible for implementing crisis intervention plans and crisis counseling not only in New York City and Washington, DC, but also in cities and states across the

United States. An eleven-year-old boy in central Wisconsin wrote the following poem. He had no direct ties in the World Trade Center, but from his writing was obviously affected by the goings on in our country.

Bravery

A fireman saw the buildings coming down and he went up.
A policeman saw the buildings coming down and he went up.
The fireman saw the people coming down and he went up.
The policeman saw the people coming down and he went up.
The fireman saw the fire burning and he went in.
The policeman saw the fire burning and he went in.
The fireman saw Jesus and he ran up,
The policeman saw Jesus and he ran up.
And they found God and he blest them with immortality.
And they ran no more (F. Fleishauer, personal communication, September 11, 2001)

Whether violence and crises are occurring in our schools or outside, students are obviously affected. Hoff (1995) defined crisis as "an acute emotional upset arising from situational, developmental or sociocultural sources and resulting in a temporary inability to cope by means of one's usual problem-solving devices" (p. 4). A crisis intervention plan should be ready to be implemented at a moment's notice. School counselors need to be prepared to counsel in a crisis and assist school's staff in implementing a crisis program that their school district has in place.

History reminds us that a crisis cannot be prevented; however we can find means for effective coping. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (N. Dibble, personal communication, May 6, 2002) created a law stating that K-12 schools in Wisconsin must have a crisis intervention plan in place. Requiring all schools to have such programs in place is imperative. These plans lay the groundwork for safer, more prepared schools. Not only does there need to be an intervention plan, but also preparation and training is needed for those who will be responsible to implement them. Teachers and other school personnel need to be trained in crisis counseling and implementation of the plans, as well as the school counselors. From the principal to the custodians, everyone should receive training in the school's individualized intervention programs. Every person plays an important role during times of crisis, especially the professionals within an educational setting. It is pertinent for everyone to be able to assist in crisis intervention to the best of their ability.

According to Johnson (2000), being aware of critical situations that may arise in the school is an important part of being educated in school safety procedures. Oftentimes being involved in a crisis is the best teacher, and many schools revise their interventions soon after they experience a crisis (L. Irons, personal communication, April 18, 2002). "Understanding the counselors' role in prevention, intervention, and crisis response must lead to the professional development that will ensure that counselors will be equipped to handle what is asked of them and what they have the opportunity to contribute" (McDaniel & Riley, 2000, p. 122).

As stated in *First aid for feelings; Life lessons for children* (ToysRUs, 2001); adults cannot protect the nation's children from the "harsh realities of life" (n.p.).

Therefore, school counselors need to have crisis counseling skills and training on how to lead school personnel during the implementation of the school's crisis intervention plan. This is necessary so that students can come to school and reach their full potential as students with burdens of crises weighing down on them as little as possible.

There have been few studies addressing the role of school counselors during and after crisis, even though preparedness leads to furthered success. Obviously, the subject of effective crisis intervention in the schools is of great importance.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine if school counselors in a small mid-western school district feel prepared to implement school crisis intervention plans and counsel their students during times of crisis. Data was collected via a survey in October of 2002.

Research Questions

The following questions will be addressed in this research:

1. Have crisis intervention plans been implemented in this small Midwest School District?
2. Do certified school counselors feel prepared to implement their school's crisis intervention plan and counsel their fellow staff members and students in times of crisis?
3. Do school counselors feel that they have been well prepared to counsel during crisis?
4. Did school counselors do any sort of crisis counseling on September 11, 2001?
5. Would counselors have been prepared to handle September 11, 2001 if they were working in New York City?

6. How could school counselors and other school personnel be more prepared for crises and disasters where they work?

Definition of Terms

The following are important terms related to this research project:

Crisis- "an acute emotional upset arising from situational, developmental or sociocultural sources and resulting in a temporary inability to cope by means of one's usual problem-solving devices" (Hoff, 1995, p. 4).

Crisis intervention- "a short term helping process that focuses on resolution of the immediate problem through the use of personal, social, and environmental resources" (Hoff, 1995, p. 4).

