

**Prepared for School Violence: School Counselors' Perceptions of
Preparedness for Responding to Acts of School Violence**

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Abstract

Analyses of 103 St. Louis metro area school counselors' using the National School Violence Survey (Astor et al., 1997; Astor et al., 2000; Furlong et al., 1996) suggests school counselors' perceptions of school violence and their preparedness to respond to said violence vary by both community setting and years of experience. Discussion frames the findings within the American School Counseling Association's National Standards, includes suggestions for school counselors to prepare for acts of school violence and concludes with implications for school counselor training.

Prepared for School Violence: School Counselors' Perceptions of Preparedness for Responding to Acts of School Violence

Within a given year, more than 2 million incidents involving acts of violence take place in schools (Constitutional Rights Foundation, n.d.). Forty percent of all violent crimes against adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 occur on school grounds (Fitzpatrick, 1999). During the 2005 school year alone, students aged 12-18 were the victims of approximately 628,000 violent behaviors and crimes while at school (Department of Education and Justice, 2007). While the majority of violent acts fall closer to one end of the violence continuum and are minor in nature, such as verbal threats or bullying, others included such crimes as sexual assault, aggravated assault, and robbery. Certainly, research suggests that so-called minor violent acts like bullying when left unchecked and unaddressed tend to lead toward an escalation in the seriousness of school violence (Flannery, Singer, & Wester, 2001; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; Thornberry, 1994).

Many people work within the school environment and depend upon a sense of safety and security to enhance the ultimate goal of students' educational attainment. School violence affects all stakeholders, that is, the parents/guardians, school staff (faculty, administration, and civil servants), and students. Research conducted among school personnel has focused primarily on school social workers, psychologists, teachers, and administrators' perceptions of preparedness to respond to acts of school violence (Astor, Behre, Fravil, & Wallace, 1997; Astor, Behre, Fravil, & Wallace, 2000; Furlong, Babinski, Poland, Munoz, & Boles, 1996). However, one member of the team whose role in the schools includes appropriate readiness and response to school

violence is the school counselor (American School Counseling Association (ASCA), 2000). One of the primary roles of the school counselor is to address the current needs of students in times of crises. A counselor's role involves providing direct, individual counseling services during and after a violent event, addressing the needs of all stakeholders, and assuming the role of a consultant in order to coordinate the necessary services to meet those needs. Gathering school counselors' perceptions of the presence of school violence and their preparedness to respond to such acts can contribute to creating a safe and healthy environment for all students, faculty, staff, and parents/guardians. School counselors have a professional and ethical responsibility to ensure and promote the safety and well-being of all students (ASCA, 2005).

Therefore, we surveyed school counselors' perceptions using the same instrument, the *National School Violence Survey (NSVS)*, previously used to assess school social workers and school psychologists' perceptions of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence (Astor et al., 1997; Astor et al., 2000; Furlong et al., 1996). We were also interested in determining whether school counselors differed in their global rating of school violence or in their level of perceived preparedness by demographic variables (age, gender, community setting of the school, and years of experience)?

Methods

Participants

Participants included 102 school counselors practicing in St. Louis County or St. Louis City schools, serving students in Kindergarten through 12th grade. St. Louis was a convenience sample because of the ability to simultaneously survey both urban and

suburban populations. Schools were identified through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2004), which divides the schools into county and city categories.

Approximately 450 surveys were sent electronically to school counselors, of which 121 surveys were somewhat completed. Of those, fourteen were partially completed and excluded from the statistical analyses. Four surveys were received from school counselors serving inner city schools or schools located in other community settings. Due to the low response rates from these groups, their responses were excluded from the analysis. The final number of participants included in the statistical analyses totaled 103 of the 450 surveys originally sent out and therefore consisted of 103 school counselors serving only St. Louis County schools. The response rate was 22.8% for the study.

St. Louis County Schools

Participants of this study are school counselors currently practicing in St. Louis County, serving students in Kindergarten through 12th grade. St. Louis was chosen as a convenience sample because of the ability to simultaneously survey both urban and suburban populations. Schools were identified through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2004), which divides the schools into county and city categories. Twenty-three school districts, totaling 254 schools represent the schools in St. Louis County. The smallest school district in St. Louis County consists of three schools and a total enrollment of 618 students, whereas the largest school district consists of 30

schools and a total enrollment of 22, 721 students (see Table 1) (Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2009).

