

SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION: SILENT MENTORING

by

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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. The

purpose of this paper is to review and critically analyze the literature related to school violence prevention and mentoring programs.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

School violence. For the past few years, this phrase 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 can we do to prevent school violence from occurring at our school? The answer is as complicated as the concept of school violence itself. In order to prevent school violence from occurring at 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.

In order to define “school violence” into a working term, one must look at the events that fall into this category. Up until about 10 years ago, school violence was thought to occur only in inner city schools with predominately minority populations, where gangs were thought to be most prevalent (Monmaney, 2000). More recently, school shootings have occurred in middle- and upper-class districts with predominately Caucasian populations. These events seemed to come “out of nowhere,” with little or no indication that they were about to occur. School violence is now observed as occurring in any type of school with any type of student body (Monmaney, 2000). 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.

The causes of school violence seem to be more difficult to understand, which may be due to the plethora of characteristics of 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 victims of school violence have also expanded across all ages, genders, ethnicities, and religious affiliations (Binns & Markow, 1999). Adults and students can and have been victims, as well as males and females. More victims of school violence are middle- and upper-class Caucasian students in the “in crowd.” 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. Where does the cause of school violence lie then? Perhaps, on the shoulders of the perpetrators themselves.

The perpetrators of the most recent school shootings (such as the incident at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado) have involved male Caucasian shooters. At Littleton, the perpetrators were members of affluent, seemingly “normal” families. Other shootings have involved perpetrators from lower- and middle-class families. Socioeconomic status does not appear to be a consistent factor that can be used to predict school violence. Nor does ethnicity, as perpetrators have been of all ethnicities. It is evident that school violence needs to be defined

out of the context of perpetrator characteristics.

For the purposes of this paper, “school violence” will be defined as “social relationship crimes that stem from school experiences and are committed by students through the use of firearms.” 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.

Defining school violence leads us to the puzzle of understanding the causes of school violence. Why do 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.

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, they may be more likely to act out violently than their peers who are not bullied.

Finally, we look at preventative measures. What can we do to help these children who display these potentially dangerous characteristics? Some schools install metal detectors or set up hotlines for students to report suspicious classmates. Other schools just try to provide more positive and open environments for their students. One program called the Silent Mentoring program, developed by Talitha Kempf, 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 certain students. These characteristics include being socially isolated or teased often, or having low self-esteem or few significant relationships with adults, and put the student “at risk” for acting out violently. Please note that this “at risk” is not the same as the “at risk” identified by state and federal laws. “At-risk” students 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 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 (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 need 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). Also important is the fact that poor self-concept may be a contributing factor to school violence (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 is a proposed study in the form of a review and critical analysis of the literature

pertinent to school violence prevention and mentoring programs. 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 Eleva-Strum Elementary School, a rural elementary school in northwestern Wisconsin, as measured by interviews 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 other 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 prevent school violence.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Relevant Literature

The term “school violence” has evolved into a horrifying thought in the minds of school professionals in the United States today. In the following pages, I will discuss the changing perception and definition of school violence, possible causes of school violence, and attempts at prevention of school violence. Finally, a current program devised in one school that is aimed at preventing school violence will be discussed.

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. Violence seems to be everywhere, and no one school can hide from it. Even more alarming is the fact that research has shown that although school violence overall is on the fall (Monmaney, 2000), school violence in suburban schools is on the rise (Serrano, 2000). How is America to deal with this issue? First, a definition of school violence must be established.

Defining School Violence

The term “school violence” would mean something drastically different to a school that has not been exposed to a school shooting than the same term would mean to a school such as Columbine High School, that has already experienced the devastation of a school shooting. In the first school, school violence may be thought of as when a student brings a knife to school and

threatens a teacher. In the second school, school violence may be viewed as when a student brings a gun to school and shoots a number of peers and teachers. With all of these different perspectives, how can we agree on a working definition of school violence that will facilitate our understanding of its causes and possible preventative measures?

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 Stuart 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).

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

After a definition of school violence has been established, we seek to understand the causes of these violent events. 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 none have been completely comprehensive (Rappaport, 2000). What we attempt to discover in the creation of these checklists is 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.

Boredom is one in the running for playing a major role in school violence in the United States (Binns & Markow, 1999; Scitovsky, 1999). 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). Perhaps students have too much time on their hands and spend time dreaming up ways to seek revenge on their enemies. Although Scitovsky noted that there were other causes of school violence, he also maintained that 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). Being under the influence of drugs alters one's perceptions of reality. This may hinder their ability to know right from wrong. 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. Kelly O'Meara noted that Ritalin, Prozac, and Luvox, three popular psychotropic drugs, can have serious side effects, including psychotic episodes and violent behavior. Students on this medication may be more likely to commit violent acts than their non-medicated peers.

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 glamourizing 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.

