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# School Counselors Perceptions of the Importance and Need for Appropriate Training Regarding Preparedness to Deal with Specific Crisis Situations in Schools

Tina Bigante

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SCHOOL COUNSELORS PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE AND NEED  
FOR APPROPRIATE TRAINING REGARDING PREPAREDNESS TO DEAL WITH  
SPECIFIC CRISIS SITUATIONS IN SCHOOLS

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

Duquesne University

August 2005

(Signature Page)

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My Ph.D. is dedicated to my loving father,  
TADDEO BIGANTE. Your continuous love, honor,  
faith, devotion, and pride has taught me so much.  
You are my inspiration.

This book is dedicated in loving memory of my mother,  
ROSA BIGANTE, who died December 17, 1995  
and of my uncle DOMENICO BIGANTE who died  
April 2, 2005. I feel your guidance and support daily.  
Thank you for being my guardian angels.

School Counselors Perceptions of the Importance and Need for Appropriate Training Regarding Preparedness to Deal with Specific Crisis Situations in Schools, explored differences among and between school counselors who have been trained and school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention with regards to specific crisis situations. The subjects were 70 school counselors employed in public school districts of western Pennsylvania. Thirty-five of the school counselors had received training in crisis intervention either through university coursework and/or workshops. The other thirty-five school counselors had no formal training in crisis intervention. All participants completed the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs. This study sought to measure school counselor perceptions of the importance of being skilled and the perceptions of the need for appropriate training regarding specific crisis situations. The results of the study found school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention perceived the importance for being skilled and the need for appropriate training in crisis intervention to be necessary. Furthermore, the data showed the school counselors who have not been formally trained in crisis intervention perceived the importance for skills to be important, but the need for appropriate training in crisis intervention was not significant. Recommendations regarding specified trainings and coursework at the university level as well as school employment level may significantly contribute to the literature. Understanding the importance of being skilled and the need for appropriate training in crisis intervention permits informed decisions to be made for school counselors in training as well as practicing school counselors. Additionally, school districts should benefit from knowing the results of this

study in order to establish in-service trainings that address what school counselors perceive to be important training. Finally, Counselor Education programs also derive benefits from the results of this study. Of most importance is the determination of whether or not it is important to include training in crisis intervention as part of the counselor-education training program for school counselors.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As the nation watched the news, students at Columbine High School were trying to escape as two of their male classmates were shooting students and staff. Some tried escaping from two-story high windows while others fled through the back doors. Frightened parents stood anxiously in the parking lot as they waited desperately for their child to exit safely from the high school. Then in March of 2001, two students were killed and a 15 year-old classmate at Santana High School in Santee, California, wounded 13 more. Only two days later, in Williamsport, PA, a 14 year-old depressed and frequently teased student wounded a classmate in the cafeteria. Six month's later, hijacked planes crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a Pennsylvanian field killing thousands. Then, in April of 2003, a 14 year-old student killed his principal of Red Lion Area Junior High School before killing himself. Millions witnessed these scenes. American citizens were exposed to these crises either on a primary (directly involved) or secondary level (exposure to the event via the news). Even more critical are the life changing effects that students and educators must deal with as a result of their direct involvement in these crisis situations.

While the previous crisis situations may seem extreme, a crisis of any sort can have deteriorating effects on a student. "If a school-related trauma is not adequately addressed at school, temporary disruptions in children's ability to concentrate can create a downward spiral in academic performance. Likewise, how schools manage a crisis in the short-term can negatively affect longer-term functioning" (Kline, Schonfeld, & Lichtenstein, 1995, p. 245). This investigator believes that not only does not adequately

handling a crisis event have negative impacts on the child, but it also can have grave <sup>2</sup> impacts on the school's performance rate as determined by the state's proficiency tests.

The goal of No Child Left Behind is to create the best educational opportunities for school children and to ensure they have every opportunity to succeed (ASCA, 2000). No Child Left Behind has implications for schools and school districts throughout America. If a school district does not meet the state standards, the school will become known as a failing school, and the repercussions can be as extreme as closing the school forever (ASCA, 2000). The implementation of higher student performance as mandated by the high stakes proficiency tests, the No Child Left Behind act, and an educator's duty to ensure the well-being of each student, provides the impetus to critically examine the school counselors' perceptions of how well trained and how important it is for a school counselor to be skilled to effectively handle crisis situations in schools (ASCA, 2000).

James and Gilliland (2005, p. 3) define crisis as, "a perception or experiencing of an event or situation as an intolerable difficulty that exceeds the person's current resources and coping mechanisms." "During a crisis, individuals are in a state of psychological disequilibrium and are unable to escape or effectively deal with the problem at hand" (Caplan, 1964, p. 4). In the school context, a crisis has the potential to destabilize the safety and stability of the entire school (Johnson, 2000). As a result, many schools have enacted school crisis plans and developed crisis management teams to handle crisis situations (Slaikeu, 1990).

A school crisis plan typically encompasses guidelines and procedures to handle a variety of potential school crisis situations (Sandoval, 2002). Routinely, specific

school representative roles are designated throughout the plan (Gerber & Feldman, 2002). These representatives are the persons that make up the crisis management teams. Most often cited personnel include superintendents, administrators, school counselors, teachers, and the school nurse. According to much research, an effective crisis management team, together, should develop, practice, and continuously evaluate the crisis plan (Basham, Appleton, & Dykeman, 2000; Fanolis, 2001, Gerber & Feldman, 2002). In doing so, these personnel will be better prepared to carry out their designated role during the time of a crisis situation (Sandoval, 2002).

As is evident, the crisis management team consists of numerous educators with a variety of educational backgrounds, a diverse collage of expertise, unique personal and professional experiences, and different school schedules. Effective crisis management depends on the amount of pre-planning and the immediacy of action during a crisis situation (Clark & Harman, 2004; Slaikou, 1990; James & Gilliland, 2005). Pre-planning does not consist of trying to develop a plan on how to handle each and every potential crisis situation (Clark & Harman, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005; Slaikou, 1990). Instead, pre-planning is about “developing the capability within the organization to react flexibly and to make the right snap decisions that will be required when a crisis does happen” (Clark & Harman, 2004, p. 41). In order to accomplish this goal, training and practicing through exercises must occur continuously (Clark & Harman, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005).

Another important factor that must be considered for effective crisis management is the school counselors’ feelings of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy consists of three major components: (a) efficacy expectations, (b) outcome expectations, and (c)

outcome values (King, Price, Telljohann, & Wahl, 1999). “Efficacy expectations refer<sup>4</sup> to the beliefs that one can successfully perform a specific behavior required to achieve desired outcomes” (King et al., 1999, p. 458). The stronger one’s efficacy expectations the more willing the individual will strive to overcome barriers to reach the desired outcome. “Outcome expectations refer to the beliefs that performing a specified behavior will lead to certain outcomes” (King et al., 1999, p. 458). Again, the stronger one’s outcome expectations are, the more likely that individual will work towards achieving his or her desired goal. Finally, “outcome values refer to the worth or significance that one places on the expected outcomes of a specified behavior” (King et al., 1999, p. 458). The more an individual believes the work is worthy of his or her time, the more impact this belief will have on the individual’s work performance. How confident and comfortable school counselors perceive themselves to be in handling specific crisis situations largely depends on this self-efficacy model described.

Allen et al. (2002a) conducted a research study that examined the match between the preparation of school counselors for crisis intervention and the demands of the profession. Shockingly, they found that on average, the school counselors of Allen et al.’s (2002a) study, reported feeling less than adequately prepared to deal with crisis situations. This is stated even though the school counselors reported that they are very familiar with their school crisis plan. In addition, “most school counselors reported that having a university class geared specifically to crisis intervention was very important and that both crisis prevention and intervention should be integrated with existing course work as well” (Allen et al., 2002a, p. 10). These findings are interesting to note that while a school may have an intact crisis plan, school counselors did not feel that

they were adequately prepared to handle a crisis situation. This leads to question what<sup>5</sup> universities and schools are actually doing to prepare school counselors in order to effectively handle crisis situations.

Many factors were encompassed in this examination of school preparedness for crisis situations. Of primary importance was the analysis of whether or not school counselors perceived an importance to be skilled and a need for appropriate training in crisis intervention. Furthermore, an investigation of whether or not there were differences in perceptions between the school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention and the school counselors who have not been trained was necessary. Encompassed in this factor included such things as hours of training, previous education, perceptions on the importance of being skilled, and perceptions on the need for training in crisis intervention. Finally, of critical importance was the examination of how prepared school counselors perceived the need for school counselors to have the skills and necessary training to effectively handle specific crisis situations.

With the persistent potential that a crisis situation can occur, the negative impacts that the crisis can have on a student, and the grave consequences for a school system, it is imperative to examine the perception of crisis preparedness of school counselors.

This study examined whether school counselors believed it was necessary to be skilled and important to have the appropriate training to deal with a variety of crisis situations. In addition demographic information collected identified whether or not the school counselors have received training to deal with crisis situations and whether or not the school counselors believed they were prepared to deal with crisis situations. The specific details were to determine if there was a significant difference between how important the school counselors perceived having skills to deal with crisis situations when compared to how important they believed it was to have training to deal with these crisis situations. There was also a differentiation to determine if there were these differences when comparing school counselors who have been trained to school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The specific research questions addressed were:

1. Do school counselors perceive that it is important to have the appropriate skills to deal with specific crisis situations?
2. Do school counselors perceive that it is important to have specialized training to deal with specific crisis situations?
3. Is there a discrepancy in the school counselors' perceptions between the importance of having the skills and the importance of having the training?
4. Is there a discrepancy in the school counselors' perceptions when differentiating by being trained to deal with crises?

Adolescents today have to deal with many types of crises (James & Gilliland, 2005). School counselors must be prepared to effectively handle the multi-faceted types of crisis situations that students may deal with on a daily basis (James & Gilliland, 2005; Sandoval, 2002). Allen et al.'s study (2002a) suggested that future research should address the adequacy of a crisis plan and examine what part school counselor's play in developing, organizing, and maintaining the crisis plan.

There is high fidelity between the results of Allen et al.'s (2002a) study and the investigators own experiences being a school counselor. For instance, the investigator has attended numerous conferences in which she inquired the opinions of her colleagues about their feelings of preparedness in dealing with crisis situations. The large majority spoke to their feeling unprepared in most crisis situations. In addition, the investigator questioned other school districts as to how they implemented their crisis program, if they have one, and the general response was a binder was given to each staff member that contained very general guidelines on how to deal with a few specific situations. Through informal interviews, the investigator discovered that very few schools spent any time during an in-service day discussing protocols for crisis situations. Even more dreadful is that most school districts admitted that they have not updated their binders in many years.

Ensuring school counselors are skilled and appropriately trained in crisis intervention is imperative to promoting the well-being of students (James & Gilliland, 2005; Sandoval, 2002). While much research validates this knowledge, it is important to assess what schools and universities are doing in response to this validated information.

Specifically, it is important to investigate if school counselors perceive a need for having the skills and training necessary in order to handle specific crisis situations. Therefore, based on the recommendations of Allen et al.'s (2002a) study, the investigator's personal experiences, and the literature reviewed, this investigator finds it necessary to examine school counselors' perceptions of training with regards to specific crisis situations in schools (Allen et al., 2002a; Barbee, Scherer, & Combs, 2003; Basham, Appleton, & Dykeman, 2004; Bongar & Harmatz, 1989; Cashwell & Dooley, 2001; Clark & Harman, 2004; Fanolis, 2001; Foster & McAdams, 1999; Johnson, 2000; Kline, Schonfeld, & Lichtensteing, 1995; McAdams & Foster, 2000; McLeod, 1992; Olson, 2000; Reyes & Elhai, 2004; Van Praag, 2004).

Few studies have examined how well prepared school counselors' perceive themselves to be on how capable they are to handle crises (Allen et al., 2002a; Bandura, 1977; King & Smith, 2000; Larson & Busse, 1998). However, the investigator was unable to find any studies examining school counselor's perceptions on how well trained and how well skilled school counselors need to be to effectively handle specific crisis situations. This study identified specific crisis areas to be evaluated by school counselors. Furthermore, this study examined the differences between school counselors who have been trained and school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. Based on the results that were found to be significant as well as the results not found to be significant, the investigator is able to offer suggestions to school districts about more specified trainings that are needed for school counselors.

School districts should be able to benefit from knowing the results of this study in order to determine whether or not school counselors believed that training and skills are important. In utilizing this information these school districts can establish in-service programs that addresses what many school counselors perceived to be important training. However, for the school counselors that determined this training is not important, school districts may want to address in-service programs to instruct these school counselors on the need for such skill and training.

The results of this study also benefit counselor education programs. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is currently seeking feedback on a series of issues for consideration in drafting the 2008 CACREP standards (ACA, 2005). The results of this study allow the investigator to

make recommendations based on the determination of whether or not it is important to include training in crisis management as part of the counselor education-training program for school counselors.

The hypotheses examined in this study are listed below.

Ho 1 – There is no significant difference among school counselors’ perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and their perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations.

Ho 2 - There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have been specifically trained in crisis intervention.

Ho 3 - There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention.

Ho 4 - There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained.

Ho 5 - There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being trained to deal with specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained.

The definitions that were used for this study are defined in this section.

Appropriate Training is being defined in this study as the response to having received over twenty hours of university and/or in-service training in crisis intervention on the “Survey of School Counselor’s Perception of Crisis Needs”.

Being Trained to Deal with Crises is being defined in this study to be those counselors who rate themselves to be adequately, well or very well prepared on the “Survey of School Counselor’s Perception of Crisis Needs”.