Table 1

St. Louis County School District Information

School District	Number of Schools	District Enrollment
Affton	4	2,517
Bayless	4	1,700
Brentwood	4	792
Clayton	6	2,590
Ferguson-Florissant	24	12,722
Hancock Place	3	1,902
Hazelwood	30	19,160
Jennings	8	3,325
Kirkwood	9	5,219
Ladue	6	3,580
Lindbergh	7	5,599
Maplewood-Richmond Heights	4	1,049
Mehlville	17	11,275
Normandy	11	5,034
Parkway	28	17,927
Pattonville	11	5,654
Ritenour	9	6,358
Riverview Gardens	13	7,493
Rockwood	30	22,721
University City	9	3,359
Valley Park	3	1,061
Webster Groves	10	4,302
Wellston	4	618
Total	254	14,5957

Note. Table 1 depicts the school districts of St. Louis County. The number of schools included within each district and the total district enrollment (number of students) is included in the table (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009).

Characteristics of Participants

A majority of the 103 participants were women ($n = 89$; 86.4%) and Caucasian (not of Hispanic origin) ($n = 88$, 85.4%). Other ethnicities represented in the sample included African American ($n = 14$, 13.6%) and Native American/American Indian or Alaskan Native ($n = 1$, 1.0%). Participating school counselors' years of experience ranged between 6 months to 41 years, with an average of 10.03 years ($SD = 8.83$). A quarter of the school counselors in the sample were new to their school district and had only worked there for 1-2 years ($n = 25$, 24.3%). Another 49.6% participants had anywhere from 2 to 15 years, with the 25% remaining school counselors having considerable experience (15 to 40 years) in their school districts.

Participants served students, schools, and communities in a variety of sizes, grade levels, and settings. Of the 103 school counselors surveyed, 23.3% ($n = 24$) worked in school districts with a total enrollment of 21,000-30,999 students. Other school counselors worked in school districts with a total enrollment of 1,000-3,999 ($n = 19$, 18.4%), 13,000-20,999 ($n = 19$, 18.4%), 401-500 students ($n = 18$, 17.5%), 501-600 students ($n = 15$, 14.6%), 301-400 students ($n = 12$, 12.6%), 1001-1500 students ($n = 13$, 12.6%), and 9,000-12,999 ($n = 12$, 11.7%).

School counselors who participated in the study worked primarily in a single school ($n = 91$, 88.3%); however, some of the participants served two ($n = 9$, 8.7%) or three schools ($n = 2$, 1.9%), and one participant served more than six schools (1.0%). School counselors described their school as elementary schools serving students in kindergarten through 5th grade ($n = 38$, 36.9%), middle schools serving students in 6-8 grades ($n = 28$, 27.2%), and senior high schools serving students in grades 9-12 ($n =$

28, 27.2%). Other participants reported serving students in junior high schools ($n = 2$, 1.9%) or schools of types other than those listed ($n = 7$, 6.5%). The majority of the participants identified the school's community setting where they worked to be suburban ($n = 83$, 80.6%) with the rest indicating urban, not inner city ($n = 20$, 19.4%). Over 89 schools located in the inner city were contacted; only three school counselors in the inner city responded to this survey. Given the low representation from inner city schools, and schools other than suburban or urban, not inner city, all other categories were dropped from further statistical analyses.

Instruments

Researchers have used the *National School Violence Survey* to assess school social workers and school psychologists' perceptions of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence (Astor et al., 1997; Astor et al., 2000; Furlong et al., 1996). The *National School Violence Survey* assesses an individual's perceptions of the occurrence of violence, preparedness to respond to acts of school violence, personal safety within the school(s) where one works, and training needs in order to adequately prepare one to respond to acts of violence (Astor, Behre, Fravil, & Wallace, 1998; Furlong et al.). Factor analyses have identified factors which have the strongest influence on school social workers and psychologists' perceptions of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence. Furlong et al. identified five components, bullying, harassment, property-related, severe physical, and deviant/anti-social behavior, as influencing perceptions of school violence, accounting for 58.0% of the total variance. In a subsequent study, four factors were identified by Astor et al. (1997), included low-level aggression, physical assault, intimidating acts, and potentially lethal events. These four

factors accounted for 53.6% of the variance in the matrix and reported a reliability score above alpha equal to .70 (Astor et al., 1997). School counselors, however, have been excluded from previous research, despite their important role in the response and prevention efforts. In order to address this void, school counselors' perceptions of violence and their preparedness to respond was assessed using the *National School Violence Survey*.

The original questionnaire was designed for school social workers and/or school psychologists; therefore, a few questions were modified in order to make this instrument more suitable for use with school counselors. The questions modified were questions 1, 5, 14, 25, and 27. In addition, five questions were eliminated from the original survey (questions 11, 13, 20, 21, and 22) because they did not address the direct purpose of the research (please contact the first author for information related to modified survey questions).