Assumptions and Limitations

This questionnaire was created by the researcher and therefore has no measures of reliability or validity, which is one of the limitations of this survey. The population used for this study is from a small Midwest community. Many participants may have attended one local university for their graduate study and training. Certain demographic information was not collected due to sample size to maintain anonymity of participants. Results of this study may therefore be limited to the community from which data was gathered. The population surveyed cannot be applied to more broad and diverse communities. However, results of this study will hopefully provide future direction for small community crisis intervention planning and further research with larger communities. As there are only ten counselors in the district, a very high return rate of questionnaires was necessary.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will define crisis and crisis intervention, followed by a discussion of counselors' role in crisis situations. Literature about training required in counselor educator programs, and other ways school counselors receive training will also be reviewed. After learning about actual crisis intervention and what goes into it, this researcher will do an exploration of whether or not there is a need for crisis intervention. Exploration of resources for teachers and counselors will be included in this chapter. The literature review will end with important aspects of creating crisis teams and crisis intervention plans.

Definition of Crisis and Crisis Intervention

Following September 11, 2001, crisis and crisis intervention became words that were often on the tongues of counselors in this country. The definition of crisis is often debated (Allen, Burt, & Bryan, n.d.). Hoff (1995) defined crisis as "a serious occasion or turning point presenting both danger and opportunity"(p. 4). Differently, Caplan (cited in Allen, Burt, & Bryan, n.d., p. 3) stated that, "during a crisis, individuals are in a state of psychological disequilibrium and are unable to escape or effectively deal with the problem at hand".

The definition of crisis in schools is inclusive of all events that deter learning in the school (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, n.d.). Threats of violence, deaths, or accidents are all events that may disrupt the learning processes in school. Allen, Burt, and Bryan listed several crises that may involve students and school

personnel (n.d.). They are as follows: “suicide; death, grief, and loss; school shootings; gang activity; natural disasters (earth quakes, hurricanes, floods, and tornados); drug abuse; sexual and physical abuse; and medical emergencies” (Allen, Burt, & Bryan, n.d., p. 3). Terrorism and other safety issues are newer concerns to be added to that list.

Brock and Poland (2002) define crisis in schools as situational crisis. “Situational crises are events that are relatively rare, unexpected, unpredictable, have sudden onset, and seem to strike from nowhere. They have emergency quality and have potential to affect an entire school community” (Brock, & Poland, 2002, p. 273). Recent history reminds us that opportunity for situational crisis is ever present. This looming reality is a constant reminder that schools need to be prepared for crisis.

Often confused with crisis, but defined differently are stress, emergencies, emotional or mental illness, and predicaments. Crisis is self-limiting and therefore there is a need for crisis management and crisis intervention. Management refers to the process of seeing a crisis through until it is resolved, as opposed to intervention which is the course of action that is often carried out by individuals in the mental health or helping professions for a small period of time after crisis occurs (Hoff, 1995). As stated by Hoff (1995) in the definition of crisis, both danger and opportunity come out of crisis situations. Successful intervention involves helping people find opportunity rather than the inherent danger that lurks wherever there is crisis.

Natural to the human species is the concept of helping others in times of need (crisis intervention). Even young children on the playground display this natural tendency towards helping one another. Often times you will see students surround a crying child and do what they can to make things better. Despite crisis intervention being

innate, Hoff (1995) contended that, crisis is fairly new to the human service profession and rooted in humanism. Some of the first shreds of crisis intervention were seen during World War I, II and the Korean War. According to Hoff (1995), soldiers who were fighting on the front line and felt distraught were sent to meet with crisis counselors rather than sending them home for psychiatric evaluation. This allowed many military men to stay where they were stationed and continue to work for their country, which was an option that held many benefits for the United States Government and the soldiers involved. Weaver (2002) concurred that the beginning of crisis mental health strategies link back to World War I, when dealing with soldiers who were suffering from shell shock and combat stress.

Crisis intervention has three different levels according to Terry Deischer (n.d.), a Safety and Crisis Management Specialist. He lists three levels of intervention as the following: primary intervention, secondary intervention, and tertiary intervention. These three levels are rooted in Caplan's preventative mental health model according to Brock, Lazarus, and Jimerson (2002). Their book, *Best practices in school crisis prevention and intervention*, is split into sections according to the same levels of intervention. Primary intervention is a proactive approach. Brock, Lazarus, and Jimerson stated, "schools must actively develop and implement programs that prevent crisis from occurring" (2002, p. 21). This means that schools' not only need a crisis intervention plan, but crisis teams need to be trained in their implementation. Secondary intervention is a reactive approach in crisis intervention. Some crises are unavoidable, and there lies the need for secondary intervention (Brock, Lazarus, & Jimerson, 2002). Brock, Lazarus, and Jimerson (2002) noted that every crisis is different and therefore, require different interventions. These

situations should be planned for in the crisis intervention programs. Finally, tertiary intervention occurs for months or even years after the crises occur. Brock, Lazarus, and Jimerson (2002) stated that youth may suffer long term affects and will need to receive long-term assistance.