Demographics are being defined in this study to be age, gender, educational information, years of counseling experience, if the participant has been trained in crisis intervention, if the school district has a crisis plan, if mock drills to practice the crisis plan occur on a yearly basis, if the school has a specified crisis team and does the counselor participate on the crisis team, and information based on how prepared or familiar the school counselors believe they are in crisis intervention.

Importance of Being Skilled is being defined as the responses of the school counselors to the skills section of the “Survey of School Counselor’s Perception of Crisis Needs”.

Importance of Being Trained is being defined as the responses of the school counselors to the training section of the “Survey of School Counselor’s Perception of Crisis Needs”.

Not Been Trained to Deal with Crises is being defined in this study to be those<sup>14</sup> counselors who rate themselves to be not at all or minimally prepared on the “Survey of School Counselor’s Perception of Crisis Needs”.

Perception is being defined in this study as the rating that school counselors give to the items listed on the “Survey of School Counselor’s Perception of Crisis Needs”.

School Counselors are being defined in this study to be all Pennsylvania certified elementary and/or secondary school counselors employed in the Butler County (PA) school districts; these will include counselors working in elementary, middle/junior high or secondary schools.

Specific Crisis Situations are being defined in this study to be those critical areas identified on the “Survey of School Counselor’s Perception of Crisis Needs”.

The investigator of this study attached a one-dollar bill and a coupon to receive three free bagels from a well-known food chain to each survey that was mailed. It is assumed that the school counselors who volunteered to participate in the study did not differ from the non-volunteers on any relevant criteria. The study was delimited to school counselors in Western Pennsylvania, as this is the geographic location in which the investigator works full-time. A limitation in the current study was that an extensive examination of cultural factors did not occur due to the small sample size.

Adolescents today have to deal with many types of crises (James & Gilliland, 2005). School counselors must be prepared to effectively handle the multifaceted types of crisis situations that students are dealing with on a daily basis (James & Gilliland, 2005; Sandoval, 2002). Additionally, schools have to ensure that the services they provide are comprehensive and focus on developing an individualized plan for handling a variety of potential crisis situations (ASCA, 2000). What is important is that the safety of all students is ensured and that a crisis plan is in place, which reflects the unique characteristics of that school (Sandoval, 2002). This is why it is vital to examine the differences between school counselors who have received training in crisis intervention with school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. Furthermore, it is imperative to assess school counselor perceptions on how important it is for school counselors to be skilled and appropriately trained with regards to specific crisis situations.

The purpose of Chapter One was to build a rationale for why this study was important. In addition, potential implications were provided. The purpose of the study was stated. Furthermore, research questions and hypotheses were listed. Finally definitions, delimitations, and assumptions were provided.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescents today have to deal with many types of crises (James & Gilliland, 2005). To them, sometimes even small things such as not having the right style of clothes, being part of the popular crowd, or not having all of the latest electronics can be considered a crisis (Sandoval, 2002). However, more and more everyday, adolescents and adults are being faced with serious crises. The terrorism of September 11<sup>th</sup> is just one example. When adolescents encounter a crisis, these students need an outlet to deal with the emotional, psychological, and sometimes even physical trauma (Slaikue, 1990). School counselors must be prepared to effectively handle the multi-faceted types of crisis situations that students are dealing with on a daily basis (James and Gilliland, 2005; Sandoval, 2002).

However, this investigator has found several problems that have hampered crisis intervention and school counselor preparedness research. Recent reviews of relations between crisis situations and counselor preparedness have focused on important but relatively narrow domains such as the relation between the school counselor's prior education, training, years of experience and the school counselor's feeling of being prepared to handle a crisis situation (Allen et al., 2002a), relations between self-efficacy and confidence (Bandura, 1977), and relations between crisis management teams and effectiveness for student recovery (Clark & Harman, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005; Slaikue, 1990).

As a result, the investigator believes a major set back has been that the investigations explored have not examined school counselors' perceptions for how well

trained and how well skilled they believe school counselors need to be with regards to specific crisis situations. <sup>18</sup>

As mentioned earlier many of the studies performed have investigated variables related to how prepared school counselors perceive themselves to be on how capable they are to handle crises in general (Allen et al., 2002a; Barbee, Scherer, & Combs, 2003; Basham, Appleton, & Dykeman, 2004; Bongar & Harmatz, 1989; Cashwell & Dooley, 2001; Clark & Harman, 2004; Fanolis, 2001; Foster & McAdams, 1999; Johnson, 2000; Kline, Schonfeld, & Lichtensteing, 1995; McAdams & Foster, 2000; McLeod, 1992; Olson, 2000; Reyes & Elhai, 2004; Van Praag, 2004). Fewer studies have looked at the amount of training school counselors receive in crisis intervention (Allen et al., 2002a; King & Smith, 2000; Larson & Busse, 1998). To help synthesize recent findings, aid in an increased understanding of school counselor preparedness to handle school crises, and offer suggestions for future research, this chapter provides a relatively broader review of relations among school crises and counselor preparedness. In addition, possible exploration of specific crisis situations and the investigation of how prepared school counselors are to handle the specific crises are put forth.

### Crisis Defined

James and Gilliland (2005, p. 3) define crisis as, “a perception or experiencing of an event or situation as an intolerable difficulty that exceeds the person’s current resources and coping mechanisms.” “During a crisis, individuals are in a state of psychological disequilibrium and are unable to escape or effectively deal with the problem at hand” (Caplan, 1964, p. 2). In the school context, a crisis has the potential to destabilize the safety and stability of the entire school (Johnson, 2000). As a result,

many schools have enacted school crisis plans and developed crisis management teams to handle crisis situations (Slaikeu, 1990).

#### Crisis Intervention Team/School Support Staff

A school crisis plan typically encompasses guidelines and procedures to handle a variety of potential school crisis situations (Sandoval, 2002). Routinely, specific school representative roles are designated throughout the plan (Watson et. al, 1990). These representatives are the persons that make up the crisis management teams that consists of numerous educators with the following characteristics: a) diverse educational background, b) diverse collage of expertise, c) unique personal and professional experiences, and d) different school schedules. Most often cited personnel include superintendents, administrators, school counselors, teachers, and the school nurse (James & Gilliland, 2005; Slaikeu, 1990).

According to much research, an effective crisis management team, together, should develop, practice, and continuously evaluate the crisis plan (Basham, Appleton, & Dykeman, 2000; Fanolis, 2001, Gerber & Feldman, 2002). In doing so, these personnel will be better prepared to carry out their designated role during the time of a crisis situation (Sandoval, 2002). According to the investigator, the characteristics of the crisis management team along with the understanding of each person's role are all factors that must be taken into account when developing and implementing a crisis management team.

Once a crisis management team has been established, effective crisis management then depends on the amount of pre-planning and the immediacy of action during a crisis situation (Clark & Harman, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005; Slaikeu,

1990). Pre-planning does not consist of trying to develop a plan on how to handle each and every potential crisis situation. Instead, “pre-planning is about developing the capability within the organization to react flexibly and to make the right snap decisions that will be required when a crisis does happen” (Clark & Harman, 2004, p. 41). In order to effectively preplan, it is important to understand the role of school counselor and their perception of preparedness to handle a crisis situation.

### School Counselor Role

Often, it is the school counselor who assists students when they are exposed to crises and experience trauma and/or loss within the school setting (Allen et al., 2002a). Thus, school counselors must be competent to handle crisis situations (ASCA, 2000). The American School Counselor Association states, “the professional school counselor’s primary role is to provide direct counseling services during and after the incident” (ASCA, 2000, p. 96). Services provided by the school counselor can include, but are not limited to, individual and group counseling, consulting with administrators, parents, and professionals, and coordinating services between the school and community (Allen et. al, 2002a). Overall, the role of the school counselor is to provide academic, career, psychological, emotional, and moral support (Davis, 2003). As is evident, the school counselor plays a critical role in assisting a student who is experiencing a crisis. Thus it is imperative that school counselors are adequately prepared to handle crisis situations.

### Counselor Preparedness

When providing help in light of a crisis there are certain tasks, not necessarily common to their daily work, a school counselor must be prepared to handle and become

involved (James & Gilliland, 2005). The primary goal of a school counselor providing crisis intervention is to first “assure the safety of the student” and second to “assist the student in regaining an adequate level of autonomous functioning” (Reyes & Elhai, 2004, p. 2). Reyes and Elhai (2004) also suggest that school counselors must provide a supportive relationship, identify the student’s chief complaint, assess the student’s personal and social resources, create a list of alternatives to achieve planned goals, receive a commitment from all involved parties to follow through with the plan, and follow up on the plan. In addition, Bryant and Harvey (2000) reported school counselors must be capable of assessing risk, providing information, and giving advice. Finally, school counselors must also be prepared to provide psycho-educational and social work related tasks in order to help individuals find public and private resources (Reyes & Elhai, 2004).<sup>21</sup>

Counselor preparedness for crisis intervention has been examined at different times and on different levels especially since the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> (Dyches, Biegel, Johnsen, Guo, & Min, 2002; Kirk & Madden, 2003; Rogers & Soyka, 2004; Vogel, Cohen, Habib, & Massey, 2004). For example, recent studies have focused on readiness for dealing with crises by emergency services personnel, hospital, and social service workers (Dyches et al., 2002; Vogel et al., 2004). There have also been numerous studies dealing with youth substance abuse and suicide (Austin, Macgown, & Wagner, 2005; Garland & Zigler, 1993; Hepp, Wittmann, Schnyder, & Michel, 2004; Macgowan, 2004; Morgan & Hawton, 2004; Van Praag, 2004; Vaughn & Howard, 2004).

The terrorist events of September 11<sup>th</sup> showed America how perceptions of being prepared can be very much underestimated. Rogers' and Soyka's (2004, p. 27) decision to volunteer at ground zero after 9/11 "was based on [their] shared perception that [their] prior training and experiences in emergency work and trauma intervention had prepared [them] to function effectively in response to this disaster." However, Rogers and Soyka (2004, p. 7) said, "those perceptions were naïve." This investigator understands this is an extreme example of perceived preparedness. However, by examining school counselor perceptions and by enacting trainings prior to dealing with a crisis, school counselors may become more prepared to handle crisis situations more effectively.

Allen et al. (2002a) conducted a research study that examined the match between the preparation of school counselors for crisis intervention and the demands of the profession. Shockingly, Allen et al. (2002a) found that on average, the school counselors reported feeling less than adequately prepared to deal with crisis situations. This is stated even though the school counselors reported that they are very familiar with their school crisis plan (Allen et al., 2002a).

In addition, "most school counselors reported that having a university class geared specifically to crisis intervention was very important and that both crisis prevention and intervention should be integrated with existing course work as well" (Allen et al., 2002a, p. 9). These findings are interesting to note that while a school may have an intact crisis plan, school counselors did not feel that they were adequately prepared to handle a crisis situation. This provides the impetus to engage in an in-depth

investigation as to what schools and universities are doing to adequately prepare school counselors in crisis intervention.

Several studies have examined the components that universities and schools offer to help school counselors be better prepared and feel more confident during times of a crisis (Allen et al., 2002a; Allen et al., 2002b; Davis 2003; King, 2000; King, Price, Telljohann, & Wahl, 1999; King & Smith 2000; Larson & Busse, 1998; Sutton & Fall, 1995). Years of education, continued education/participation in trainings, practicum, internship, and work experience, and support from other school staff are the four most common characteristics identified in making school counselors prepared for crisis in the reviewed crisis (Allen et al., 2002a; Allen et al., 2002b; Davis 2003; King, 2000; King et al., 1999; King & Smith 2000; Larson & Busse, 1998; Sutton & Fall, 1995).

Allen et al. (2002a) analyzed school counselors' feedback from previously completed studies regarding their education, participation in trainings, and experience with crisis situations. The results of the study found that school counselors' perspectives on crisis situations are essential to examine. Focusing on school counselor perceptions may allow for better tailored crisis training to school counselor needs and essentially the needs of the students (Allen et al., 2002a).

Furthermore Allen et al. (2002a) tried to determine which component most prepared school counselors to deal with crises. Results indicated that being employed in a school that has a crisis plan/team in place and provided assistance to further educate school counselors on crisis intervention helped to make the school counselors feel more prepared to assist during a crisis, as well as being familiar with the crisis plan (Allen et al., 2002a). While education was viewed as important, the study also indicated that very

few classes included the topic of crisis or crisis intervention skills and training, thus making school counselors feel that their coursework did not prepare them for crisis situations (Allen et al., 2002a).

In another study Allen et al. (2002b) how university preparation, continuing professional development, and participation in school crisis intervention help to make school counselors feel more prepared to deal with school crises was examined. Similar to the Allen et al. (2002a) study, results were broken down into the topic categories of university preparation, continuing professional development, and participation in school crisis intervention (Allen et al., 2002b). These results also indicated a trend that education/university course work did not seem to prepare school counselors for crisis intervention as much as other components (Allen et al., 2002b). The other components of continuing professional development and knowledge of and participation in crisis plans already established within the school setting seemed to make school counselors feel more prepared to deal with actual crisis situations (Allen et al., 2002b). One possible explanation of why education/university course work did not produce a significant result could be because 98% of the universities sampled did not mandate school counselors in training to take a course in crisis intervention (Allen et al., 2002a).

Another factor found to be important in school counselors feeling prepared to deal with crises was having the support of other school staff and/or having a crisis intervention plan in place within the schools. Similar to the King (2000) study, King, Price, Telljohann, and Wahl (1999, p. 457) conducted a study that assessed “school counselors’ perceived self-efficacy in recognizing students at risk for suicide.” The topic of suicide was chosen for the study due to it being the ninth leading cause of death

in the United States (King et al., 1999). Results indicated that most of the participating school counselors had experience working with students at risk for suicide (King et al., 1999). Most school counselors believed that they could assess a student at risk and effectively offer support (King et al., 1999). Significant results were found between the school counselors' self-efficacy and working with their school's crisis intervention team, indicating that school counselors feelings of preparedness and competence in crisis situations related to the school personnel support they received (King et al., 1999).