Results

The current study gathered information regarding school counselors' global rating of school violence at the school(s) where they work and their perceptions of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence using the NSVS.

Assessing Skewness and Kurtosis

School counselors' global rating of school violence scale responses were both skewed (.521) and exhibited kurtosis (-.543). School counselor global rating of school violence had both a median and mode of 2.00, with a mean score of 1.89 ($SD = .827$). The scale used to evaluate school counselors' perceptions of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence was also assessed to determine the

characteristics of its distribution. This data set was skewed as well. The measures of central tendency reported an arithmetic mean of 5.26 ($SD = 1.057$), a mode of 6.00, and a median of 5.00. The reported variance was 1.12 indicating a dispersed set of data (Johnson & Kuby, 2004). Skewness was noted as -1.156 and kurtosis was reported as of 1.316, suggesting a negatively skewed and leptokurtic distribution (Johnson & Kuby).

The scale, level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence, was also assessed to determine the characteristics of its distribution. The measures of central tendency report an arithmetic mean of 5.26 ($SD = 1.057$), a mode of 6.00, and a median of 5.00. The reported variance is 1.12 indicating a dispersed set of data (Johnson & Kuby, 2004). The skewness and kurtosis values were computed to assess the nature of the distribution of the data collected from this level of preparedness scale. Skewness was noted as -1.156 and kurtosis was reported as of 1.316, suggesting a negatively skewed and leptokurtic distribution. With the results from the measures of central tendency, skewness, and kurtosis, there is an indication of a lack of normality and skewed nature of the present data set.

Natural Logarithmic Transformation

In efforts to adjust the skewness of the data set, a natural logarithmic transformation was utilized. Utilizing a logarithmic transformation assisted in minimizing the variance of the responses in efforts to create a more normally distributed data set (Johnson & Kuby, 2004). Even with the natural logarithmic transformation, both global rating of school violence and level of preparedness appear to have a skewed distribution. Nonparametric statistics allows researchers to test for independence, or associations among variables, even though the data set is skewed. Therefore, to

investigate the proposed research questions, contingency tables, and goodness –of-fit, we used Pearson Chi Squares (Stockburger, 2001).

Global Rating of School Violence

The Global rating of school violence scale asked participants to reflect on the impact school violence has at the school(s) in which they work. School counselors rated their perception on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “very little or no problem” to “very big problem”. Participants self-reported an average global rating of a “little problem” ($M = 1.89$, $SD = .827$). Therefore, school counselors most frequently reported experiencing few issues with school violence at the school(s) where they work (see Figure 1).

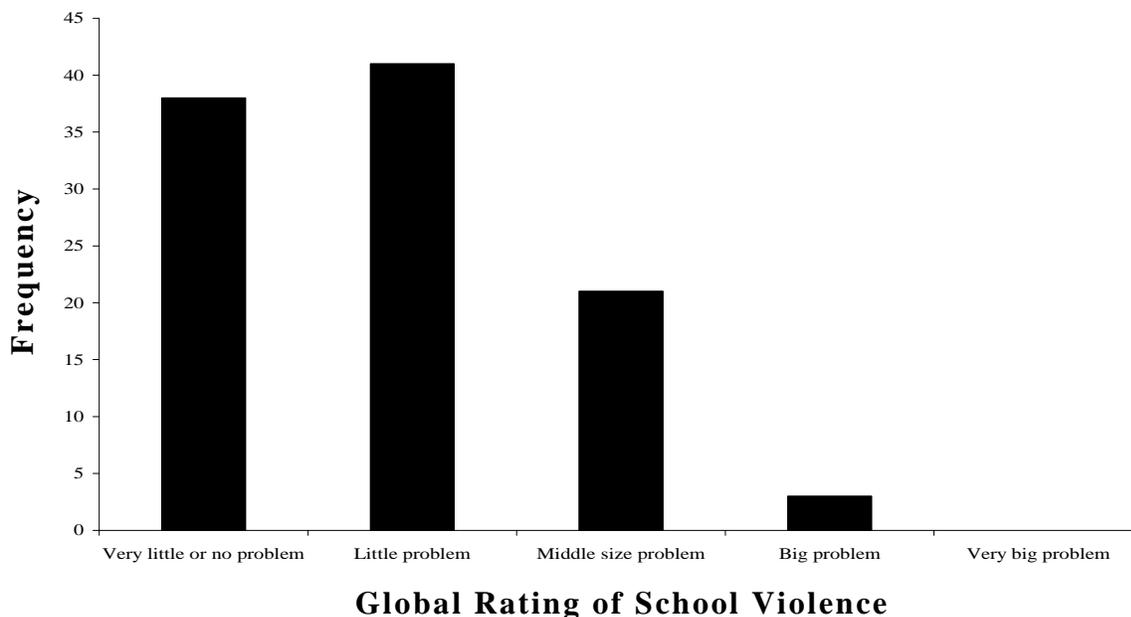


Figure 1. School Counselors’ global rating of school violence scores with reported frequencies. School counselors assessed school violence utilizing the global rating of school violence scale which ranges from 1 = very little or no problem to 5 = very big problem. Frequencies represent the number of participating school counselors who rated school violence at each level.