In seeking to understand the causes of violence, the media portrays what it wants, and may misinform or exaggerate facts in order to make for an interesting story. Sometimes they make the victims out to be martyrs, or the perpetrators to be heroes. According to Samuel Francis (2000), the media exploited the shooters of Columbine and turned them into racist members of the clique known as the "Trenchcoat 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 of us, why would it not have an effect on 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). If the students who committed school shootings did not have ready access to weapons, the incidents would not have occurred, they argue. Jann 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. Many of the shooters in past school violence incidents had guns in their homes.

Some mistreated students do not lash out. Students who are left out and ignored may turn their distress inward, and they may not act out until they bring a gun to school one day and shoot their classmates. These students must not be ignored or forgotten. 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 consistently lack of parental involvement (Cloud, Booth, Brice, Morse, Padgett, & Philadelphia, 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, it appears that with an increase in the size of schools and the push for fewer teachers (and, thus, fewer paychecks), school staff members are unable to continue providing this emotional support to students (Raywid & Oshiyama, 2000). 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. Another possible cause of school violence was supported by research findings that students' poor self-concept was perceived as strongly influential in causing or contributing to school violence (Pietrzak, et al., 1998). 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 is another factor that has come under the scrutiny of school violence researchers. Bullying has been around practically forever, and today it has not gotten any easier for students who look different, who are not as smart as others, or who are not as athletic. In fact, 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). It can be found at all levels of schooling, from elementary through high school. The effects of bullying are many times long-lasting. A heart-wrenching narrative by Meredith Minton Dixon (2000) told about the daily beatings she endured growing up, and how teachers and administrators looked the other way. Think of what that must have said to that child: "You do

not matter enough for me to stick up for you--for me to protect you,” or “You do not deserve my help.” 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. Some of these ways are positive, some are not.

The conclusion I make regarding the causes of school violence is that there is a myriad of causes and that more factors emerge with each incident. 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

Some schools are utilizing metal detectors and employing police officers to impede the attempts and ability to bring weapons into schools (Cloud, et al., 1999). Having these present may act as a visual deterrent to students who may be interested in bringing a weapon to school. The police officers serve as another deterrent, and that is for misbehavior in general. Adults stationed throughout the school building is by far the most effective deterrent for violent outbursts (Curwin & Mendler, 1997). When students view the officers in the hallways, they are probably less likely to behave inappropriately. 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.

Another tactic that is becoming more common is to require a school uniform be worn by all students (Cloud, et al., 1999; Portner, 2000). 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.

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 have adopted 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 it 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.

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.

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). Rarely are programs 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). A study by Speaker and Petersen (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. We need to start prevention models at an early age.

The Silent Mentoring Program

Understanding this, Talitha Kempf, 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" are defined 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. By providing attention and care to these students in a one-on-one setting, these students 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 so much focused on addressing the issue of school violence at the elementary level, when it appears that there is a growing need for this.

Prevention models are not comprehensive, as it is unknown what factors are present at all incidents of school violence. Due to the variance in 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). One avenue that has not been 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. Mentoring programs are largely implemented in middle and high schools, but rarely in elementary schools (OJJDP, 2000). It appears that a silent mentoring program implemented at the elementary level is uncharted research territory. The proposed study is 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 will address how this research will be carried out, as well as its significance and potential limitations.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter will focus on the need for the proposed study in relation to past research. Methods for the proposed study will be addressed, as well as significance of the research and potential limitations of the study.

Implications of the Current Literature for Future 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 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 one of a kind, and there is no current research on the program's effects on student behavior. As such, the proposed future study will focus on the following objectives:

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

The Proposed Study

Site Selection

The site selected for this proposed study is a rural elementary school in northwestern Wisconsin. The Silent Mentoring program will have been in effect for approximately one school year (spring 2001 to spring 2002) when data will be collected. The reason this site was chosen is because it is the only known school where the Silent Mentoring program is in effect.

Selection of Participants

Participants interviewed will be those adults who were asked to participate and who are currently mentors in the Silent Mentoring program.

Selection of Research Techniques

Data will be collected through interviews conducted by the author in the late spring of 2002 for approximately two weeks.

Instrumentation

A sheet with interview questions will be used to record the mentors' answers. Questions asked will include ones that address the following: what activities have been conducted by the mentor and mentee as part of the Silent Mentoring program; what 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. Questions may be added or deleted pending further research. Answers will be grouped by similarity and reported in non-numerical format.

Significance of the Research

There is little research on school violence preventative measures at the elementary level, although research has discovered that violence at this level has been on the rise (Speaker & Petersen, 2000). Mentoring programs have rarely been implemented at this level, and they have always been open. Silent Mentoring implemented at the elementary level is a new idea. The proposed study will provide data on the effectiveness of this new program, and will also add to research on school violence prevention at the elementary level.

Potential Limitations of the Proposed Study

Two possible limitations of the proposed study are projected. One possible limitation is that, if no school violence incidents occur, it will never be known if the program prevented school violence or if another factor came into play. We will not be able to attribute students' not acting out solely to the program. We will only be able to speculate whether the program was effective in preventing school violence.

Another possible limitation of the proposed study is that the results may not be necessarily generalized 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. As such, the extent to which the results of the potential study can be generalized to other populations is questionable.

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