#### Factors Needed to be Effective

Research lists a specific set of qualifications a school counselor needs in order to be effective in handling a crisis (Reyes & Elhai, 2004). The set of qualifications include personal qualities, education and professional development, knowledge, and mock crisis training. Furthermore, Reyes and Elhai (2004) advise school counselors remain flexible with the following: (a) accepting minimal control over their job assignments, (b) accept the lack of a formal therapist/client relationship, (c) willingness to provide psycho-educational and social work related tasks, and (d) competence.

Moreover, Allen, Ashbaker, and Scott (2003) list the following qualities as important to the school counselor in a crisis situation: (a) flexibility, (b) compassion, (c) resilience, (d) adapts to change, (e) remains calm in a crisis, (f) maintains boundaries, and (g) does not overreact. Furthermore, Allen et al. (2003) list the following as negative qualities for the school counselor in a crisis situation: (a) seeks her status, (b) defies authority/leadership, (c) resists team efforts, (d) ignores limits/guidelines, (e) uses inappropriate humor to relieve tension, (f) starts/feeds rumors, (g) resists feedback,

(h) lacks empathy, and (i) lacks emotional stability. Based on these factors, the following thematic areas needed to be an effective school counselor emerged for the investigator: a) education/professional development, b) personal qualities c) self-efficacy, d) supervision, e) competence, and f) experience.

#### *Education/Professional Development*

If the role of the school counselor in crisis intervention is to coordinate, support, counsel, and intervene, it seems prudent that school counselors be properly educated, trained and prepared to deal with any sort of situation that might occur. Preparation for crisis intervention should include pre-service education and training (Allen et al., 1996). Such continuing professional development activities may include in-services, community crisis training programs, professional articles and video trainings (Allen et al., 1996).

A knowledge base of clinical skills is a good beginning to being prepared to evaluate and manage a crisis situation (Kleespies, 2000). However, Allen et al. (2002a) discovered that 98% of the counseling programs examined did not offer trainings or courses in crisis intervention. Kleespies (2000) suggested that psychology and counseling programs are in need of far more training on handling, managing, and evaluating crisis situations. Kleespies (2000) and Allen et al. (2002a) also advised university counseling departments to implement and mandate trainings in crisis intervention for all counselors in training.

The benefits of counselors in training being exposed to trainings in crisis intervention are plentiful. To exemplify this point, Olson (2000) experimented with taking graduate students into a flood situation to provide both assistance to the flood

victims and education to the graduate students on crisis intervention. The students thus had two opportunities: (a) the gain of experience in crisis intervention and (b) the opportunity to have debriefing sessions that would decrease the likelihood of experiencing trauma themselves (Olson, 2000). The students fulfilled the aforementioned opportunities by going door-to-door distributing information, providing support, and taking notes of who needed professional help and/or recovery services (Olson, 2000). Olson (2000) concluded that the experiment provided graduate students with the needed training in crisis intervention in a supervised setting.

Another study specifically analyzed the benefits of continued professional development/trainings on school counselor preparation for crisis and efficacy (King & Smith, 2000). King and Smith (2000) focused on a program named Project SOAR, which was designed for intensive suicide prevention training for school counselors. A hypothesis was that with more training on a specific crisis, school counselors would feel more prepared and have more self-efficacy to deal with that crisis (King & Smith, 2000). Analysis of the results indicated that there was significance between the above-mentioned factors and having received training within the past three years, with counselors feeling more confident (King & Smith, 2000). These results indicated to the investigator that recent continued professional development does significantly impact a school counselor's perspective of how prepared and how confident they feel to perform crisis intervention.

Larson and Busse (1998) researched the level and scope of trainings provided for school counselors for traditional issues- school violence and young gang prevention. The purpose of the study was to assess "the readiness and practice of specialist-level

training programs in school psychology to address pre-service training needs,” for specific crisis areas (Larson & Busse, 1998, p. 374). Results indicated that there were more trainings available for more traditional behavioral concerns and that trainings for school violence and gang prevention/intervention were viewed as lower priorities for trainings by school counselors (Larson & Busse, 1998). The participants in the study did identify that training in all areas of crisis intervention played a large role in their preparation for a crisis (Larson & Busse, 1998). These results indicate to the investigator that although trainings are an important component for school counselors to be prepared for crisis situations, it may depend on what trainings are completed as well as what trainings are made available.

Other research has also indicated that there is an importance between the different levels of education and preparation for the role and responsibilities of becoming a school counselor (Perusse et al., 2001; Reschly & Wilson, 1997). Much time is spent on studying which levels of education resulted in the most preparation, whether it is specialist training or completing a doctoral degree (Perusse et al., 2001; Reschly & Wilson, 1997). Reschly and Wilson (1997) examined the differences between these two levels and their involvement with intervention and the actual role of school counselors. Similarities and differences were found between both programs, with nothing specifically related to crisis intervention (Reschly & Wilson, 1997). Reschly and Wilson’s (1997) study, however, did provide suggestions to modifications that could be beneficial to both programs including the suggestion to integrate trainings in crisis intervention into the developed curriculum.

Perusse, Goodnaugh, and Noel (2001) completed a survey of school counselor<sup>29</sup> preparation programs and found similar results to Reschley and Wilson (1997). Perusse et al.'s (2001) results indicated of the topics of coursework offered during university study that seemed most beneficial for school counselor preparation, none significantly related to crisis intervention. The topics of practicum and internship were deemed most valuable for counselor preparation where the practicum and internship experience related to participation in crisis intervention programs (Perusse et al., 2001). It is this investigators belief that the practicum and internship, although part of the total educational experience, are related more to actual work experience rather than the academic class work required by counselor education programs.

Overall, research seems to suggest that education is very important for the overall performance and preparation of school counselors in crisis intervention (Perusse, Goodnaugh, & Noel, 2001, Reschley & Wilson, 1997). However, education has not been shown in many of the studies examined to significantly effect preparation for participation in crisis intervention (Perusse et al., 2001, Reschley & Wilson, 1997). Instead trainings in crisis intervention and exposure to crisis situations seem to have the most effect on providing school counselors with the skills and knowledge necessary to handle crisis situations (Perusse et al., 2001, Reschley & Wilson, 1997).

### *Personal Qualities*

It requires an extremely flexible person to provide crisis intervention (Allen, Ashbaker, & Scott, 2003; Reyes & Elhai, 2004). Crisis intervention doesn't always take place in the confines of an office. Often, crisis intervention takes place in the hallways, classrooms, or even the schools parking lot. Further, crises occur in rural communities

where there are often times minimal mental health service providers (Reyes & Elhai, 2004). The ability of school counselors to be flexible during a time of a crisis can be imperative to the student's outcome (Allen et al., 2003; James & Gilliland, 2005, Reyes & Elhai, 2004).

An integral quality of the school counselor is the ability to work cooperatively with others (Reyes & Elhai, 2004). School counselors are often required to work with many other service providers to provide the most effective help for students (Sandoval, 2002). School counselors must also be capable of providing emotional support, be willing to work with students on a short-term basis, and be capable to work quickly and effectively (Sandoval, 2002). Reyes and Elhai (2004) emphasized the importance of time as being the most precious resource in an emergency situation. As a result, how the school counselor intervenes in a crisis situation may depend heavily on the personal qualities the school counselor emits to the student and to other service providers.

School counselors must maintain control over their personality and allow for empathic and genuineness language to emerge. However, school counselors can also be adversely affected when responding to a crisis (Everly, Lating, & Mitchell, 2000, Mitchell, 1986). When a crisis event occurs suddenly, the school counselor may feel a sense of heightened anxiety (Sandoval, 2002). "Probably the most significant help the interventionist can provide as his juncture is to remain calm, poised, and in control" (James & Gilliland, 2005, p. 14). Subsequently, Sandoval (2002, p. 18) offers the following suggestions for school counselors to identify in order to monitor their behavior: a) remove distracters and other stressors not relevant to the crisis situations, b)

avoid impulsive action, c) delegate authority, d) be prepared, and e) seek supervision and debriefing. 31

### *Self-Efficacy*

The self-confidence that one can perform competently has been termed by Bandura (1977) as self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977) the two most efficacious ways in which to increase self-efficacy is through performance accomplishments and vicarious experiences. Performance accomplishments are one's own personal experiences (Bandura, 1977). If these experiences are negative, it will take a large amount of positive experiences to increase the level of positive self-efficacy. The other manner in which Bandura (1977) theorizes that positive self-efficacy can increase is through vicarious experience. This is when one learns through observing someone else perform a task. If the task is done successfully, the observer will think that if she or he tries, she or he, too, can overcome the obstacle (Bandura, 1977).

Sutton and Fall (1995, p. 331) focused on Bandura's self-efficacy theory and how "self-efficacy beliefs are based on individuals' expectations that one possesses certain knowledge and skills." This theory was studied in relation to school counselors and how prepared and/or competent they felt to complete their roles (Sutton & Fall, 1995). Social relationships, organization, climate, and school staff were the main factors of the study since an "environment with few opportunities for support may make it difficult for a counselor to maintain a strong sense of effectiveness" (Sutton & Fall, 1995, p. 332).

Results were broken down into two categories, school counselors in multifaceted roles and school counselors in strictly school counseling roles (Sutton & Fall, 1995). Regarding a multifaceted role, significant relationships were found between self-efficacy and staff support and grade level (Sutton & Fall, 1995). Regarding the school counseling role, a significant relationship was found between self-efficacy and staff support (Sutton & Fall, 1995). Staff support was also found to be significant in regards to school climate, the school counselor role, and other demographic information (Sutton & Fall, 1995). The results of this study indicated that the self-efficacy of school counselors may be influenced by the school climate, which included the support received from other staff, making them feel more competent and more prepared for their role as a school counselor (Sutton & Fall, 1995).

School counselor's perceptions of their own self-efficacy in detecting and intervening in crisis are possibly just as important as their background and training. If the school counselor does not believe that he or she is capable of or effective in crisis intervention, then his or her previous training is almost useless (James & Gilliland, 2005). King, Price, Telljohann, and Wahl (1999), looked at high school counselor's perceived self-efficacy in recognizing students at risk for suicide- a very common crisis issue faced in a school setting. King et al. (1999) found that only one of every three school counselors believed they could recognize a student at risk for suicide. The cause for the lack of self-efficacy in the school counselors sampled, the researchers believed, was due to lack of participation in crisis intervention during practical training (King et al., 1999). Allen (1996) suggested that participation in such intervention with supervision could increase future self-efficacy for school counselors in crisis situations.

## *Supervision*

The second aspect of self-efficacy, the vicarious experience, seems especially applicable to supervision, which should occur with a well-formed crisis management team (James & Gilliland, 2005). If the supervisor depicts a competent school counselor dealing successfully with crisis situations, the school counselor may feel more confident that she or he, too, could handle such situations (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). Furthermore, having professionals work together on a crisis management team permits the opportunity to observe others successfully handle crisis situations (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; James & Gilliland, 2005).

Supervision has been shown to be needed for the development of counseling skills (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998) and to increase the level of self-efficacy in counseling (Cashwell & Dooley, 2001). However, the investigator was unable to find any research defining what traits are needed in order to do this effectively. It could be conjectured from Bandura's (1977) work that a fundamental aspect of supervision is in fact displaying effective counseling techniques and participating in successful counseling sessions.

Work by Johnson, Baker, Kopala, and Kiselica (1989) assessed the level of school counselors in training at several points during supervision. The results showed little change in the level of self-efficacy for school counselors in training over an eight-week period (Johnson et al., 1989). As for performance in an academic setting, the same study revealed that those with high self-efficacy performed at a higher academic level than those with low self-efficacy (Johnson et al., 1989). Johnson et al. (1989) noted that the reason for this is unknown. Regardless of the reason, the presence of higher levels

of self-efficacy is related to higher performance and was stable (Johnson et al., 1989).<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, it is this investigators belief the next step in understanding how to produce competent professional counselors is to distinguish what contributes to a higher self-efficacy

One way in which self-efficacy can be increased is through pre-practicum work in the field (Barbee, Scherer, & Combs, 2003). A pre-practicum placement doing a service-learning project has shown to positively correlate with higher levels of self-efficacy and lower levels of anxiety (Barbee et al., 2003). Additionally, prior work experience in the field was also effective at raising levels of self-efficacy (Barbee et al., 2003). However, more effective than both service-learning and prior fieldwork experience was the level of training. The more training a school counseling student had the more self-efficacious they felt when finally put in the counseling field during practicum (Barbee et al., 2003).

In relation Ramberg and Wasserman (2002) displayed in their study on supervision and suicidality, the effectiveness of training was dictated by the supervisee's perceptions not the supervisor's. Their work surveyed a sample of psychiatric nurses and psychiatrists on their ability to deal with suicidal patients (Ramberg & Wasserman, 2002). Ramberg's and Wasserman's (2002) results indicated that even after receiving supervision the nurses that perceived their training as insufficient reported greater uncertainty when working with suicidal clients. The nurses' training was consistent across groups; whether or not the nurses found the training to be sufficient was the variable that influenced their certainty (Ramberg & Wasserman, 2002).

In light of the work by Ramberg and Wasserman (2002), it is apparent that school counselors' perceptions of the counseling experience are important factors in dictating their ultimate efficacy. In a crisis situation (e.g., a suicidal client) the school counselor's perceptions of being prepared could be very important in the final outcome of the situation. Currently much of the research has explored the importance of training the supervisor in being effective (Getz, 1999; Ronnestad, Orlinsky, Parks, & Davis, 1997).