Level of Preparedness for Responding to Acts of School Violence

School counselors also provided insight into how prepared they felt to respond to acts of school violence. Participants rated their level of preparedness on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “totally unprepared” to “totally prepared.” School counselors’ reported on average feeling “somewhat prepared” for responding to acts of school violence ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.06$). The majority of participants reported responses ranging from almost completely unprepared (2.00) to totally prepared (7.00) and a mode of 6.00, corresponding to feeling mostly prepared, ($n = 44$, 42.7%) for responding to acts of school violence (see Figure 2).

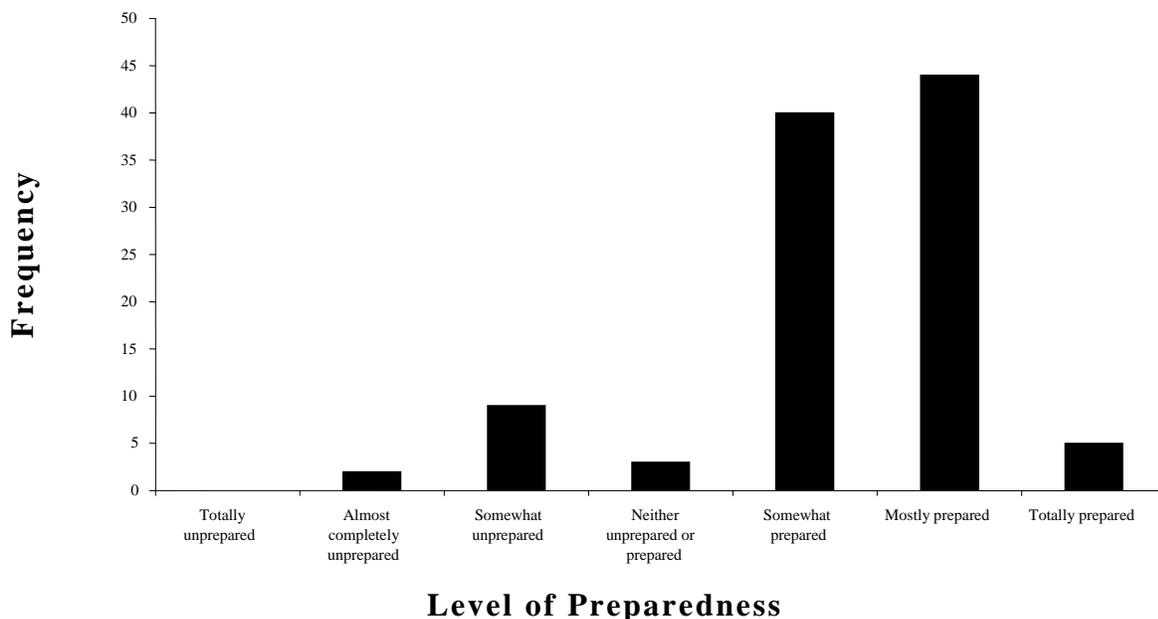


Figure 2. School counselors’ self-reported level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence, reported with frequencies. School counselors’ evaluated their level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = totally unprepared to 7 = totally prepared. The frequencies report the number of school counselors who responded at each level. Majority of school counselors most frequently indicated feeling “mostly prepared” for responding to acts of school violence.

Global Rating of School Violence and Demographic Variables

Research question one assessed school counselors' global rating of school violence in relation to reported demographic variables. To determine if demographic variables (age, gender, years of experience, and community setting of the school) and global rating of school violence had any statistically significant associations, a contingency table was computed and reviewed. Pearson Chi-Square analyses were conducted to test for independence among the variables.

The original contingency table resulted in more than half the cells having an observed value less than five (please contact the author for contingency tables). Several of the categorical variables needed to be collapsed as a result of sparse representation. Collapsed variables included: (a) global rating of school violence, (b) years of experience, and (c) age. For assessing the first research question, global rating of school violence was conceptually collapsed from five categories to two. The categories of "very little to no problem" and "little problem" were collapsed into the category of "little problem." The categories of "middle size problem," "big problem," and "very big problem" were collapsed into the new category of "big problem."