According to the American School Counselor's Association (ASCA) website their position on the school counselors' role is as follows: "the professional school counselor is a pivotal member of a school district's critical incident response team. The professional school counselor is a leader in the successful implementation of a response plan during any school related incidents and serves primarily as an advocate for students' safety and well being" (ASCA, 2000, n.p.). ASCA also contended that it is vital that districts and buildings have "emergency preparedness and response plans" (ASCA, 2000, n.p.). School counselors are also responsible for mental health counseling post crisis and to recognize when referrals need to be made. According to Flynn, "most mental health providers are not trained in dealing with large scale trauma" (cited in Simmons, 2002, p. 20). Critical incident and stress debriefing is also organized with the help of the professional school counselor (ASCA, 2000). Weaver (2002) defined debriefings as formal meetings that take place after crises occur. The majority of the people affected and people participating in intervention should attend. The main purpose is to inform and encourage the healing process (Weaver, 2002).

According to Lockhart, Keys, Perusse, Goodnough, and Noel, "the recent emphasis placed on the need for effective crisis intervention and the profession's self-defined role, it is important to determine if the school counselor's preparation aligns with the demands of the profession (cited in Allen, Burt, & Bryan, n.d., p. 4). The Council for

Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2001

Standards sets up eligibility requirements for counseling educator programs to achieve accreditation. These standards sections I-VI are different objectives that programs seeking accreditation must achieve and document. “The CACREP Standards are minimal criteria for the preparation of professional counselors, counselor educators, and student affairs professionals” (CACREP, 2001, n.p.). There are four standards set up by CACREP for school counseling programs. Standard B is the Contextual Dimensions of School Counseling. This standard states that school counseling programs should provide: “studies that provide an understanding of the coordination of counseling program components as they relate to the total school community, including knowledge of prevention and crisis intervention strategies” (CACREP, 2001, p. 30).

Counselors and Counselor educators are two other sources that have knowledge of the crisis preparation that occurs during graduate and post-graduate coursework in accredited and unaccredited programs. A recent study surveyed around 200 school counselor and school psychology training programs. Only about five of those 200 programs required their graduates to enroll in a course in crisis intervention or even offered one to their graduate students (M. Allen, personal communication, November 25, 2002). Over half of the counselors surveyed claimed they had some sort of experience with crisis intervention during graduate level classes or during on site experience. However, only 10.6% of the counselors surveyed reported that their exposure to crisis intervention was specifically from a crisis intervention course. The other counselors said their exposure to crisis intervention came from the following areas: seminars, workshops, other graduate courses that worked crisis intervention into them, or from enrolling in a

crisis intervention course that was being taught by a different department (Allen, Burt, & Bryan, n.d.).

Brigham Young University does offer one of these graduate level crisis intervention courses. It is entitled School Crisis Intervention-CPSE 655. This course, according to the syllabus, examines the history and growth of crisis intervention in schools. The main objective of the course is to efficiently prepare the graduate students to effectively and successfully function during times of crisis in schools (Allen, 2002). When participants in the above study were asked about the importance of having a class on crisis intervention similarly to the one offered at BYU, the majority of the counselors participating in their study deemed courses like this to be of great importance (Allen, Burt & Bryan, n.d.). Many of the respondents also suggested that professional development in this area was equally important.

Fortunately graduate school is not the only place to receive preparation and training for crisis intervention and there are often opportunities for professional development. Allen, Burt, and Bryan (n.d.), also surveyed school counselors about how many of them had been involved in professional development dealing with crisis intervention. 69% stated that they have had involvement in professional development activities dealing with crisis and crisis intervention. Not only did Allen, Burt, and Bryan report that they are participating in the extra training, but many times the counselors are also paying out of their own pockets to attend the seminars and trainings (n.d.).

“Terrorism: Challenges and Threats to the American Way of Life” is a course being put on by a nonprofit school called The Freedoms Foundation located at Valley Forge. This professional development course was put on for educators to help them teach students

about terrorism and learn about planning and implementing crisis intervention plans (Teachers Plan, 2002).

Is There a Need for Crisis Intervention?

After learning the definition of crisis, crisis intervention, ASCA's interpretation of the counselors' role in crisis and information on the training counselors are receiving the question is there a need for crisis intervention arises. The need for effective crisis intervention in schools is becoming more apparent every day. The National Center for Children Exposed to Violence (n.d.) contended that one in twelve high school students are either a victim of assault with a weapon or threatened with a weapon each year. They also stated that 88% of children in a particular neighborhood in Richmond, Virginia have heard gunfire near their home, and 25% of those same students have seen someone killed.