Ronnestad, Orlinsky, Parks, and Davis (1997) explored the traits of clinicians who took on the responsibility of supervision. Their findings displayed that experience in the field was a major indicator of supervisory experience; that as school counselors work with students they often began working with supervisees as well (Ronnestad et al., 1997). The results depicted a strong relationship between time in the counseling field and number of supervisees trained; 0.9% of school counselors in the novice group (1-6 months) had supervised at least one supervisee and 43.9% of the school counselors in the highly experienced group (26-52 years) had supervised 25 or more supervisees (Ronnestad et al., 1997). The more experience the school counselor had, the more confident they were in guiding a supervisee's experience. The study also indicated that once a school counselor had even a minimal amount of experience in the role of supervisor they felt an increased level of confidence (Ronnestad et al., 1997). The strongest indicator of supervisors' confidence was their own self-rated level of counseling skill (Ronnestad et al., 1997). In essence, this means that the more confident the supervisor is about his/her counseling skills the more likely they will be confident supervisors (Ronnestad et al., 1997).

In work by Getz (1999) supervisors were trained in how to be effective supervisors. The supervisors were trained in models of supervision, counselor development, supervision methods and techniques, supervisory relationship, ethical and professional issues, evaluation, and executive skills (Getz, 1999). This training showed increased confidence on the part of the supervisors to be effective (Getz, 1999). In addition, the supervisors achieved a new level of competence that, as the researcher concludes, increased the competence of the supervisee (Getz, 1999). It seems to the investigator based on the work conducted by Ronnestad et al. (1997) and by Getz (1999), an increase in the amount of trainings over time could produce increased levels of self-efficacy in school counselors.

### *Competence*

When assessing a school counselor's competence, the measure upon which competence is measured must first be defined. McLeod (1992) theorized competence was often based upon skill, which is a specified behavior performed in a certain manner at a particular time. However, McLeod (1992) left the definition of competence in counseling open because of what he saw as a lack of research backing any certain assessment strategy or items to be assessed. The notion of skills emerged in other works of counseling (Auger, Seymour, & Waiter, 2004; Freeman & McHenry, 1996). However, the definition of skills was left undefined again. Therefore, the question of what is needed in a school counselor is left open. Whatever skills may be needed, it seems intuitive that the skills must be effective.

In October of 2001, Auger, Seymour, and Waiter (2004) conducted a survey of 89 school counselors and related helping professionals regarding the impact the

September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks had on students and staff members in schools that served kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Results reported 65% of the students to have had moderate to high levels of stress immediately following the attacks (Auger et al., 2004). The schools implemented an open-door policy to school counselors to provide increased access to counseling services to students. The study's results indicated that few students sought out counseling assistance through the school following the attacks (Auger et al., 2004). Moreover, the mental health needs of teachers and other adult school members were underserved, and over one-third of the school counselors felt under trained to deal effectively with crisis and trauma situations (Auger et al., 2004). Auger et al. (2004) called for a more aggressive approach from school counselors to seek out the individuals who are affected and become proactive in seeking crisis intervention training to become more effective professionals.

Much research has indicated that people react to crises differently (James & Gilliland, 2005; Myer, 2001; Sandoval, 2002). Withdrawal can often be a typical reaction exhibited by some (James & Gilliland, 2005; Myer, 2001; Sandoval, 2002). Assimilating the findings from the Auger et al. (2004) study and prior research, there seems to be a need for school counselors must be trained to seek out individuals in crisis (Auger, Seymour, & Waiter, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005; Myer, 2001; Sandoval, 2002).

### *Experience*

Studies have demonstrated that experience may play a larger factor in school counselors' preparation for crisis intervention (Davis, 2003; King, 2000). Davis (2003, p. 1183) indicated "college educational experiences were very important in terms of

laying the foundation for... on-the-job performances.” Additionally, research has indicated that professionals feel more competent the longer they have worked in their field and dealt with certain situations (Davis, 2003; King, 2000).

One study conducted by King (2000) analyzed what made school counselors feel most prepared when preventing adolescent suicide. This study focused on questioning whether school counselors knew the appropriate steps to take if a student told them he or she felt suicidal, risk factors for suicide, and appropriate responses a school should make if a student committed suicide (King, 2000). Other questions included characteristics of school counselors that may affect the above-mentioned factors, such as number of years working as a counselor (King, 2000).

Results of King’s (2000) study found significance between knowledge about adolescent suicide and years working as a school counselor. Significance was also found with gender and age (King, 2000). These results indicated that there was a significant effect between work experiences on how prepared for and knowledgeable of crisis intervention school counselors were; the longer one has worked as a school counselor, the more prepared the school counselors felt (King, 2000).

A study by Davis (2003) assessed a variety of factors on school counselors’ self-reported duties within the schools. A major theme of the study was the “continued importance of high school counseling and college advising” (Davis, 2003, p. 1183). Results indicated that student crisis intervention was one of the most important topics identified for counselor trainings (Davis, 2003). “Work-based learning was valued most by participants compared to professional development,” indicating the importance of

experience of school counselors when discussing the duties of their responsibilities (Davis, 2003, p. 1183).

### Specific Types of Crisis Situations

The list of specific crisis situations examined in this investigator's study was based on Allen et al.'s (2002a) study. "The list of crisis topics was based on a fifteen year review of crisis intervention topics presented at national convention programs of the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the American Counseling Association" (Allen et al., 2002a, p. 4). Furthermore, Allen et al. (2002a) conducted a search of school crisis topics presented in journal publications over a 31-year period. As a result, the following crisis situations were examined in the investigator's study: a) terrorism and vicarious trauma, b) natural disasters, c) suicide, d) child abuse, e) violence, f) post-traumatic stress disorder, g) grief and death, h) terminal or critical illness, and i) drug abuse.

#### *Terrorism and Vicarious Trauma*

Terrorism places helpers in a position of assisting those in need while their own lives are affected by the same events (Clark & Harman, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005). This unique position of exposure opens a door of vulnerability of changes of self-perception and the perception of change in others (Clark & Harman, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005). Between the months of December 2001 and February 2002, Eidelson, D'Alessio, and Eidelson (2003) surveyed the impact of September 11<sup>th</sup> and its aftermath on psychologists. A random sample of one-half of the members of the state

psychological associations of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania<sup>40</sup> were asked to complete a questionnaire (Eidelson et al., 2003). The researchers found in dealing with the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, psychologists reported feeling unprepared to fully meet the need for their services (Eidelson et al., 2003).

The results of Eidelson et al.'s (2003) study provide several implications to the importance of increasing the level of preparedness felt by school counselors in handling a crisis situation. First, "while it is impossible to prepare for all contingencies, crisis response measures place school counselors in the best possible position to respond to traumatic circumstances" (Sandoval, 2002, p 25). Second, it is advised that schools create crisis response plans and practice mock drills on a regular basis in order to provide more effective services (Clark & Harman, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005; Slaikou, 1990). "Readiness checks and drills are important if preparedness and response procedures are to remain effective over time" (Sandoval, 2002, p. 37). Finally, training school counselors in dealing with a terrorist event should focus on teaching school counselors how to assess the situation, disseminate information, identify crisis victims, provide crisis intervention services, and debrief and evaluate the crisis response (Clark & Harman, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005; Sandoval, 2002; Slaikou, 1990).

Preventing Vicarious Trauma (VT), the development of trauma reactions secondary to exposure of clients' traumatic experiences, is a matter of which all school counselors should be aware (James & Gilliland, 2005). Vicarious Trauma may cause physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms while diminishing the quality of client care (Trippany, White, & Wilcoxon, 2004). Eidelson et al. (2003) suggest that the risk

of VT can be mitigated by a widespread distribution of disaster and relief workers among caregivers in an act against VT of any single counselor.

Debriefing is the most commonly cited method suggested for preventing vicarious trauma among school counselors (James & Gilliland, 2005; Myer, 2001). “Debriefing is designed to mitigate the psychological impact of a traumatic event, restore homeostasis and equilibrium, prevent PTSD from developing, and identify people who will need professional mental health follow up” (James & Gilliland, 2005, p. 573). One suggestion is for school counselors to gather together after a crisis response to evaluate the effectiveness of their actions and provide each other with reflective thought (James & Gilliland, 2005; Sandoval, 2002; Slaikeu, 1990).

#### *Natural Disasters*

Reyes and Elhai (2004) reviewed the need for systematic interventions with individuals that were affected with post-disaster psychosocial problems. School counselors who serve under disaster conditions are challenged in a number of ways (Reyes & Elhai, 2004). The school counselors and victims are functioning outside of their comfort zones and may not be afforded the privacy or confidentiality that applies in a formal therapeutic relationship (James & Gilliland, 2005; Reyes & Elhai, 2004). School counselors may encounter role ambiguity and may need to collaborate with agencies that are providing disaster relief services. Reyes and Elhai (2004) maintained that when treating victims of disaster, quick action is needed to preserve the mental health of the victims.

The goal of treating victims of disaster is to secure the safety of the client and have them regain an adequate level of autonomous functioning (James & Gilliland,

2005). It is emphasized that mental health providers who are qualified to work with trauma victims should not assume their preparedness to work with disaster victims (Reyes & Elhai, 2004; James & Gilliland, 2005). According to Reyes and Elhai (2004) it appears that trauma interventions are not effective with disaster survivors and that specialized training is needed to be an effective disaster mental health counselor.

To be effective, school counselors need to be prepared, and need to view themselves as being prepared and self-confident to be able to handle a crisis situation (Sandoval, 2002). Additionally, school counselors need to collaborate with health and educational professionals to form crisis teams that help students, faculty, and family members adjust to traumatic events (Flaherty, Farison, & Waxman, 1998). Eidelson et al. (2003) call for all psychologists to train in trauma work and that trauma counseling should no longer be a specialized segment of the psychological community of professionals. Researchers are calling for all professionals to train and prepare technically and emotionally for this intense work by implementing education in this area at the graduate school level and through professional continuing education (Allen et al., 2002; Eidelson et al., 2003).

### *Suicide*

Client suicide has been found to be a significant stressor for those school counselors in practice (Bongar & Harmatz, 1989; McAdams III & Foster, 2000). McAdams III and Foster's (2000) conducted a study that indicated school counselors' lives were affected on both professional and personal levels. Professional affects included: a) increased attention to legal liabilities, b) tending to refer clients who were at risk for suicide to hospitals, c) a strong focus on possible suicide cues from clients, d)

increased likelihood of seeking out consultations for high-risk cases, e) increased conservatism in record keeping and f) increased concern for death related issues (McAdams III & Foster, 2000). Personal affects included deficits in self-esteem, intrusive thoughts, intense dreams and feelings of guilt and anger (McAdams III & Foster, 2000). It seems rational to this investigator to theorize that in order to feel competent and prepared for the eventuality of a client's attempted or completed suicide, it would be important for school counselors to be trained in recognizing and dealing with not only preventing suicidal behavior, but also with the possible aftermath of having a client complete suicide.

Bongar and Harmatz (1989) evaluated the training available in Clinical Psychology programs. Bongar and Harmatz (1989, p. 1) found, of those that responded, most of the clinical training directors viewed studying suicide as a "relatively important element in graduate training in clinical psychology." However, the researchers also found that during the 1987-1988 school year, nearly 57% of the programs responding to their survey of the Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology Programs, did not offer formal training in the study of suicide (Bongar & Harmatz, 1989).

While surveying psychology graduate students, Klepsies, Smith, and Becker (1990, p. 4) found, "many of the comments on the questions about suicide education and training revealed that when there was training, it was minimal and only moderately helpful." Reves, Wheeler, and Bowl (2004) grouped suicidal ideation with self-injury and violence toward others under the heading of risk. Reves, et al. (2004) found that 95.8% of those that responded thought that specifically considering risk, including suicidal ideation, was a necessary part of curriculums for counselor training. The

importance of such training was also emphasized by Richards and Range (2001, p. 3)<sup>44</sup> who stated, “it could be that initial training and/or practical experience that improves one’s ability to respond effectively to a potentially suicidal person.”

Recommendations for training on how to handle suicide are in much of the literature (Bongar & Harmatz, 1989; McAdams III & Foster, 2000; Reves et al., 2004). For instance, McAdams III and Foster (2000) advocated for specific training about suicide to be a standard part of the education of counselors. “Counselor education programs must prepare students for the reality of encountering clients with diverse and complex conditions, including suicidal ideations. Students need to develop the professional ability to constructively cope with difficult client problems, treatment failures and stressful clinical events such as client suicide” (McAdams III & Foster, 2000, p. 5).

It seems reasonable to this investigator to presuppose that the greater the amount of education and training for school counselors, the greater the perceived competence will be. In addition it seems realistic to the investigator to believe that those school counselors who have had recent training would feel more confident about applying those skills and training to real life situations. Therefore, exploring the idea of whether or not school counselors believe that training and skills in suicide is important should be explored.

### *Child Abuse*

Nearly four children died every day in 2000 from abuse or neglect (Massy-Stokes & Lanning, 2004). In 2002, “approximately 2.6 million referrals concerning approximately 5 million children were reported to Child Protective Services for

suspected child abuse and neglect” (Massy-Stokes & Lanning, 2004, p. 193). It seems<sup>45</sup> from these statistics, that many children fear their home because of the people that care for them. There have been cases made known about parents physically and sexually hurting their children for bringing home what parents view as unacceptable report cards (Bridgeland, 1996; Mandell, 2000; Romeo; 2000).

In 1990, the city of Baltimore was turned upside down in the State’s Attorney’s Office because 90 cases of child abuse were reported (Mandell, 2000). This may be expected in a large city, but the truth behind these child abuse cases was because of the poor grades a child brought home from school (Mandell, 2000). These children were being physically abused by their enraged parents (Mandell, 2000). Baltimore was not the only city in which this horrific scene was occurring. In fact, these cases were being reported all over America (Mandell, 2000). Days after report cards were sent home, many students were returning to school with evident signs of child abuse (Mandell, 2000). Social services admitted that this situation of child abuse during report card time was nothing new (Mandell, 2000). Social Services had seen this situation occur numerous times (Mandell, 2000).