The question scale assessing level of preparedness was also conceptually collapsed from seven categories to two. The categories of "totally unprepared," "almost completely unprepared," "somewhat unprepared," and "neither unprepared or prepared" created the new category of "not prepared to respond to school violence." The category of "neither unprepared or prepared" was included in the "little preparedness" category as a result of the participants not identifying with being prepared to respond to acts of school violence. The remaining categories, "somewhat prepared," "almost completely

prepared,” and “totally prepared,” were collapsed to create the new category of “prepared to respond to school violence.” The demographic variables gender and community setting were not collapsed for analysis, as the cells accounted for less than 25% of the contingency table (Garson, 2009).

Pearson Chi-Squares were computed with the collapsed variables, global rating of school violence, years of experience, age, and the original variables, gender, and community setting. Years of experience and global rating of school violence did not have a statistically significant association ($\chi^2_{(1, n=103)} = 1.642, p = .200$). In addition, gender and global rating of school violence did not have a statistically significant association ($\chi^2_{(1, n=103)} = .252, p = .616$) (Table 2). The only significant associations occurred between age and global rating of school violence ($\chi^2_{(1, n=103)} = 7.062, p = .029$) and community setting and global rating of school violence ($\chi^2_{(1, n=103)} = 37.118, p = .001$). Finally, there was no statistically significant association between school counselors’ global rating of school violence according to demographic variables (age, gender, years of experience, and community setting). Based on this result, H1, failed to be rejected at alpha = .05. However, age ($\chi^2_{(2, n = 103)} = 7.062, p = .029$) and community setting of the school ($\chi^2_{(1, n=103)} = 37.118, p = .001$) were found to have statistically significant associations with global rating.

With significance values greater than alpha = .05, years of experience and gender do not have statistically significant associations with global rating of school violence and do not significantly contribute to school counselors’ global rating of school violence. Therefore, there is no statistically significant association between school counselors’ global rating of school violence and the demographic variables of gender

Table 2

Pearson Chi-Square with School Counselors' Global Rating of School Violence and Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	χ^2	<i>df</i>	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Φ	Cramer's V	Implications of Results
Age	7.062	2	.029		.262	Associated
Community Setting	37.118	1	.000	-.600		Associated
Ethnicity	5.363	1	.021	-.228		Associated
Gender	.252	1	.616	-.049		No Association
Years of Experience	1.642	1	.200	-.126		No Association

Note. Table 2 compares the association between the school counselors' global rating of school violence and the demographic variables, community setting (community), gender, years of experience, and age. The results depict an association between community setting of the school, age of the participant, and ethnicity and global rating of school violence. Gender and years of experience do not have an association with global rating of school violence. * $p < .05$.

and years of experience. It seems neither the gender of the school counselor nor their years of experience has an impact on school counselors' assessment of whether their school has a little or big problem with school violence. However, the age of the school counselor and the community setting of the school impacted whether the school counselor rated their school as experiencing a big problem or a little problem with school violence. Since school counselors reported generally feeling safe at school, perhaps the safety of the surrounding community impacted their feeling of safety on school grounds. Further, as school counselor age, they seem to feel their schools has less of a problem with school violence. The cause is not known through this study, but may result from the benefit of experience or perhaps of varying perceptions of what constitutes school violence.

Level of Preparedness for Responding to Acts of School Violence

To test the hypothesis (H2), several contingency tables and Pearson Chi-squares were conducted using the demographic variables: years of experience, community setting of the school, gender, age; and school counselors' perceived level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence. Ethnicity, as stated previously, was excluded from the hypotheses because it was not included as a factor in previous research utilizing the instrument; however, it was included in the statistical analyses.

Collapsed categories were needed to analyze several variables. Collapsed categories included: (a) level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence, (b) years of experience, (c) ethnicity, (d) age of school counselor, and (e) community setting of the school. Based on Research Question One, the categories of global rating of school violence had already been collapsed into two new categories, "little problem" and "big problem." This newly categorized variable was used to evaluate Research Question Two. In addition, various demographic variables, age, gender, years of experience, and community setting, were included in contingency tables and collapsed conceptually due to the presence of a sparse table indicated by cells with observed values of less than five. Years of experience and age had their corresponding categories collapsed into smaller groupings.

The original variable, years of experience, reported values ranging from 6 months to 41 years with varying frequencies and was initially collapsed into six categories, 6 months-1.5 years, 2-5 years, 5-10 years, 10-20 years, 20-30 years, and 30-41 years of experience. A contingency table was computed on these new groupings, however, sparse cells were still reported. The new groupings were reevaluated and

collapsed into smaller groups. The groupings were conceptually collapsed from six categories to two: “new to the profession,” representing 6 months-5 years and “experienced professional,” representing 10- 41 years of experience.