Not only are America's youth exposed to violence while they are in their homes, but violence also occurs in their schools. According to the National Center for Children Exposed to Violence (n.d.), 57% of students who are expelled for bringing guns to school are from the high school level, but an alarming 43% are from the middle and elementary school level. The repercussions of firearms brought into the schools are happening each year. Littleton, Colorado lost 12 students and one teacher from a school shooting in April of 1999 and in May of 2000 Lake Worth, Florida lost a teacher to a thirteen-year-old gunman (Learning Network, n.d.). This is a growing problem. Forty-two people died violent deaths at school during the 1997-98 school year; this number is up from 25 violent deaths on school grounds during the previous year (Mulrine, 1998). School shootings and violence however are not the only reasons that all schools should have trained personnel and crisis intervention plans.

Terrorism in the United States has been on the rise during the past decade. One of the most horrific attacks of all occurred on September 11, 2001. In the aftermath, many parents and educators are struggling with how to educate their children and students about this tragedy. According to Pennington (n.d.), there are also concerns about the short and long-term effects that these attacks are having on America's Youth. Short-term effects range anywhere from the worsening of emotional and behavioral problems to the acting out of the terrible images that were witnessed by children around the world. If these behaviors persist for over an extended period of time, parents should consult with their physician. Pennington (n.d.) also listed several things that parents should do: answer their children's questions, limit how much television their children are watching, and be cognizant of their own reactions to tragedy. These are all things that will help with the future mental health of children in this nation. Unfortunately, many parents are not as available or do not have access to the information needed to help their children. Many students' only perceived source of support through these terrorist attacks come while they are at school. This is one more reason that school counselors and personnel need to have a vast knowledge of crisis counseling and be familiar with their schools crisis intervention plan.

Lindemann (cited in Hoff, 1995) found that anyone who has gone through a serious loss and developed psychopathologies most likely did not go through a normal grieving process. Loss is a very prevalent theme when dealing with crisis and therefore Lindeman's work has become the backbone to today's ever-changing crisis theory. "Encouraging people to allow themselves to go through the normal process of grieving can prevent negative outcomes of crises due to loss" (Hoff, 1995, p. 11). Students need

to have opportunities available to them for normal processing of crisis situations around them as well. Due to the fact that a great portion of students' days are spent within their schools, much of this processing will occur there and will be lead by their teachers and counselors.

The Wisconsin Legislature state budget in 1999-2001 stated that all schools within the state must have a school safety plan in place. Tommy Thompson signed Act 9 of the 1999 Wisconsin biennial state budget in October of 1999 (Young, 2000). This initial requirement was not detailed and therefore much leeway was given to the schools in its implementation. However, the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was more detailed as to what schools needed to be doing to keep schools safe and drug free. There are five sections to the ESEA. They cover things from discipline policies to prevention activities, but there is an entire section devoted to crisis intervention plans for responding to crises that occur on the school grounds, and safety procedures at school (N. Dibble, personal communication, May 6, 2002). "Recent history has shown us that regardless of location, large metro or small rural, violence and emergencies can find their way into our schools" (Young, 2000, p.1). Not only is there a growing need for crisis intervention, now it is mandated by the legislature. All Wisconsin schools need to have a plan, and they are required to have one.

Crisis Intervention Plans

Although crisis plans should already be in place according to Act 9 of the biennial state budget act (Young, 2000), many current plans could use revision. According to Allen, Burt, and Bryan (n.d.), "the majority of school counselors are familiar with their district's school crisis plan, school counselors should work with administration and other

professionals to evaluate, improve, and update existing plans” (p. 11). Young (2000) contended that creating a crisis intervention plan in schools can be an overwhelmingly large task. Young (2000) also stated, “it would be nearly impossible to describe all items that should be covered by a comprehensive safe school plan...” (p. 1). Creating and revising crisis plans is an arduous task. One way schools lighten the load of creating an intervention plan is to create crisis teams. These teams are a core element in the development of the intervention. Dwyer and Jimerson (2002) suggested that the crisis team should have the following people included: a teacher, an administrator, and “a professional skilled in the psychosocial learning, and behavioral development of children (e.g., school psychologist, social worker, counselor, or other mental health professional)” (p. 24). They also suggest that other school employees join these three staff members, but that the teacher, administrator, and mental health professional remain the nucleus of the crisis team (Dwyer & Jimerson, 2002). This team helps create the school's goals and a calendar for the completion of the intervention plan (Young, 2000). Creating this calendar, according to Dwyer and Jimerson (2002), puts team members on the same page and reduces unneeded stress. After setting the team goals, the team can work from there, using all of the resources that they have available to them. Other personnel who have had experience with implementation of crisis plans are often good resources (Young, 2000), as are schools’ own successes and failures in the department of crisis and crisis intervention. According to Young (2000), the school crisis plans that have proven to be the most successful outline all of the crises that may arise in the school and then in detail explain how the school will act in response. The response outlined for each situation should be detailed, but not so overloaded with information that personnel are not able to