Another case that was reported involved a father sexually abusing his daughter because of her poor grades and threatening to rape her 400 times if she ever did it again (Romeo, 2000). In May of 2000, parents from northern Iran were arrested because they murdered their daughter for earning poor grades in school (Associated Press, 2000). The parents forced their 8-year old daughter to drink weed poison and then they buried her in the backyard (Associated Press, 2000). The parents confessed that they killed her when she came home from school (Associated Press, 2000).

Society recognizes that something has to be done in order to prevent child abuse from occurring (Associated Press, 2000; Bridgeland, 1996; Mandell, 2000). One solution offered was to “change attitudes from a ‘punishment time’ to a ‘problem-solving time’ and the incidence of abuse would be reduced” (Mandell, 2000, p. 688). The idea is to help parents reduce their anger and frustration so that the child would remain safe (Mandell, 2000). “If counselors could prevent that outburst of anger by offering positive parenting techniques and crisis intervention and personal support on the phone” the incidence of physical abuse could be significantly reduced (Mandell, 2000, p. 688).

“Child-abuse intervention has been an important social-policy concern within North America for over a generation” (Bridgeland, 1996, p. 454). A law was passed in both Canada and in the United States demanding school administrators, day-care workers, teachers, counselors, doctors, and nurses to understand, recognize, and treat the signs of child abuse (Bridgeland, 1996). As a result school counselors are required to report suspected cases of child abuse (Bridgeland, 1996).

Thus it is vitally important for school counselors to know how to intervene when child abuse occurs (Bridgeland, 1996; James & Gilliland, 2005). A school counselor’s knowledge and understanding of crisis intervention in school is essential for children that are being abused in their home (Bridgeland, 1996). School counselors are able to reach out to the child in school and communicate positive reinforcement along with encouraging communication (Bridgeland, 1996).

*Violence*

Over the past 10 years, violence has risen in schools (Alexander, 2002). “In a 2001 survey of 15,000 teenagers across the United States, one in three students feel unsafe in school” (Alexander, 2002, p. 52). Most students felt that it is acceptable to hit, threaten, or bring a weapon to school (Alexander, 2002). For these reasons the investigator believes school counselors need to be adequately skilled and trained for any violent acts that are shown in school.

School counselors can be trained to look for signs of violence in the school or home (Alexander, 2002; James & Gilliland, 2005). Alexander (2002) explained some of the warning signs that school counselors have to take into consideration when thinking about intervening. Some of the warning signs include: (a) social withdrawal, (b) experience of poor academic performance, (c) acute feelings of isolation, (d) evidence of bullying behavior, and (e) threatening violence. It is important for school counselors to have knowledge, skills, and training in detecting violence so that the school counselors can effectively intervene in a crisis situation (Alexander, 2002).

#### *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*

The American Psychiatric Association (1980) classified Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a mental disorder in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). According to the DSM, in order to be identified with PTSD, the following conditions or symptoms must be met: a) the person must have been exposed to a traumatic event in which he or she was confronted with an event that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to self or others' physical well being, b) the person persistently re-experiences the traumatic event, c) the person persistently avoids stimuli in a variety of ways, d) the person has

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persistent symptoms of increased nervous system arousal that were not present before the trauma, and e) the disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other critical areas of living (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

“Childhood trauma... can lead to character problems, anxiety disorders, psychotic thinking, dissociation, eating disorders, increased risk of violence by others and by oneself, suicidal ideation and behavior, drug abuse, self-mutilation, and disastrous interpersonal relationships in adulthood (Pynoos, Steinberg, & Goenjian, 1996, p. 331). Developmental expectations are often hindered in children who do not receive treatment during or after experiencing a trauma (Nader, 1997; Pynoos et al., 1996). One noted developmental problem that often occurs is the child’s inability to organize a linear story (Pynoos et al., 1996). As a result the child’s ability to read, write, and communicate effectively can be severely hampered and cause numerous other problems in the child’s success in future grade levels (James & Gilliland, 2005; Nader, 1997; Pynoos & Nader, 1988; Pynoos et al., 1996).

School counselors can play a critical role in identifying students with PTSD and assisting in their treatment (James & Gilliland, 2005; Pynoos & Nader, 1988).

Researchers offer the following suggestions for training school counselors to effectively manage a child with PTSD: a) early assessment- to determine if there is a potential for trauma, b) interviewing- to determine the degree and severity of exposure to trauma and assessing the child’s response as it relates to the degree of exposure, c) instruments- learning to administer instruments tailored to identify PTSD, and d) projective

techniques- to reveal the trauma experienced by the child (James & Gilliland, 2005; Nader, 1997; Pynoos & Nader, 1988; Pynoos et al., 1996).

### *Grief and Death*

Bereavement is a complex and often misunderstood or overlooked issue in grieving children (Sandoval, 2002). Understanding the tasks of the mourning process in children and employing meaningful prevention strategies to respond effectively are key to the training process for school counselors (Kubler-Ross, 1969; Sandoval, 2002). Training in grief and death should also include factors such as the understanding of human attachments, models describing the mourning process, manifestations of grief, and intervention strategies (Bowlby, 1960; Bugen, 1977; Christ, 2000; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Matz, 1979; Sandoval, 2002; Worden, 1991).

The concept of human attachment when examined with its relationship to grief and death must be understood in terms of what human attachments are and how they develop (Sandoval, 2002). Bowlby (1960) argued humans create strong emotional bonds with a few specific people based on a need for security and safety. The formation of early attachments provides the foundation of basic trust and a “source of strength from which to venture and explore the world outside the relationship” (Sandoval, 2002, p. 162). Furthermore, early attachments pave the way for people to form future relationships later in their life (Bowlby, 1960; Erikson, 1950). “When the early attachment is disrupted or threatened or severed, the child’s response is one of intense anxiety” (Sandoval, 2002, p. 162). If the process of mourning is incomplete, future bonds may be anxiety-laden, questionable, or absent (Bowlby, 1960; Bugen, 1977; Erikson, 1950; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Matz, 1979).

Numerous models have been proposed to describe the mourning process. (Bugen; 1977; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Matz, 1979; Worden, 1991). Taken together, the most often cited stages in individual bereavement are identified as: a) accepting the reality of the loss, b) experience the pain of grief, c) adjust to a new environment that does not include the deceased, and d) accept the loss and allocate emotional energy into another relationship (Bugen; 1977; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Matz, 1979; Worden, 1991).

Throughout the mourning process of a child, numerous symptoms may develop (Sandoval, 2002). Worden (1991) grouped the behaviors most associated with death and grief into four categories: a) feelings, b) physical sensations, c) cognitions, and d) behaviors. While symptoms in each of the aforementioned categories are typical of the grieving process, school counselors must be trained to identify and be skilled to intervene so that the symptoms do not become dysfunctional (Matz, 1979; Sandoval, 2002; Worden, 1991).

Much research is offered on intervention strategies to help children cope with death (Christ, 2000; Worden, 1991). Strategies such as providing clear and honest information, understanding how children viewed what has happened, and encouraging children to express their feelings are just a few of the strategies training should focus on for school counselors (Christ, 2000; Worden, 1991). Allowing the issue of child bereavement to continue to be often misunderstood and overlooked by many school counselors must end (Christ, 2000). It is the belief of this investigator that the detrimental and deteriorating effects to the child's current and future level of functioning are too important to leave professional school counselors untrained.

*Terminal or Critical Illness*

Changes in public law and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guarantee children a place in public classrooms (James & Gilliland, 2005; Sandoval, 2002; Slaikeu, 1990). Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act requires educators to ensure that each and every student meets certain academic standards as mandated by the state and government (James & Gilliland, 2005; Johnson, 2000). Learning disabilities and/or illnesses in children can create enormous difficulties not only for the child but also for parents and teachers as well (Johnson, 2000; Sandoval, 2002). The school counselor plays an imperative role in assisting parents, teachers, and students understand the disability or illness and implement intervention strategies to assist all of those involved (James & Gilliland, 2005; Johnson, 2000; Sandoval, 2002).

Wallander and Thompson (1995) found in their study of the children and adolescents in America, approximately 10%-20% have chronic health conditions, and 1%-2% has a condition severe enough to interfere with their daily activities. Children experiencing chronic diseases are often highly stressed (Sandoval, 2002; Wallander & Thompson, 1995). The stress is related to many factors. With regards to the stress caused in the school, the disability or illness can often cause the child to miss school or certain periods of the school day (Wallander & Thompson, 1995). As a result, the child is behind in his or her coursework and may miss some of the fundamental learning blocks for the course. Additionally, teachers may not understand or have the background on how to help these children learn in the most effective way (Sandoval, 2002). As a direct result, the child struggles to learn the concepts required.

Training in terminal or critical illness for school counselors is vital (Sandoval, <sup>52</sup>2002). Some suggestions offered for school counselors are: a) with parental permission, consult with the child's physician to gain information on the disease or disability and ask for recommendations, b) become skilled and trained in a variety of intervention strategies that work with high-risk children, c) provide group interventions for children experiencing a terminal or critical illness, and d) assist teachers in developing strategies to educate the child (James & Gilliland, 2005; Johnson, 2000; Sandoval, 2002).

### *Drug Abuse*

The National Institute of Drug Abuse studied the extent of drug abuse in high school students in 2004 (NIDA, 2004). Decreases in substance use were found for the most part from 2003 to 2004. However, the study found an increased use in inhalant abuse (NIDA, 2004). While decreases in substance abuse were discovered and is a positive finding, the statistics of teenage substance abuse are still alarming. For instance, among the 10th graders surveyed, approximately 40% admitted to using an illicit drug (NIDA, 2004). Even more frightening were the 51% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders surveyed who admitted to using an illicit drug (NIDA, 2004). From these statistics, it is obvious that schools are dealing with a large population of students at-risk for drug-abuse.

While school counselors are often not involved in substance abuse treatment, school counselors must be educated and skilled in order to perform their job functions in a competent manner (Lewis, Dana, & Blevins, 2002). With the problems of drug abuse being so pervasive, the lack of training in this area would result in inadequate preparation for school counselors (Lewis, Dana, & Blevins, 2002; Sandoval, 2002). Training should focus on identifying students at risk, understanding family dynamics,

facilitating the process of getting the child into treatment, and assisting the child to transition back into school (Lewis, Dana, & Blevins, 2002).

### Summary

Many factors were encompassed in the examination of school counselor preparedness for crisis situations. Despite the emphasis in the crisis intervention literature, the investigator was unable to find numerous studies looking at the needs for skills and training with regards to specific crisis situations. Therefore, of primary importance was the analysis of school counselor perceptions on the importance of being skilled and the need for appropriate training with regards to specific crisis situations. Furthermore, it was imperative to examine whether or not there were differences between school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention and school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. With the persistent potential that a crisis situation can occur, the negative impacts that the crisis can have on a student, and the grave consequences for a school system, it was imperative to examine the differences among and between school counselors who have been trained and school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention with regards to specific crisis situations.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

This chapter defines the methodology that investigated the following research questions: a) do school counselors perceive that it is important to have the appropriate skills to deal with specific crisis situations? b) do school counselors perceive that it is important to have specialized training to deal with specific crisis situations? c) is there a discrepancy in the school counselors' perceptions between the importance of having the skills and the importance of having the training? and d) is there a discrepancy in the school counselors' perceptions when differentiating by being trained to deal with crises? The Survey of School Counselor's Perception of Crisis Needs, a thirty-five-item questionnaire, was developed to address the research questions.

This Methods Chapter is divided into four subsections. First, the characteristics of the participants are described. Second, the psychometric properties of the instrument are described. The Survey of School Counselor's Perception of Crisis Needs was used to measure school counselors perceptions of how well trained and how well skilled they believe school counselors need to be to effectively handle specific crisis situations. Third, procedures are described about how data was collected. Finally, the statistical analyses used are discussed to analyze the data.

#### Participants

The total sample of this study consisted of 70 public elementary, middle/junior high, and high school counselors in seven accredited public school districts of western Pennsylvania. The sample included 24 males (mean age = 44.83 years) and 46 females (mean age= 44 years); 1 bachelor level, 68 master level, and 1 doctoral level. The

school counselor counseling experience ranged from 2 years to 35 years ( $M= 15.19$  years,  $SD= 9.113$ ).

The entire population of school counselors employed in seven public school districts in western Pennsylvania was sampled. The battery of instrument, Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs, was administered to all subjects. Approximately equal numbers of participants were solicited at seven public school districts of located in western Pennsylvania.

The seven public school districts cover 44,817 square miles of southwestern Pennsylvania (State Census, 2004). The entire area contains a population of 174,083 with 274 persons per square mile (State Census, 2004). Caucasians make up 98% of the entire population (State Census, 2004). Sixty-four percent of the population has lived in the area for longer than five years (State Census, 2004). The average household income is \$51,215 (State Census, 2004).

#### Instrumentation

The Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs measured the perception of school counselor preparedness and training to deal with crisis situations. The survey allowed the investigator to distinguish whether the school counselors have been or have not been trained in crisis intervention based on the school counselors' response on the survey. The scale consisted of eight Likert items that were represented on a 5-point continuum (i.e. 1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) with higher scores indicating greater preparedness and effectiveness.

The investigator developed the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs based on the survey that was administered in Allen et. al.'s study (2002a).