The demographic variable, age, also required related categories to be collapsed in effort to reduce the occurrence of a sparse table, or cells with less than five observed frequencies. The original variable of age consisted of five categories, “21-29”, “30-39”, “40-49”, “50-59”, and “over 60.” Based on the original contingency table, several sparse cells were calculated. Therefore, the original variable was collapsed into three categories, “21-39,” “40-49,” and “over 50”. The three new categories defined the age variable for the Pearson Chi-Square analyses. The other demographic variables included in this research question were gender and community setting. The demographic variable consisted of two groups, male and female. Based on the results of the contingency table, some observed frequencies were reported with values less than five. However, these cells accounted for less than 25% of the table and therefore, could remain (Garson, 2009). In addition, community setting and global rating of school violence were included in the calculation of a 2x2 contingency table reporting the observed and expected frequencies within each category. The contingency table reported no sparse cells, therefore the categories related to community setting were not collapsed.

No significant associations existed between any of the demographic variables and school counselors’ perceived level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence. Therefore, using sequential Chi-Square analyses, the null hypothesis, there is no statistically significant association between demographic variables (age, community

setting of the school, gender, and years of experience) and school counselors' perceived level of preparedness, failed to be rejected. This failure to reject the null hypothesis suggests that the demographic variables of age, gender, years of experience, and community setting are not associated with school counselors' level of preparedness in responding to acts of school violence.

Table 3

Pearson Chi-Square Analyses with School Counselors' Level of Preparedness and Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	χ^2	<i>df</i>	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Φ	Implications of Results
Age	2.286	1	.131	.149	No association
Community Setting	.042	1	.838	.020	No association
Ethnicity	2.555	1	.110	.158	No association
Gender	3.095	1	.079	.173	No association
Years of Experience	.850	1	.356	.091	No association

Note. Table 3 compares the association between the school counselors' perceived level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence and the demographic variables, community setting of the school (community), gender, years of experience, age, and ethnicity. The results depict no associations between community setting of the school, age of participant, ethnicity, gender, and years of experience. * $p < .05$.

Perception of Preparedness and Presence of School Violence

The final research question examined whether school counselors' level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence differs according to their global rating of school violence. A Pearson Chi-Square was computed to determine if there was a statistically significant association between global rating of school violence and school counselors' perceived level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence. Prior to the analysis, the contingency table, including the responses for global

rating of school violence and level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence, was reviewed.

Based on the results of the original contingency table with global rating of school violence and level of preparedness, numerous categories of global rating of school violence and level of preparedness were collapsed for analysis (please contact authors for contingency tables). Collapsed categories included: (a) global rating of school violence and (b) level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence. Reviewing the contingency tables supported the use of collapsed categories for several variables. Level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence was remained collapsed into two categories, “not prepared to respond to school violence” and “prepared to respond to school violence” as stated previously in Research Question One. In addition, age, ethnicity, and years of experience were identified as having categories which need to be collapsed as a result of sparse results in the contingency table. Categories associated with both years of experience and ethnicity were collapsed as noted in Research Question Two. Ethnicity, as noted in Research Question Two, was not included in the proposed hypotheses, but was included in the statistical analysis. Based on previous findings, the categories of ethnicity remained collapsed into two categories, “minority” and “Caucasian.” The redefined variables, years of experience, ethnicity, and age, in addition to gender and community setting were included in Pearson Chi-Square analyses to test for independence among the variables. The years of experience variable was collapsed into two categories “new professional” and “experienced professional” and ethnicity was collapsed into “Caucasian” and “minority.”

Age, previously collapsed in Research Question Two, when included in a contingency table with level of preparedness, resulted in the presence of a sparse table, having one or more cells with less than five observed responses. Therefore, the various age categories were collapsed into two groups. The first group represented the ages of “21-39” and the second group represented those school counselors who identified themselves as “over the age of 40”. This variable, with its redefined categories, was included in the Pearson Chi-Square analysis between age and level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence.

Community setting and level of preparedness were included in a 2x2 contingency table. The cell “suburban, not prepared” reported observed values less than 5; however, this cell represented less than 25% of the entire table warranting continued use of the identified categories. Similarly, the demographic variable gender and level of preparedness were included in a 2x2 contingency table reporting a single cell (male, not prepared) with an observed frequency of less than 5. This accounted for less than 25% of the total contingency table, allowing for these categories to remain in their original categories (Garson).