react efficiently (Young, 2000). “Considerations should be given to: who must be contacted and in what manner, what actions should take place in to control the emergency and in what order, where should people look to get information, and how will the media be handled” (Young, 2000, p. 1). Young (2000) also stressed the importance of training all persons involved in the school safety plan. Just as the plan should map out the exact role of the school in crisis, the exact role of school personnel should also be mapped out. School staff needs to know their role and also be trained in how to fulfill their assigned duties when crisis arises. Brock et al. (cited in Allen, Burt, & Bryan, n.d., p. 11) remarked: “A crisis response plan is useless without personnel capable of conducting crisis intervention”.

Collaboration between school staff, parents, crisis teams, administration, and other community support resources (fire department, police, human services) is a must for successful creation, revision, or implementation of crisis intervention plans (Allen, Burt, Bryan, n.d.; & Young, 2000).

Implementation of the crisis intervention plan is the next step, and may be the most difficult and lengthy step of crisis intervention (Dwyer & Jimerson, 2002). Dwyer and Jimerson (2002) claimed that having the crisis plan up and running could take up to several years. Training may be the most important part of implementing the crisis intervention plan. Everyone involved in the plan must be adequately trained, including bus drivers, kitchen staff, custodians, and new staff members (Dwyer & Jimerson, 2002). People new to a district frequently go untrained because training has already occurred when they start and their lack of training is often overlooked.

Dwyer and Jimerson (2002) contend that having a way to evaluate the crisis procedures is one of the most important parts of a complete crisis intervention plan. Evaluation of how procedures are working is a valuable tool for future revisions of crisis intervention plans.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

Sample selection, descriptions of the sample and instruments, procedures for data collection and analysis, and limitations will be included in this chapter.

Subject Selection and Description

Subjects consisted of all school counselors in a small Midwest public school district. All of the school counselors in this community were asked to participate in this study and their participation was completely voluntary. Approval for this study was gained by contacting the district co-chair of pupil services committee.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was an original survey and no existing instrument that addressed issues specific to this topic could be located. After reviewing research on the topic of crisis and crisis intervention, the questionnaire was developed by the researcher. Questions for this survey were developed directly from areas of the literature identified as important for effective crisis intervention planning. This survey inquires about the counselor's views on counseling post September 11. The survey consisted of twelve questions. Five of the questions were a "yes"/ "no" format. A likert scale was used for four of the twelve questions, and the last question was open-ended inquiring as to how schools could be more prepared for a crisis (see Appendix A for instrument).

Data Collection

At a district-wide pupil services meeting the co-chair of the committee distributed the questionnaire. Upon completion, the counselors could choose to return it to the co-chair of the committee or return it to the researcher via intercampus mail. Participants were informed that by returning the survey they were indicating consent to participate in the study, as stated in the introduction to the survey.

Data Analysis

SPSS-X is a PC statistics program that was used to analyze the data gathered from this survey. All appropriate descriptive statistics were tabulated, as the data was nominal and ordinal in nature. Based on the content of the research questions no crosstabulations were compiled.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Introduction

This chapter will include the results of the study. Demographic information and item analysis will be discussed. In closing, the research questions were examined and discussed.

Demographic Information

Ten counselors were initially presented with this survey and were invited to participate. All of the counselors asked to be involved in the survey were from the same small Mid-western school district. Seven out of ten counselors completed the survey for a 70% response rate.

Three of the counselors were male (42.9%), and the remaining four counselors surveyed were female (57.1%). The ages of the respondents were as follows: one of the respondents was younger than 29 (14.3%), one was between 30-34 (14.3%), four respondents were between 45-49 (57.1%), and the final respondent was between 50-54 (14.3%).

Item Analysis

The first two questions on the survey asked for demographic data. Their genders and age were described in the previous section. Question three asked the respondents if they had received crisis intervention instruction during their graduate program? Three of the respondents answered that they had not received any crisis intervention training during their graduate studies (42.9%). The remaining four counselors answered that had received some sort of crisis intervention training during graduate school (57.1%). The

fourth question asked the people who did receive training how well it prepared them for crisis intervention. All four of the counselors that indicated that they had training responded that felt somewhat prepared (57.1%).