According to the investigator face validity was established by basing the SSCPCN on <sup>56</sup> the guidelines established for school counselors by the American School Counselor Association and the American Counseling Association. Content validity, based on the appropriateness of the contents of the instrument, was established by referencing a study conducted by Allen et. al. (2002). The list of specific crisis topics was based on a 15-year review of crisis intervention topics presented at national convention programs of the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the American Counseling Association (Allen et al., 2002a). Additional support for these topics was also evidenced by information gathered from a 31-year review of journal publications related to school crisis topics (Allen et al., 2002a). The investigator further assessed the instrument when 10 doctoral students completed the questionnaire as a pilot to determine if there was test-retest reliability. The 10 students were given the instrument during December of 2004 and were retested one month later. The correlation coefficient was .801, indicating a high level of test-retest reliability.

A copy of the survey with a one-dollar bill and a coupon to receive three free bagels at a well-known food chain, an informed consent letter, and a self-addressed stamped envelope was sent to each school counselor. The informed consent letter explained to the school counselor that completing and returning the survey indicated to the investigator that they have read the informed consent letter and have agreed to participate in the study. The school counselors were asked to only return the survey so that anonymity would be maintained. In addition, a letter was included requesting the school counselors to return the completed instrument within two weeks. After two

weeks, the investigator sent a second mailing to the school counselors including a letter, a copy of the instrument, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. The letter asked the school counselors to complete the instrument if they haven't done so already, and if they had the investigator thanked the school counselor for his or her participation.

### Data Analysis

A roster of 85 masters and doctoral level practicing Pennsylvanian certified school counselors and their employment addresses in the western Pennsylvania area was compiled to serve as a list of potential participants. Compilation of this list was obtained through a Counselor's Association. Potential participants were mailed a cover letter (see Appendix A), a letter of informed consent (see Appendix B), a copy of the survey with a dollar bill and a coupon to receive three free bagels at a well-known food chain attached (see Appendix C), and a self-addressed stamped envelope.

The cover letter (a) described the study and its potential benefits to the profession, (b) clearly stated that responses would be anonymous, (c) described what participation would entail, and (d) requested the recipients' participation in the study. The informed consent letter informed the subjects (a) that she or he would be completing a survey that dealt with how he or she felt about school counselors need for skills and training with regards to specific crisis situations, (b) who would be conducting the study, (c) how to contact the principal investigator if he or she had any questions, (d) that the materials will be destroyed after six years of completion of the study, (e) approximately how long it would take (10-20 minutes), and (f) that returning the completed survey to the investigator implies that the participant has read the informed consent form and agrees to participate in the study. Respondents were asked

to return the survey to the investigator within 1 week of receiving the letter of inquiry<sup>58</sup> if they are or are not willing to participate in the study. Fifteen of these potential participants declined to participate in the study.

After two weeks participants were then mailed a reminder letter with a packet consisting of a cover letter (see Appendix D), an informed consent form, the instrument, and a self-addressed stamped envelope with a request to return the survey within 1 week of receipt. Again, in the cover letter, potential participants were assured that their participation would be anonymous. Included in the reminder letter was a request to call the principal investigator if there were any questions and/or if a third packet is needed. After two letters of request, 70 eligible packets were returned to the principal investigator, representing 82% of the total eligible sample of potential participants.

Upon collection of the surveys, the subjects received a debriefing form stating a more detailed description of the study (see Appendix E). This debriefing form was mailed to each of the potential participants in the study.

The research design is a descriptive survey design, intended to provide information about the nature of perceptions of preparedness and effectiveness of specific crisis situations by school counselors. An average score on their perceptions of importance for having the skills and training was calculated for both the school counselors who have been trained and the school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. Likewise, an average score on their perceptions of having training in crisis intervention was calculated for all school counselors.

To assess hypothesis one, a dependent sample t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference in the perception of the importance of being skilled in

specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal<sup>59</sup> with crisis situations. To assess hypothesis two, a dependent sample t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference in the perception of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with crisis situations among school counselors who have been specifically trained in crisis intervention. To assess hypothesis three, a dependent sample t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. To assess hypothesis four, a dependent sample t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and school counselors who have not been trained. Finally, to assess hypothesis five, a dependent sample t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being trained to deal with specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained. The investigator understands that using multiple t-tests increases the possibility of a Type I Error. In order to control for the Type I Error, the Bonferroni correction was employed.

### Summary of Chapter Three

Chapter Three provided a map of exactly what the investigator did to conduct this study. Included in this chapter is specific information and descriptions of the

participants, the instrument and its development, procedures, and statistical analyses 60  
that were used. Specific detail was provided so that readers may understand how the  
study was conducted.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

This study has described how school counselors perceive the importance of skills and need for appropriate training in specific crisis situations. The intent of this research was to implement a quantitative study, gathering and then analyzing these perceptions to examine the differences among and between school counselors who are trained in crisis intervention and school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. A quantitative design was chosen in order to gather and analyze data that would generate descriptive information on the elements of the importance of training and skills as related to specific crisis situations described in the research instrument.

This study analyzed data collected from a thirty-five item questionnaire, administered to school counselors that covered their perceptions of the importance of skills and need for appropriate training in specific crisis situations, which were taken from the Allen et al. (2002a) study. Additionally, data regarding both samples' training experiences was collected and reviewed. The data was reported and analyzed within two school counselor groups: school counselors trained in crisis intervention and school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention.

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses of the data. Each hypothesis is restated; the results of the analyses are presented, in narrative form and are also presented in a table. Conclusions for each hypothesis are stated, and a summary concludes this chapter.

### *Hypotheses*

The hypotheses were developed to explore the significant differences in the perception among school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention and among school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention of the importance of skills and the need for appropriate training as related to specific crisis situations. The following null hypotheses were tested in this study:

#### *Hypothesis 1*

There is no significant difference among school counselors' perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and their perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations.

A dependent sample t-test was used to analyze the data collected for this hypothesis. The average score on the "Importance of Being Skilled" subscale of the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors was 49.62 with a standard deviation of 1.72. The sample size was 70. The average score on the "Needs for Appropriate Training" subscale of the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors was 47.5 with a standard deviation of 1.84. The sample size was 70.

The t-ratio was calculated to be 3.23 with a probability less than 0.05 for 69 degrees of freedom (see Table 1). The hypothesis is not accepted at the .05 alpha level; there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled and the perception of the needs for appropriate training among school counselors. The school counselors do not perceive the need for training to be as great as the need to be skilled.

**Table 1**

*Perceptions of School Counselors of the Importance of Being Skilled in Specific Crisis Situations and the Perception of the Need for Appropriate Training in Specific Crisis Situations.*

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>
Importance of Skills	70	49.62	1.72	3.23*	>.05	69
Need for Training	70	47.5	1.84			

\*Significant at .05 alpha level

### *Hypothesis 2*

There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have been specifically trained in crisis intervention.

A dependent sample t-test was used to analyze the data collected for this hypothesis. The average score on the “Importance of Being Skilled” subscale of the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors trained in crisis intervention was 49.95 with a standard deviation of 2.455. The sample size was 35. The average score on the “Needs for Appropriate Training” subscale of the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors was 48.95 with a standard deviation of 2.048. The sample size was 35.

The t-ratio was calculated to be 1.72 with a probability less than 0.05 for 34 degrees of freedom (see Table 2). The hypothesis is accepted at the .05 alpha level; there is not a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled and the perception of the needs for appropriate training among trained school counselors.

**Table 2**

*Perceptions of School Counselors Trained in Crisis Intervention of the Importance of Being Skilled in Specific Crisis Situations and the Perception of the Need for Appropriate Training in Specific Crisis Situations.*

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>
Importance of Skills	35	49.95	2.455	1.72	>.05	34
Need for Training	35	48.95	2.048			

*Hypothesis 3*

There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention.

A dependent sample t-test was used to analyze the data collected for this hypothesis. The average score on the “Importance of Being Skilled” subscale of the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors not

trained in crisis intervention was 49.29 with a standard deviation of 2.44. The sample size was 35. The average score on the “Needs for Appropriate Training” subscale of the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors not trained in crisis intervention was 46.06 with a standard deviation of 2.59. The sample size was 35. <sup>65</sup>

The t-ratio was calculated to be 5.38 with a probability of less than 0.05 for 34 degrees of freedom (see Table 3). The hypothesis is not accepted at the .05 alpha level; there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled and the perception of the needs for appropriate training among school counselors who are not trained in crisis intervention. The school counselors who are not trained in crisis intervention do not perceive the need for training to be as great as the need to be skilled.

**Table 3**

*Perceptions of School Counselors Not Trained in Crisis Intervention of the Importance of Being Skilled in Specific Crisis Situations and the Perception of the Need for Appropriate Training in Specific Crisis Situations.*

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>
Importance of Skills	35	49.29	2.44	5.38*	>.05	34
Need for Training	35	46.06	2.59			

\*Significant at .05 alpha level

#### *Hypothesis 4*

There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained.

A dependent sample t-test was used to analyze the data collected for this hypothesis. The average score on the “Importance of Being Skilled” subscale of the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention (N=35) to school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention (N=35) was 49.95 with a standard deviation of 2.455. The average score on the “Importance” subscale of the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors who have been trained in crisis

intervention (N=35) to the school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention (N=35) was 49.29 with a standard deviation of 2.449.

The t-ratio was calculated to be 1.128 with a probability less than 0.05 for 68 degrees of freedom (see Table 4). The hypothesis is accepted at the .05 alpha level; there is not a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled between the school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention with the school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention.

**Table 4**

*Perceptions of School Counselors who Have Been Trained with the Perceptions of School Counselors who Have Not Been Trained Regarding the Importance of Being Skilled in Specific Crisis Situations.*

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>
Counselors Trained	35	49.95	2.455	1.128	>.05	68
Counselors Not Trained	35	49.29	2.449			

*Hypothesis 5*

There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being trained to deal with specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained.

A dependent sample t-test was used to analyze the data collected for this hypothesis. The average score on the “Needs for Appropriate Training” subscale of the

Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors who<sup>68</sup> have been trained in crisis intervention to school counselors (N=35) who have not been trained in crisis intervention (N=35) was 48.95 with a standard deviation of 2.408. The average score on the “Needs for Appropriate Training” subscale of the Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs for the school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention (N=35) to the school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention (N=35) was 46.06 with a standard deviation of 2.590.

The t-ratio was calculated to be 4.841 with a probability less than 0.05 for 68 degrees of freedom (see Table 5). The hypothesis is not accepted at the .05 alpha level; there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being appropriately trained in crisis intervention between the school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention with the school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. The school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention perceive the need for training to be greater than the perceptions of the school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention.

**Table 5**

*Perceptions of School Counselors who Have Been Trained with the Perceptions of School Counselors who Have Not Been Trained Regarding the Needs of Being Trained in Specific Crisis Situations.*

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>
Counselors Trained	35	48.95	2.408	4.841*	>.05	68
Counselors Not Trained	35	46.06	2.590			

\*Significant at the .05 alpha level

#### *Summary*

The data indicated that there was a significant difference in the perceptions of the importance of being skilled and the need of being appropriately trained among school counselors. The school counselors did not perceive the need for training to be as great as the need for skills. However, school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention did not display a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled and the perceptions of the need to be appropriately trained with regards to specific crisis situations. This meant that school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention perceived the importance of being skilled and the need for appropriate training to be equally significant. However, there was a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled and the perceptions of the need for appropriate training among school counselors who have not

been trained in crisis intervention. The school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention did not perceive the need for appropriate training to be as great as the need to be skilled. Finally of the data collected, there was not a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled between the school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention with the school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the implications of the results presented in Chapter 4. First the findings of the analyses are discussed in reference to possible explanations of the findings and their convergence or divergence with previous literature. Next theoretical and research implications of the study are discussed. Finally limitations of the study are reviewed and suggestions for future directions within counseling research are made.

The purpose of this study was to describe how school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention and school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention perceived the importance of being skilled and perceived the need for appropriate training with regards to specific crisis situations. The intent of the research was to implement a quantitative study, gathering and analyzing these perceptions to examine the differences among school counselors who have been trained and school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. A quantitative design was chosen in order to allow for the gathering and analyzing of data that would generate as much descriptive information on the elements of the importance of skills and the need for appropriate training in crisis intervention with regards to specific crisis situations.

This study reviewed and analyzed data collected from the administration of a thirty-five item questionnaire administered to school counselors that assessed their perceptions of the importance of skills and the need for appropriate training in specific crisis situations, which were taken from the Allen et al. (1999) study. Additionally

collected and reviewed were data regarding both samples' training experience in each <sup>72</sup> of the specific crisis situations presented.

The data was reported and analyzed across two school counselor groups: school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention and school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. The discussion of the results is reported in the following section.

### Conclusions

Hypothesis 1 stated there is no significant difference among school counselors' perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and their perceptions of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations. This hypothesis was not supported by the results. Significant differences in school counselor perceptions between the importances of being skilled and the need for appropriate training were found.

The importance of school counselor perceptions on the importance of being skilled and the need for appropriate training is an interesting finding. The results showed that school counselors did not perceive the need for training to be as great as the need to be skilled in specific crisis situations. The literature supported the significance of having the skills and appropriate training to deal with crisis situations (Allen et. al, 2002a; King, 2000; King, Price, Telljohann, & Wahl, 1999; King & Smith, 2000; Larson & Busse, 1998; Sutton & Fall, 1995). However as discussed by Allen et al. (2002a), very few universities mandate students to take a course or training in crisis intervention. In fact the researchers found, "most school counselors reported that having a university class geared specifically to crisis intervention was very important and that

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both crisis prevention and intervention should be integrated with existing course work as well.” (Allen et al., 2002a, p. 9). One possible explanation for the results is that since most counselor education programs do not mandate students to take a course or receive training in crisis intervention, the school counselors may perceive skills to be more important than training since skills are what the school counselors were taught and exposed to throughout their educational training.

Hypothesis 2 stated there is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perceptions of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have been specifically trained in crisis intervention. This hypothesis was supported by the results. Trained school counselor status was not found to account for any significant variance in the importance of being skilled and the need for appropriate training.