After redefining the categories of global rating of school violence and level of preparedness, a Pearson Chi-Square was calculated to determine if there was a statistically significant association between the two variables. Based on the analysis there is not a statistically significant association between global rating of school violence and level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence at alpha = .05 level ($\chi^2_{(1, n=103)} = 3.467, p = .063$). The null hypothesis failed to be rejected; therefore, global

rating of school violence and level of preparedness appear to have no statistically significant association.

Discussion

Acts of school violence occur at varying intensities, frequencies, and locations throughout school buildings, leaving a lasting impact on the school environment. School administrators, faculty, staff, and other school based professionals assume a responsive role when faced with addressing problems of school violence. Past research has focused on the perceptions of school violence and school personnel's preparedness for responding to acts of school violence. However, school counselors, key players in creating a safe learning environment, were excluded. School counselors have a professional responsibility for the safety and well-being of all students and are at the forefront when responding to school crises, such as acts of school violence (ASCA, 2000).

Global Rating of School Violence

School violence plagues the hallways, cafeterias, locker rooms, classrooms, and various other locations within the school (Astor, Meyer, & Pitner, 2001; Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Trump, 2000). Students and school personnel may have varying perceptions of the problem of violence within the schools. For example, students generally reported feeling safe while at school (Skiba et al., 2004). School psychologists often report little concern about their personal safety (Furlong, Babinski, Poland, Munoz, & Boles, 1996) while school social workers reported concern (Astor, Behre, Fravil, & Wallace, 1998). Comparing students and various school personnel's perceptions of the

presence of school violence provides insight into the impact violence has on students, faculty, and school environment.

Among the school counselors' in this study who perceived "little problem" with school violence at their schools, age and whether the school was in a suburban or urban (not inner city) setting seemed to matter. Age of the school counselor and global rating of school violence report a statistically significant association; however, the complete nature of the association requires further analysis. It seemed as school counselors' age, their perceptions of the problem of school violence decreases. Similarly, school counselors in suburban settings viewed school violence as less of a problem than school counselors in urban settings. Reasons behind these variations are unknown from this study; however future studies could explore the implications. The implications of the association between community setting of the school and global rating of school violence suggests support for school-community collaboration to help prevent acts of school violence occurring both in school and around the surrounding community.

Preparedness for Responding to Acts of School Violence

School psychologists, social workers, and school counselors work collaboratively with other school personnel to support students' emotional, social, and academic well-being (ASCA, 2004; CACREP, 2001; NASP, n.d.; SSWAA, n.d.). However, acts of school violence hinder school personnel from providing a safe and healthy environment to enable students' self-exploration and growth. Participating school counselors reported feeling "somewhat prepared" ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.06$) to respond to violence regardless of years of experience, age, gender, and community setting of the school.

These findings suggest school counselors' levels of preparedness are not associated with age, gender, years of experience, and community setting. Understanding the importance of feeling adequately prepared for responding to acts of school violence can assist school personnel, especially school counselors, to feel confident about their ability to fulfill their duties to stakeholders of the school community.

Level of Preparedness and Global Rating of School Violence

The current research found school counselors perceived school violence to be a "little or no problem" at their schools and felt "somewhat prepared for responding to acts of violence." Global rating of school violence and level of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence was not found to be associated ($\chi^2 (1, n = 103) = 3.467, p = .063$). These findings suggest that as school counselors reflect on the problem with school violence or their level of preparedness to respond, they do not generally consider either the size of the problem or how well they feel they can respond; rather participants tend to evaluate each of these areas independently. Yet research suggests that being mentally prepared to address violence and crises often makes a difference in successfully handling violent situations (Aguilera, 1998; Jaksec, 2007; Trump, 2000). Therefore, it is important for school counselors to reflect both on how they perceive the presence of school violence at their schools and on how prepared they perceive themselves to be to respond to acts of school violence. Careful consideration of these areas is important for school counselors so they can ensure their ability to adequately respond to the needs of faculty, staff, and students when faced with the repercussions of acts of school violence.

Implications for School Counselors

School counselors collaborate and consult with various stakeholders and community resources in order to facilitate the healthy academic, physical, social, emotional growth and achievement of all students (ASCA, 2004; CACREP, 2001; CACREP, 2009). To aid in school counselors' mission to ensure the health and well-being of all students, the ASCA National Model provides a framework to assist in the identification, development, and implementation of responsive services to help support student in times of crisis. In conjunction with responding to students' needs, school counselors fulfill the role of a consultant, meeting with parents, administrators, teachers, and other professionals to coordinate appropriate and necessary services to meet the present needs of the school community (ASCA, 2000). Knowledge of school counselors' experiences with school violence, their ability to adequately respond, concerns with personal safety, programs and services available at the schools, and training needs provide a comprehensive view of the importance of being prepared to respond to acts of school violence.