Question five asked the counselors if their school had a crisis intervention plan. 100% of the counselors answered that some sort of crisis intervention plan was in place in their school. The following question asked these counselors if they had ever had opportunity to use the plan their school had in place. All of the counselors (85.7%) except one indicated that they previously had an opportunity to implement their school's crisis intervention plan. When asked in question seven how prepared they feel to implement their school's crisis plan one counselor (14.3%) answered they felt only somewhat prepared. Three of the counselors (42.9%) responded that they felt prepared, and the remaining three counselors said they felt well prepared to implement their school's crisis intervention plan. Question eight asked the respondents how prepared they felt to counsel students and fellow staff during crisis. Four of the counselors (57.1%) reported they felt prepared, and the remaining three counselors (42.9%) responded that they felt well-prepared counsel their students and fellow staff members during such times.

Question nine asked the respondents if they implemented any aspect of their crisis plans on September 11, 2001. Four of the counselors (57.1%) reported that no part of their crisis plan was used on that day. Two counselors (28.6%) indicated that certain aspects of their plans were used on September 11, 2001. The remaining counselor (14.3%) reported that question was not applicable to him/her. They did not disclose their reason for this response. The tenth question asked the counselors their perceptions on

how prepared they would have felt to counsel in New York City post September 11, 2001. The counselor's responses are as follows: one (14.3%) said that he/she felt a little prepared, two counselors (28.6%) reported they would have felt somewhat prepared, one counselor (14.3%) indicated that he/she would have felt in between prepared and somewhat prepared, two counselors (28.6%) reported feeling prepared, and the final counselor (14.3%) indicated that he/she would have felt well prepared to counsel in New York City post September 11, 2001. When asked to explain their answers four out of seven counselors (57.1%) did so. Many of them reported that their experience, ability to listen, or familiarity with the crisis process would have helped them during this time.

Question eleven asked the counselors if they have had any staff development opportunities or post-graduate courses on crisis intervention, and if so to document the opportunities. Five of the respondents (71.4%) have had some sort of crisis intervention training since graduating from their graduate programs. Two of the respondents (28.6%) have not had this opportunity. Example of the professional development that the counselors indicated they participated in are as follows:

- Professional Development: 1-2 hours within pupil services, course work through different university programs, Critical Stress Debriefing (full day workshop through the Department of Public Instruction), district inservices, and workshops through CESA and community agencies.

The final question asked these school counselors how they feel that they, their school and their district could be more prepared for crisis intervention. All (100%) of the counselors participating in this study responded to this question. Some of their suggestions are as follows:

- Need for more training: training was a common theme with many of the respondents. There were concerns about continuity and staff member not being prepared. Some of their responses are as follows: “every staff member should have the same training,” “a yearly review of the crisis manual and procedure as a group would be beneficial.”
- Review of crisis plan: many of the respondents indicated that reviewing their school’s crisis intervention plan more frequently would help school staff members be more prepared. The following are some of the comments that the counselors made about reviewing crisis plans: “regular review of crisis intervention plan during staff meetings (once a month),” “we need to review and discuss our plan/process on a more regular basis. We update our calling tree each fall, but it would be beneficial to review and update our plan”.

Research Questions

Research Question #1 - Have crisis intervention plans been implemented in this small Midwest School District? Item five on the survey addressed this question. 100% of the counselors that participated in this study reported that their school has a crisis intervention plan.

Research Question #2 - Do certified school counselors feel prepared to implement their school's crisis intervention plan and counsel their fellow staff members and students in times of crisis? Items seven and eight addressed this question. Question seven asked the counselors how prepared they feel to implement their schools crisis intervention plan. One counselor (14.3%) answered they felt only somewhat prepared. Three of the counselors (42.9%) responded that they felt prepared, and the remaining three counselors said they felt well prepared to implement their school’s crisis intervention plan. Question

eight asked the respondents how prepared they felt to counsel fellow students and staff during crisis. Four of the counselors (57.1%) reported they felt prepared, and the remaining three counselors (42.9%) responded that they felt well-prepared counsel their students and fellow staff members during such times.