This finding indicated that trained school counselors in crisis intervention did not perceive a difference in the importance between being trained and being skilled in specific crisis situations. This was a positive finding. This result contributed to the literature review. As stated in the literature review, continued education and participation in trainings are characteristics identified in making counselors feel prepared for performing crisis intervention effectively (Allen et al., 2002a; Allen et al., 2002b; Davis 2003; King, 2000; King et al., 1999; King & Smith 2000; Larson & Busse, 1998; Sutton & Fall, 1995). The findings suggested that school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention truly believe that it is important to be both skilled and trained in crisis intervention.

Hypothesis 3 stated there is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perceptions of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. Results of this study did not support this hypothesis. School counselors who have not received training in crisis intervention showed a significant difference in their perceptions between the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the need for appropriate training to deal with these specific crisis situations.

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as a person's belief in his or her capability to master a particular level of performance. It seems reasonable that the school counselors not trained in crisis intervention felt that there is not a need for training as much as there is a need for skills in crisis intervention. It is likely these results were related to the school counselors feeling of self-efficacy. These school counselors likely believed they are capable of handling crisis situations. Therefore, since they have not been trained, these school counselors attributed their performance to the skills they have obtained over the years.

Hypothesis 4 stated there is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained. Results of this study soundly supported this hypothesis. This result was important. Both groups of school counselors believed that being skilled in specific crisis situations is imperative. The literature also supported this view that all school counselors believe it is important to be skilled in order to effectively handle specific crisis situations (Allen et

al., 2002a; Allen et al., 2002b; Davis 2003; King, 2000; King, Price, Telljohann, & Wahl, 1999; King & Smith 2000; Larson & Busse, 1998; Sutton & Fall, 1995).

Hypothesis 5 stated there is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being trained to deal with specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained. This hypothesis was not supported by the results of the study. A significant difference was found in perceptions of the importance to be trained to deal with specific crisis situations between school counselors trained in crisis intervention and school counselors not trained in crisis intervention. Training was viewed as significantly less important to the school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention whereas school counselors who received training in crisis intervention felt that training was extremely important.

This finding is extremely interesting when comparing the results from hypothesis one where all school counselors perceived the importance of skills to be more important than the need for appropriate training to hypothesis five where the school counselors not trained in crisis intervention felt that training was significantly less important to them than to the school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention. One possible explanation for the difference found in hypothesis five may be a result of socially desirable responses among the school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. It is important to remember that the survey utilized was a self-report measure. When using self-report measures, the investigator cannot know how truthfully respondents answer (Cherry, 2002). Social desirability might affect the way the participants answer the items (Cherry, 2002). Thus it is possible that the

school counselors who were not trained in crisis intervention did not want to be viewed as less competent in their ability to effectively handle specific crisis situations.

Another explanation for the results of hypothesis five may be a result of social pressure. The surveys were mailed to each subject, and each subject was given time to return the survey. It is possible that the participating subjects may have consulted with his or her colleagues about the survey. It is possible that the school counselors who work at the same school may be classified as all trained or all non-trained in crisis intervention. Thus, if all of the school counselors who were not trained in crisis intervention talked with each other, each of these subjects may have answered under group pressure. Research over the years has shown that yielding to group pressure occurs regardless of whether or not the judgmental task is ambiguous, as in statements of opinion, or unambiguous, as in statements of fact (Lazarus, 1991).

Another explanation relates to the concept of self-efficacy. At the university level, all school counselors are required to take courses in counseling skills. However, few counseling programs at the universities mandate students to take a course in crisis intervention and many school districts do not provide trainings in crisis intervention. Therefore, those school counselors who have received the training believed and understood the impact training in crisis intervention had on their effectiveness to accurately handle crisis situations whereas those who have not been trained in crisis intervention do not have that experience and thus base their experience only on the skills they have.

As with all studies, this study has several limitations. The method used to collect the data was one limitation. While utilizing a survey is an efficient method to collecting data, there are several disadvantages to using a survey. One disadvantage was the mailing of surveys to participants. When a survey is mailed to a participant, any chance of clearing up a misunderstood question is lost (Cherry, 2002). Another disadvantage to administering a survey is the low response rate (Cherry, 2002). The data was limited to only those participants who completed the questionnaire. Thus, the perceptions of school counselors who did not complete and return the questionnaire were not indicated in the data. Furthermore, the self-report nature of the survey was another limitation (Cherry, 2002). When using self-report measures, researchers cannot know how truthfully respondents answer (Cherry, 2002). Although the survey used exhibited appropriate levels of reliability and validity, the survey may still be at risk for participants answering in a socially desirable manner. This study tried to control for social desirability by ensuring participants that the school counselor's identification would not be revealed and confidentiality would be maintained. However, a social desirability scale was not utilized to ensure control for this variable.

Although the participants were recruited from the majority of schools in western Pennsylvania, the sample cannot be described as a random and representative sample of all school counselors in the United States. Another significant limitation to the study was the lack of minorities surveyed. All but one participant was identified as Caucasian. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the sample used in this study was more representative of Caucasian school counselors located in western Pennsylvania.

This study was intended to contribute to the professional development of school counselors. By exploring the perceived importance of counseling skills and the need for appropriate training in regards to specific crisis situations, recommendations can be made regarding levels of school counselors' competence. Academic institutions may gain important information that will contribute to the planning and implementation of crisis intervention curriculum for the master's level school counselor training and add to the curriculum of the doctoral student in counseling. Ultimately, the welfare of the client may be positively impacted by professional development in the area of crisis intervention.

The addition of crisis intervention to the curriculum for the master's level counselor will increase the likelihood that future school counselors will have some formalized training in crisis intervention. This training will provide the future school counselors with a more efficacious way to handle specific crisis situations. Finally, continued study of recommended training materials might contribute to the creation of school districts offering trainings and workshops in crisis intervention.

#### Recommendations for Future Studies

The findings of this study in context with past research have significant implications to the provision of crisis intervention training to school counselors. Taken as a whole, the results of this study indicated that there is a need for school counselors to be skilled and appropriately trained in crisis intervention.

The methodological purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to provide solid definitions of the experimental groups that could be replicated in future studies, (b) to

use criteria to define a trained school counselor in crisis intervention, and (c) to explore the differences between school counselors who have been trained and those school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention and their perceptions on the importance of training and need for skills in crisis intervention. The results of this study extend the understanding of the expertise literature in each of these areas.

This study has several methodological implications that can strengthen future research in the area of crisis intervention for school counselors. First, the survey utilized was a self-report measure where socially desirable responding was not controlled. Future studies may consider utilizing a social desirability scale as a pretest to control for this variable. Second, future studies should sample a more culturally diverse population. All but one participant in the study was identified as Caucasian. Therefore the results of the study may not be generalizable to all school counselor populations. A future study would benefit greatly by sampling a more diverse group. Third, future studies should be expanded to other geographic areas of the United States. The current study sampled a population of school counselors in western Pennsylvania. Expanding the study to other geographic locations will provide more generalizable results. Lastly, future studies should assess school counselors perceptions to a specific crisis situation, then provide crisis intervention training on that specific crisis situation, and finally post-test the participants to examine if training causes any significant differences in counselor perceptions for the need of skills and importance of training with regards to specific crisis situations

Based on the preceding discussion of the results, several conclusions were drawn from this study. First it appeared that this study achieved one of its primary goals in showing that all school counselors perceived a great need for skills in crisis intervention. Furthermore, this study showed that school counselors who have been trained in crisis intervention perceived the importance of being skilled and the need for appropriate training to be important. However, school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention only perceived the need for skills to be important. The results of this study shed light on the areas of training needed for school counselors in training as well as practicing school counselors. It is the hope of this investigator that academic institutions will begin to place more of an emphasis on training students in crisis intervention. Furthermore, the investigator hopes that school districts will begin to implement yearly trainings in crisis intervention. Finally, it is also hoped that future studies will be conducted in this area.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter of Participation

# DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

## SCHOOL COUNSELORS PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE AND NEED FOR TRAINING REGARDING PREPAREDNESS TO DEAL WITH SPECIFIC CRISIS SITUATIONS IN SCHOOLS

Dear Colleague,

I am currently involved in a research project addressing school counseling issues related to crisis intervention and crisis preparedness in public schools. The project seeks to investigate if school counselors perceive the importance of and need for training regarding preparedness to deal with specific school crisis situations. In addition, the research project will also try to determine if school counselors believe that it is important to have developed skills in order to handle specific crisis situations in schools. The study is performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.

Your participation in this project will provide useful information on this topic. You qualify for participation if you are currently employed as a school counselor in a public school. You will be asked to complete a survey that will take about 15 minutes to complete.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Participation is not associated with your place of employment. All data from this project are confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Data from surveys are anonymous. Names of participants will not be connected to information and scores.

Although there are no foreseeable risks to the participant, the Survey of School Counselor's Perception of Crisis Needs survey contains questions regarding specific crisis situations. If you feel questions of this type would upset you, please feel free to decline from participation at any point in this project. If you agree to participate in this study, I ask that you return the completed survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope within two weeks.

Thank you for your assistance,

**Tina Bigante, M.A., doctoral candidate**  
**Mars High School, School Counselor**  
**412.654.4483**

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in Research Study

# DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** SCHOOL COUNSELORS PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE AND NEED FOR TRAINING REGARDING PREPAREDNESS TO DEAL WITH SPECIFIC CRISIS SITUATIONS IN SCHOOLS
- INVESTIGATOR:** Tina Vittoria Bigante, M.A.  
2455 Hampton Ave.  
Allison Park, PA 15101  
412.654.4483, TvittoriaB@aol.com
- ADVISOR:** Joseph Maola, Ph.D.  
Duquesne University  
412C Canevin Hall  
412.396.6099  
maola@duq.edu
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate if school counselors in southwestern Pennsylvania perceive the importance of and need for training regarding preparedness to deal with school crisis situations. In addition, the research project will also try to determine if school counselors believe that it is important to have developed skills in order to handle crisis situations in schools.
- METHOD:** You are being asked to complete the Survey of School Counselor's Perception of Crisis Needs (SSCPCN) that was developed by the investigator. You are being contacted by mail with a letter

requesting you to participate in the proposed study. Included in the mailing is a copy of the SSCPCN, Consent to Participate form, instructions, investigator contact information, and a self-addressed stamped envelope for you to return the completed survey. A one-dollar bill (\$1.00) is included as a statement of gratitude. If you choose to participate, please read the Consent to Participate form. In addition, complete the SSCPCN, place the completed SSCPCN in the self-addressed return envelope, and mail it to the project investigator. Completing and returning the SSCPCN implies to the investigator that you have read the informed consent and agreed to participate in the current study. The SSCPCN will take about ten minutes for you to complete. Anonymity will be maintained, as you are not asked to identify yourself. For the purpose of analysis, only the aggregate data will be used, not individual data. All materials will be destroyed six years after the completion of the data collection process.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

There are minimal anticipated risks to the participants. The benefits to be derived will be (1) the determination of whether or not school counselors believe that crisis training can be beneficial; (2) if school counselors would be interested in participating in an in-service training; (3) if school districts need to train school counselors at an in-service program on the importance and need for such skills and trainings; and (4) counselor education programs can determine if including training in crisis management as part of the counselor education training program for school counselors is important.

**COMPENSATION:**

A one-dollar bill (\$1.00) is included as a statement of gratitude. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. An envelope is provided for return of your response to the investigator.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Anonymity will be maintained, as your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. No identity will be made in the data analysis. All written materials will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. All materials will be destroyed six years after the completion of the research.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your data will not be included in the data analysis.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project and will return a completed survey to the investigator. I understand that returning the completed survey implies to the investigator that I have read the informed consent form and agreed to participate in the current study.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Tina Bigante, the investigator, at 412.654.4483 or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at 412.396.6326.

Appendix C

Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs

## Survey of School Counselor Perception of Crisis Needs

This survey form is intended to assess the perceptions of school counselors regarding the skills and training needed in crisis situations. You are being asked some demographic information followed by questions asking your perception of how important it is, in your work environment, to be skilled and/or trained to deal with specific crises situations. Please answer part one “Demographics”; additional directions are provided for answering part two “Specific Crisis Situations”. There is no need to put your name on this survey form, only aggregate data will be needed to assess the results of this survey.

### PART ONE - DEMOGRAPHICS

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many years have you worked in the field of counseling? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your gender?            Male            Female
4. What is your race? (Circle One)
  - a. Caucasian
  - b. African American
  - c. Hispanic
  - d. American Indian/Alaskan Native
  - e. Asian/Pacific Islander
  - f. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the highest degree you obtained?
  - a. Bachelors
  - b. Masters
  - c. Doctorate
6. Please identify the building level that you are currently employed.
  - a. Elementary
  - b. Middle School
  - c. Junior High
  - d. Intermediate
  - e. High School
7. Please identify the location of your employment.
  - a. Rural
  - b. Suburban
  - c. Urban
8. How long ago did you graduate with your highest obtained degree?
  - a. 0-4 years ago
  - b. 5-9 years ago
  - c. 10-14 years ago
  - d. 15 + years ago

9. Did you receive formal training in crisis intervention either through a school in-service training, an outside agency training, a university course, or the like?

YES NO

*If "NO" to question 9, skip to question # 12*

10. How many hours of formal training do you have in crisis intervention?
- 0 hours
  - 1-5 hours
  - 6-10 hours
  - 11-20 hours
  - 20+ hours

11. Describe how well you believe the formal training prepared you to deal with school crises.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>not at all</i>	<i>minimally</i>	<i>adequately</i>	<i>well</i>	<i>very well</i>
<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>

12. Does your district or individual school have a crisis plan in place?

YES NO

*If "NO" to question 12, skip to question #16*

13. How familiar are you with your schools' crisis plan?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>not at all</i>	<i>somewhat</i>	<i>familiar</i>	<i>very</i>	<i>extremely</i>
<i>familiar</i>	<i>familiar</i>		<i>familiar</i>	<i>familiar</i>

14. Do you have mock drills to practice the crisis plan (excluding fire drills and severe weather drills) at least once a year?