Designing programs that meet the National Model guidelines, school counselors can establish services to address the immediate needs and concerns of students. Providing students with a safe environment to grow socially, emotionally, and academically is the school's responsibility. By promoting awareness of school violence and preparedness to respond, school counselors will be more confident to respond in situations of school violence and assist in creating a school community that is a safe and supportive environment promoting the healthy growth and development of every student. School counselors can use these results to argue for additional training.

Indeed, school counselors in the St. Louis area may use these results to begin discussions to coordinate additional school violence training for their school districts.

ASCA National Model

The ASCA National Model provides a framework for school counselors to develop and implement services that meet the needs of students and stakeholders. Within the direct service component of the model, school counselors are responsible for meeting students' immediate needs and concerns, especially in times of crisis (ASCA, 2005). School counselors engage in a variety of responsive services to meet the concerns of students when faced with a crisis, such as school violence. Responsive services include consultation, individual and small group counseling, referrals, peer facilitation, and crisis counseling (ASCA). Other responsive services included in the National Model include the school counselors' role in providing prevention education addressing life choices (7.1), assisting students in solving immediate problems which present barriers to their academic, career, and personal/social development (7.2), and the presence of a system to ensure intervention for identified students (7.5). Direct services meet the National Model standards by providing individual and small group counseling, crisis counseling, and peer facilitation (ASCA, 2005; 7.4). The National Model also supports the use of indirect services such as consultation/collaboration and referral system (7.4).

Limitations of Current Study

Although this research provides valuable insight into school counselors' perceptions of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence, there are limitations to consider when interpreting the results, including the small sample size, the

low response rate, the use of non-parametric statistical analysis, issues with the administration and use of the survey instrument, and the self-report procedure for data collection.

To assess school counselors' global rating of school violence and their preparedness for responding to school violence, the *National School Violence Survey* was utilized. This instrument has evaluated school social workers and school psychologists' perceptions of school violence and preparedness to respond (Astor, Behre, Fravil, & Wallace, 1997; Astor, Behre, Fravil, & Wallace, 1998; Furlong, Babinski, Poland, Munoz, & Boles, 1996). Lacking psychometric support, the reliability and validity of the instrument is questionable. The *NSV S* presented several additional limitations with its use in the assessment of school counselors' preparedness for responding to acts of school violence. Based on the format of the survey questions, school counselors had several categories to select from to answer each question. When data from these numerous categories were reviewed, reported data appeared to be skewed, suggesting that the data was more dichotomous in nature. As a result of the skewed results, nonparametric statistics were used to test for independence, or associations among variables. Therefore, to investigate the proposed research questions, contingency tables and Pearson Chi-Squares were assessed. Participants' responses appeared to easily segregate into smaller groupings. This stems from the format of the instrument, and warrants further examination in future research.

Additional issues occurred from the use of email to distribute and collect the survey. School counselors' contact information was gathered from their respective school district websites or through contacting the school directly. One school district did

not provide direct contact information for each school counselor, but rather the school provided one central contact who would forward the survey to their school counselors. Unfortunately, as the survey was forwarded, the hyperlink was deactivated, thereby making the survey inaccessible. Having the direct contact information for all participants may decrease any issues with forwarding the research request. In addition, the city schools did not respond to the survey, thereby lowering the response rate significantly.

Recommendations for Future Research

Limited research is available assessing school counselors' perceptions of school violence and their ability to respond to such events. School counselors' ability to prepare for and respond to acts of school violence needs continued exploration. However, an assessment tool with strong psychometric properties is needed as researchers continue to examine school counselors' perceptions of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence. Currently, no such instrument exists. Therefore, it would be beneficial to norm and validate the instrument used for the current research, as well as conduct a confirmatory factor analysis. Furthermore, future research could evaluate the format and construction of the current survey instrument.

A qualitative component to the assessment instrument would add richness and depth to the data while expanding the sampling pool to include practicing school counselors from across the United States would increase external validity. Expanding the analysis to assess the impact of the relationship between various other variables and school counselors' perceptions of preparedness for responding to acts of school violence would also provide additional insights. For example, assessing the relationship between the demographic variable, such as ethnicity, and school counselors' global

rating of school violence as well as their perceptions for responding to acts of school violence would provide valuable insight into the significance of this relationship.

Future research with school counselors addressing their perceptions of violence and preparedness for responding is important to provide useful information for the development of programs and services as well as identification of areas in which additional training is warranted. Through obtaining this information, school counselors can continue their personal and professional growth as well as strive to foster a safe and healthy school environment for all stakeholders.

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