Research Question #3 - Do school counselors feel that they have been well prepared to counsel during crisis? Items three, four, and eleven address this research question. Question three asked the respondents if they had received crisis intervention instruction during their graduate program. Three of the respondents answered that they had not received any crisis intervention training during their graduate studies (42.9%). The remaining four counselors answered they had received some sort crisis intervention training during graduate school (57.1%). Question four asked the respondents who did receive training how well it prepared them for crisis intervention. All four of the counselors that indicated that they had training in their graduate coursework responded that felt somewhat prepared (57.1%). Question eleven asked the counselors if they have had any staff development opportunities or post-graduate courses to prepare them for crisis intervention. Five of the respondents (71.4%) have had some sort of crisis intervention training since graduating from their graduate programs. Two of the respondents (28.6%) have not had this opportunity.

Research Question #4 - Did school counselors do any sort of crisis counseling on September 11, 2001? Item nine addressed this research question. Of the counselors surveyed 57.1% who answered this question indicated that their crisis plans were not implemented at all on September 11, 2001. Only two respondents (28.6%) indicated that their crisis plans were used on that day.

Research Question #5 - Would counselors have been prepared to handle September 11, 2001 if they were working in New York City? Item ten addressed this research question. The responses here were very diverse. The counselors were asked their perceptions on how prepared they would have felt to counsel in New York City post September 11, 2001. The counselor's responses are as follows: one (14.3%) said that he/she felt a little prepared, two counselors (28.6%) reported they would have felt somewhat prepared, one counselor (14.3%) indicated that he/she would have felt in between prepared and somewhat prepared, two counselors (28.6%) reported feeling prepared, and the final counselor (14.3%) indicated that he/she would have felt well prepared to counsel in New York City post September 11, 2001. When asked to explain their answers four out of seven counselors (57.1%) did so. Many of them reported that their experience, ability to listen, or familiarity with the crisis process would have helped them during this time.

Research Question #6 - How could school counselors and other school personnel be more prepared for crises and disasters where they work? Item twelve addressed this question and was a written question. The final question asked these school counselors how they feel that they, their school and their district could be more prepared for crisis intervention. 100% of the counselors participating in this study responded to this question. Some of their suggestions are as follows:

- Need for more training: training was a common theme with many of the respondents. There were concerns about continuity and staff member not being prepared. Some of their responses are as follows: "every staff member should have the same training", "a yearly review of the crisis manual and procedure as a group would be beneficial".

- Review of crisis plan: many of the respondents indicated that reviewing their school's crisis intervention plan more frequently would help school staff members be more prepared. The following are some of the comments that the counselors made about reviewing crisis plans: "regular review of crisis intervention plan during staff meetings (once a month)", "we need to review and discuss our plan/process on a more regular basis. We update our calling tree each fall, but it would be beneficial to review and update our plan".

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

This section will include a discussion of the research, the results of the study, and findings from the data. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research in this area of study and its importance.

Discussion

The information acquired from this study profiled counselors' perceptions on their preparedness to implement crisis intervention plans and counsel in times of general crisis. There are ten school counselors in the midwestern school district that was surveyed. Of the ten surveyed seven of the counselors participated in the study (70%). All of the counselors who participated in the survey felt at least somewhat prepared to implement their school's crisis plan and prepared to counsel students and staff during times of general crisis. However, according to a study done by Allen, Burt, and Bryan few of the counseling educator programs they surveyed require crisis intervention courses to receive their degree (M. Allen, personal communication, November 25, 2002). Of the counselors they surveyed 10.6% said they received training in their graduate course work (Allen, Burt, & Bryan, n.d.). Of the counselors surveyed in this research 42.9% concurred with the statement that their crisis intervention training did not occur in their graduate coursework. The percentages that are an outcome of this survey do not show that counselors in this district feel unprepared for crisis. However, the sample size of this survey was quite small and 71.4% of the respondents were 45 years of age or older and have been counseling for many years. In turn, their experience in the field may have

produced skewed results about how well they were trained for crisis and crisis intervention.

In October of 1999, Governor Tommy Thompson signed Act 9 of the Wisconsin biennial state budget (Young, 2000). This act stated that all schools in Wisconsin must have a crisis intervention plan in place (Young, 2000). All of the counselors in the small midwestern school district that were surveyed concurred that their district was abiding by this law. Of all the counselors surveyed (85.7%) reported that during their time as a counselor they have had opportunities to implement this plan. Only two of the counselors in the district implemented aspects of their crisis intervention plan on September 11, 2001. These counselors counsel in schools that are miles away from the Pentagon and World Trade Center. However, when asked how well prepared they would have felt if they had been counseling in New York City the responses were varied. 14.3% of the counselors responding that they were a little prepared, 28.6% of the counselors reported they would have felt some what prepared, one counselor (14.3%) indicated that he/she would have felt in between prepared and somewhat prepared, two counselors (28.6%) reported feeling prepared, and the final counselor (14.3%) indicated that he/she would have felt well prepared to counsel in New York City post September 11, 2001. When asked to explain their answers, four out of seven counselors (57.1%) did so. Many of them reported that their experience, ability to listen, or familiarity with the crisis process would have helped them during this time. There is little to no research on school counselors' roles following large-scale crisis or how counselors in New York City or Washington D.C. handled this recent tragedy. The comparison between the counselors' viewpoints would be riveting.