YES NO

15. How prepared do you feel you are to implement your school crisis plan if necessary?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>not at all</i>	<i>minimally</i>	<i>adequately</i>	<i>well</i>	<i>very well</i>
<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>

16. Does your District/Individual School have a specified crisis team?

YES NO

*If "NO" to question 16, skip to question # 18*

17. Are you a member of the District/Individual School crisis team?

YES NO

18. How well prepared do you believe you are to deal with a school crisis?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>not at all</i>	<i>minimally</i>	<i>adequately</i>	<i>well</i>	<i>very well</i>
<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>	<i>prepared</i>

19. How skilled are you to handle crisis situations that occur at school?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>not at all skilled</i>	<i>minimally skilled</i>	<i>adequately skilled</i>	<i>well skilled</i>	<i>very well skilled</i>

20. I am confident that I can assess whether a student is at risk for a crisis.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

21. I would feel more confident if I would receive further training in crisis intervention.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

22. I would feel more competent if I were to attend trainings to develop skills in handling crisis situations.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

## PART TWO – SPECIFIC CRISIS SITUATIONS

Please consider each of the crisis situations listed below. Please **respond to each item TWO times**. The first response is your opinion, based upon your work environment, of *how important it is to have skills to deal with each situation*. The second response is your opinion of *how well trained you need to be in order to effectively handle this situation*. Responses will be based on the use of a scale ranging from 1-5: 1= no importance or no training, to 5= very important or a great deal of training (a great deal of training meaning university coursework, supervised internship, and continuing professional education).

**Answer each situation TWO times**, circling the most appropriate option reflecting your perception, using the following scale:

**1= no importance or no training**

**2= somewhat important or some training**

**3= fairly important or fair amount of training**

**4= moderately important or moderate amount of training**

**5= very important or a great deal of training**

23. Suicide

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 24. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 25. Sexual Abuse

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 26. Physical Abuse

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 27. Grief and Death

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 28. Terminal or Critical Illness

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 29. Violence/Aggression

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 30. Gangs

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 31. School incidents involving weapons

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 32. Drug-Abuse

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
Training	1	2	3	4	5

## 33. Natural Disaster

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
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Training	1	2	3	4	5
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## 34. Terrorism

Importance	1	2	3	4	5
------------	---	---	---	---	---

Training	1	2	3	4	5
----------	---	---	---	---	---

35. If there any other specific crisis situations you believe to be important, please write them on the lines below:

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Appendix D

Cover Letter

# DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

## SCHOOL COUNSELORS PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE AND NEED FOR TRAINING REGARDING PREPAREDNESS TO DEAL WITH SPECIFIC CRISIS SITUATIONS IN SCHOOLS

Dear Colleague,

A few weeks ago you received a packet of information requesting your participation in my research study. The research project addresses school counseling issues related to crisis intervention and crisis preparedness in public schools. So far I have been receiving many completed surveys. If you have already returned your completed survey to me, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you. If you have not yet completed the survey, I have enclosed a copy of the survey and informed consent letter. I hope you will take the time to fill out the survey and/or contact me if you have any questions or concerns. If possible, please return the completed survey within one week.

In a few weeks, you will receive a letter describing the purpose of the research study in great detail. I would encourage you to contact me at any time if you have any questions or would like a copy of the results upon completion of the study.

Sincerely,

Tina V. Bigante, M.A., doctoral candidate  
School Counselor, Mars HS

Joseph Maola, PhD  
Dissertation Chair

Appendix E

Debriefing Statement

# DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

## SCHOOL COUNSELORS PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE AND NEED FOR TRAINING REGARDING PREPAREDNESS TO DEAL WITH SPECIFIC CRISIS SITUATIONS IN SCHOOLS

Dear Colleague,

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for participating in my study. As you were informed earlier, the project sought to investigate school counselors' perceptions for the importance of skills and need for training regarding preparedness to deal with specific crisis situations. On the following pages you will find an abstract detailing the study you were asked to participate in a few weeks ago. Should you have any questions, I encourage you to contact me at any time. I can be reached at 412.654.4483.

Sincerely,

Tina V. Bigante, M.A., doctoral candidate  
Mars High School, School Counselor

Joe Maola, PhD  
Dissertation Chair

**1. Statement of the Problem**

The problem to be investigated is to examine whether school counselors believe that it is important to have training and to have skills to deal with a variety of specific crisis situations. Furthermore, the investigation will compare school counselors who have formal training in crisis intervention to school counselors who have not been formally trained in crisis intervention on two dependent variables. The two dependent variables that will be used in this investigation are (1) the perceived importance of having the skills to deal with school crisis situations in order to do their job and (2) the perceived need to have training in crisis intervention in order to do their job.

**2. Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This proposed study will examine whether school counselors believe that it is important to have training to deal with a variety of crisis situations. In addition, demographic information will identify whether or not the school counselors have received training to deal with crisis situations and whether or not school counselors believe their school districts are prepared to deal with crisis situations. The specific details will be to determine if there is a significant difference between how important the school counselors perceive having skills to deal with crisis situations when compared to how important they believe it is to have training to deal with these crisis situations. There will also be a differentiation to determine if there are these differences when comparing school counselors who have been trained to school counselors who have not been trained.

Approximately 80 school counselors of southwestern Pennsylvania who are currently employed in accredited public school districts are asked to participate in the study. The school counselors that are being sampled are required by the American School Counselor Association to ensure the emotional/personal, social, and vocational well being for each student. These school counselors are certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In order to attain this certification, each school counselor must have obtained a master's degree in school counseling.

School counselors are not required by most graduate programs to have formal training in crisis intervention. In addition, school districts are not required to provide school counselors with training in crisis intervention. Some of the school counselors have been formally trained in crisis intervention as part of their university training or school's in-service training, but many have no formal training.

Few studies have examined how well prepared counselors' perceive themselves to be on how capable they are to handle school crisis situations. However, the investigator was unable to find any studies examining school counselor's perceptions on how well trained and skilled they perceive a school counselor needs to be with regards to specific crisis situations. This study will identify specific crisis areas to be evaluated by school counselors. If the results are found to be significant, then the investigator will be able to offer suggestions to school districts about more specified trainings that are needed.

School districts should be able to benefit from knowing the results of this study in order to determine whether or not school counselors believe that training is important. In utilizing this information these school districts can establish in-service programs that will address what many counselors perceive to be important training. However, if school counselors determine that this training is not important, school districts may want to address in-service programs to instruct school counselors on the need for such skill and training.

Counselor education programs will also derive benefits from the results of this study. Of most importance is to determine whether or not it is important to include training in crisis management as part of the counselor-education training program for school counselors.

### **3. Research Design and Procedures**

The hypotheses for the study are:

Ho 1 – There is no significant difference among school counselors' perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and their perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations.

Ho 2 - There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have been specifically trained in crisis intervention.

Ho 3 - There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention.

Ho 4 - There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained.

Ho 5 - There is no significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being trained to deal with specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained.

School counselors who are employed in public school districts in southwestern Pennsylvania will be asked to participate in this study. They will be asked to volunteer to complete the Survey of School Counselor's Perceptions of Crisis Needs (SSCPCN) and submit the questionnaire for assessment. Anonymity will be maintained as these school counselors will not be asked for any identification information and only the aggregate data will be used for the comparisons. An average score on their perceptions of importance for having the skills and training will be calculated for both the trained and non-trained school counselors. Likewise, an average score on their perceptions of having training in crisis intervention will be calculated for all school counselors. To assess hypothesis one, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference in the perception of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with crisis situations. To assess hypothesis two, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference in the perception of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with crisis situations among school counselors who have been specifically trained in crisis intervention. To assess hypothesis three, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. To assess hypothesis four, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained. Finally, to assess hypothesis five, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being trained to deal with specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained. The investigator understands that using multiple t-tests increases the possibility of a Type I Error. In order to control for the Type I Error, the Bonferroni correction will be employed (see section 8-Data Analysis below).

#### 4. **Instrument**

The Survey of School Counselor's Perception of Crisis Needs (SSCPCN) was developed for the study by the investigator. The SSCPCN was developed based on a study conducted by Allen et. al. (2002). The SSCPCN is a two-part survey designed to measure the school counselor's perceived importance of being skilled to handle crisis situations and the perception of the importance of being

trained to deal with crisis situations. The questionnaire requires about ten minutes to complete.

The initial part “Demographics” asks the participants to answer questions about their age, gender, race, and education. Furthermore, participants are asked to answer yes or no if they have had university training, a school in-service training, and/or an outside agency training in crisis intervention. Participants are also asked to answer yes or no if their school district has a crisis plan, if mock drills to practice the crisis plan occur at least once a year, if their school district has a specified crisis team, and if they are a member of the crisis team. Then, participants are asked to rate themselves on a five point, forced-answer Likert scale for eight questions. In the second part of the SSCPCN, “Specific Crisis Situations” utilizes a five point, forced-answer Likert Scale with values ranging from “no importance” or “no training” to “very important” or a “great deal of training.” Participants are asked to reply to each specific crisis situation twice. The first response asks the participants’ opinion of how important it is to have skills to deal with each situation. The second response asks the participants how well trained should they be in order to effectively handle the specific crisis situation.

According to the investigator face validity was established by basing the SSCPCN on the guidelines established for school counselors by the American School Counselor Association and the American Counseling Association. Content validity, based on the appropriateness of the contents of the instrument, was established by referencing a study conducted by Allen et. al. (2002). The list of specific crisis topics was based on a 15-year review of crisis intervention topics presented at national convention programs of the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the American Counseling Association. Additional support for these topics was also evidenced by information gathered from a 31-year review of journal publications related to school crisis topics. The investigator further assessed the instrument when 10 doctoral students completed the questionnaire as a pilot to determine if there was test-retest reliability. The 10 students were given the instrument during December of 2004 and were retested one month later. The correlation coefficient was .801, indicating a high level of test-retest reliability.

##### **5. Sample Selection and Size**

The population will consist of school counselors who are employed in accredited public school districts of southwestern Pennsylvania. These school counselors all have at least a master’s degree in school counseling. Approximately 80 school counselors employed by the accredited public school districts are being asked to participate in the study. Of the 80 school counselors, about 40 of them have formal course training in crisis intervention from a college, university, or in-service training. The school counselors will be asked to volunteer to complete the SSCPCN. The school counselors are primarily female (70%) and Caucasian (95%). The ages range from 25 to 60 years. The

instructions for participation and the consent forms are attached to this document.

**6. Recruitment of Subjects**

A list of certified school counselors' working in seven accredited public school districts was obtained through a Counselor Association in southwestern Pennsylvania. This investigator will mail a packet to 80 school counselors employed in accredited public school districts of southwestern Pennsylvania. School counselors will be contacted, by mail, with a letter requesting their participation in the proposed study. Included in the mailing will be a copy of the SSCPCN, Consent to Participate form, instructions, investigator contact information, and a self-addressed stamped envelope for them to return the completed survey. A one-dollar bill and a coupon for three free bagels at a well-known food chain will be included as a statement of gratitude. The participants will be asked to read the Consent to Participate form and complete the SSCPCN. Returning the completed SSCPCN implies to the investigator that the participant has read the informed consent form and has agreed to participate in the study. In the self-addressed stamped envelope, the school counselors will send the completed SSCPCN. Anonymity of the participants will be maintained, as their identity is not asked for on any form. Only the aggregate data will be used for analysis.

**7. Informed Consent Procedures**

Each participant will receive a copy of the instructions for completing the SSCPCN and an informed consent form. Both of these items are attached.

**8. Collection of Data and Method of Data Analysis**

School counselors will be contacted, by mail, with a letter requesting their participation in the proposed study. The participants will be asked to read the Consent to Participate form and complete the SSCPCN. School counselors will place the completed SSCPCN in the self-addressed stamped envelope and mail the survey to the investigator. Each of the SSCPCN questionnaires will be evaluated for each of the two areas identified on the SSCPCN. There will be an average score calculated on the "importance of having the skills" for the trained school counselors and an average score for the non-trained school counselors. There will also be an average score calculated on the "importance of having the training" for the trained school counselors and an average score for the non-trained school counselors.

The statistical analysis will be conducted in the following ways. To assess hypothesis one, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference in the perception of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the perception of the need for appropriate training to deal with crisis situations. To assess hypothesis two, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference in the perception of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations the perception of the need for appropriate

training to deal with crisis situations among school counselors who have been specifically trained in crisis intervention. To assess hypothesis three, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations and the need for appropriate training to deal with these crisis situations among school counselors who have not been trained in crisis intervention. To assess hypothesis four, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the importance of being skilled in specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained. Finally, to assess hypothesis five, a t-test will be used to determine if there is a significant difference in perceptions of the importance of being trained to deal with specific crisis situations between school counselors who have been trained to deal with crisis situations and those who have not been trained. In order to maintain the independence of each hypothesis, the investigator's committee requested the use of multiple t-tests. In order to reduce the possibility of making a Type 1 error, the investigator is employing the Bonferroni correction. Therefore the 0.05 alpha level will require that the actual probability level will be 0.01 ( $0.05 / 5 = 0.01$ ).

**9. Emphasis on Issues Relating to Interactions with Subjects and Subject's Rights**

The subjects will have the right to participate or decline participation. No one will be identified and the investigator will not know who submitted the completed SSCPCN. All materials will be destroyed six years following the completion of the research.