Approximately 71.4% of the respondents reported that they have had staff development opportunities. Fortunately, this seems to be a common theme. Among the school counselors surveyed by Allen, Burt, and Bryan (n.d.), 69% stated that they had been involved with professional development activities and often they paid out of pocket to attend these extra trainings.

Recommendations for Further Study

A study of a larger group of counselors, differing in years counseling and location of school district would be beneficial because it would be more representative of school counselors across the country. Surveying a larger population would also allow researchers to ask more demographic information without compromising the confidentiality of the respondents. Some demographic information that may be useful is where they attended graduate school (accredited program or not), years that they have been counseling, and what level they counsel at. Surveying the institution in which the surveyed counselors graduated would also be beneficial because you could learn of actual program requirements rather than relying on the memories of the counselors involved. Asking more questions about what level (primary, secondary, or tertiary) of crisis intervention they have knowledge of or use would also give researchers a better understanding of their knowledge base and preparedness.

Recommendations for School Districts

With the rise in crises of late, schools need to revise or at least revisit their crisis intervention plans. Many people who are responsible for implementing the plans may not be appropriately trained to do. So opportunities for professional development in this area are necessary and a large asset to the school district and those able to attend. Staff,

administrators, community agencies, and parents need to be on the same page and well prepared for when crisis occurs in school.

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APPENDIX A

Hello, my name is Alyssa Fleishauer and I am conducting research to complete my graduate thesis. My research involves a very important topic for school counselors: crisis intervention in the schools.

This survey will ask you about your experiences as a counselor dealing with crisis, implementing crisis plans, an assessment of your preparedness to counsel students and staff in crisis, and graduate coursework that addresses crisis intervention. Additionally, you will be asked for feedback regarding ways you feel you could be more prepared to effectively intervene in a crisis. Your knowledge and expertise would be greatly appreciated in answering the following 12 questions.

Your participation is completely voluntary, but much appreciated. If at anytime you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, feel free to withdraw from the survey. By returning this completed survey you are giving your informed consent to be a part of this research study. After answering the questions your response sheet can be mailed back in the envelope provided.

Questions about this research project or its results can be directed to the study researcher, Alyssa Fleishauer at (715)231-2287 or the Research Advisor, Dr. Denise Zirkle at (715)232-2599. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact Sue Foxwell, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protections of Human Subjects in Research at (715)232-1126.

For our purposes crisis intervention is defined as “a short term helping process that focuses on a resolution of the immediate problem through the use of personal, social, and environmental resources” (Hoff, 1995, p.4).

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Gender:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Male</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Female</p> | <p>2. Age: (check one box)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 29 or younger</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 30-34</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 35-39</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 40-44</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 45-49</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 50-54</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 55-59</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 60 or older</p> |
| <p>3. Did you receive crisis intervention instruction during your graduate program?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No (if you answered No skip to question #5)</p> | |

4. If you did receive training, how well did your coursework prepare you for crisis intervention?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		Somewhat		Well
Prepared		Prepared		Prepared

5. Does your school have a crisis intervention plan?

Yes
 No

6. Have there been opportunities/situations where you have had to use the crisis intervention plan?

Yes
 No

7. How prepared do you feel to implement your school's crisis plan?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		Somewhat		Well
Prepared		Prepared		Prepared

8. How prepared do you feel to counsel students and fellow staff during times of crisis?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		Somewhat		Well
Prepared		Prepared		Prepared

9. Were any aspects of your crisis plan implemented on September 11, 2001?

Yes
 No

10. If counseling in New York City how prepared do you feel you would have been to counsel post September 11, 2001?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		Somewhat		Well
Prepared		Prepared		Prepared

(please explain)

11. Have you had any staff development opportunities or postgraduate courses on the topic of crisis intervention?

Yes

No

If yes, please document opportunities. Specify by providing the title of the course or workshop, and the number of hours.

12. How do you feel that you, your school, and your school district could be more prepared for crisis intervention?