Supporting Every Child: School Counselors' Perceptions of

Juvenile Sex Offenders in Schools

Leann Wyrick Morgan and Levi S. McClendon
University of Texas at Tyler

Jenna McCarty
University of Colorado – Colorado Springs

Kirk Zinck
University of Texas at Tyler

Abstract

Researchers explored the attitudes and concerns of professional school counselors in their roles in working with juvenile sex offenders (JSOs) who attend school. Little empirical data exist regarding school counselors' roles in effectively engaging and supporting JSOs toward school success. Focus groups contributed to the consensual qualitative research (CQR) methodology, providing a framework for investigating concerns, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs related to juvenile sex offenders and school climate. The authors present findings of five systematic themes and the implications for school counselor best practice.

Keywords: school counseling, school climate, juvenile sex offender, consensual qualitative research

Supporting Every Child: School Counselors' Perceptions of

Juvenile Sex Offenders in Schools

In the past decade, 18% of all juvenile arrests made in the United States involved sexually related offenses (United States Department of Justice, 2013). The issue of juveniles who commit sexual offenses remains a growing public concern within the community and their schools (Righthand & Welch, 2001; Zimring, 2004). Research suggests that school systems, boards, and administrators have been inconsistent in dealing with the juvenile sex offenders (JSOs) in their school system (McNeil, 2007; Stover, 2005) where the likelihood of juveniles committing sexually based offenses in groups and at school is on the rise (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Chaffin, 2009). Given these statistics, it is likely that school counselors will work with JSOs at some point in their professional career. However, a lack of information in the literature exists regarding the ways in which juvenile sex offenders receive support in schools.

The professional school counselor has a unique position within the school, charged with providing such services as comprehensive, developmental guidance, individual and group counseling, as well as overall student activism (ASCA, 2012; Van Velsor, 2009). They must be competent in working with culturally diverse populations (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2011), but also affiliation diversity (Chen-Hayes, Miller, Bailey, Getch, & Erford, 2011), which is to provide services, support, and advocacy for all students entrusted in their care, including JSOs within the school community. The school and its inhabitants make up a unique culture and climate that can be both supportive and unwelcoming to students at large (Schulte, et al., 2002).

Through the research of Borduin and Schaeffer (2002), we know that there is a direct correlation between juvenile sex offenders and their influence over their schools' student body. For instance, they found that one-third of all sexual offenses, committed against juveniles, take place on school grounds. In addition, lack of public policy has left schools tending to the needs of both the JSO and the remaining student population (Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002). School counselors and administrators are in the unique position to provide support for JSOs in schools, but tend to overlook the needs of JSOs without policies and procedures to guide their work (Righthand & Welch, 2001).

School Climate

Researchers identified school climate is the primary influence on students' involvement in negative behaviors, such as bullying, relational aggression, and cheating (Gottfredson, 1989; Jackson, Levin, Furnham, & Burr, 2002; Murphy, 1993). Students determine their level of involvement in negative impact behaviors by assessing the social norms of their environment and making decisions accordingly. Students feel a sense of community and mutual understanding and trust when a positive school climate exists (Schulte et al., 2002). According to Gendron, Williams, and Guerra (2011), "Children develop normative beliefs about behavior that guide their actions" (p. 153); Therefore, if students' perception of the social climate of their school is one that accepts and supports negative behaviors, then those behaviors will become more pervasive over time. For juvenile sex offenders, the climate of a school can help or hinder their re-entry into academic life. If the JSO determines the school climate is one of support, she/he may be more apt to engage in positive behaviors, if deemed unsupportive or

inconsistent; the JSO may encounter more difficulty in assimilating into the educational community (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010).

Research supports the claim that when students perceive the rules set forth by school administration to be strong and the consequences for negative impact behaviors severe, the frequency of negative behaviors decreases (Jackson et al., 2002; Sherman, Gottfredson, MacKenzie, Eck, Reuter, & Bushway, 1997; Zullig, Huebner, & Patton, 2011). Those perceptional determinants tend to set parameters for behavior within the school and students become accustomed to a higher standard of behavior from both peers and adults alike. According to Stockard and Mayberry (1992), if school counselors, administrators, and parents convey a standard of high achievement, positive social relationships among students, organization of materials and school work areas, and promote a high morale among staff and students, the prevalence of positive school climate increases.

According to Koth, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2008), students' perceptions of their "school climate" positively correlated to their academic achievement, issues of adjustment, and social and personal attitudes toward others. Social relationships play an encompassing role in the lives of high school students, including those between students and teachers, students and their peers, in addition to their overall feelings about their school's social environment (Eliot et al., 2010; Liu & Lu, 2011; Zullig, et al., 2011). Moreover, students tend to have better grades and have fewer social problems if they feel there is a caring adult who supports them at school (Anderman & Midglay, 2004; Langley, Nadeem, Kataoka, Stein, & Jaycox, 2010; Littrell & Peterson, 2001; Sink, 2005). The physical environment of the school can also be a factor in student

achievement. What happens within the walls of the school may be as important to student learning outcomes as the building itself (Liu & Lu, 2011; Zullig et al., 2011).

The term "school," has been broadly defined to include any interaction that takes place within the school building, as well as locations beyond the school premises (i.e., school buses, field trips, extra-curricular activities when the school is responsible for the student) (Anderman & Midglay, 2004; Zullig et al., 2011). When conceptualizing the "climate" of a school, several factors are considered such as; socioeconomic level, racial and ethnic diversity of the students, as well as stability, instances of violence, crime rate, and perceived levels of support within the school community (Hernandez & Seem, 2004; Koth et al., 2008). Students, who have a negative perception of school due to the high transient rate of fellow students, or high turnover of teachers, will most likely have a poor perception of the school's climate (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). School climate may influence the student academic achievement, and consequently may affect students' perceptions of themselves within the school context (Bemak, 2000; Hernandez & Seem, 2004; Koth et al., 2008). Students who perceived the school to be in a constant state of disruption often reported feeling undervalued, disrespected or unsafe. These feelings often contributed to academic and social difficulties (Hernandez & Seem, 2004; Sink & Spencer, 2005). In situations where students reported that teachers were committed and competent, they were less likely to engage in negative behaviors (Anderman & Midglay, 2004; Murdock, Hale & Weber, 2001). Social variables such as these are indicators that the school climate influences the behavior of students, either negatively or positively, depending on the students' collective perceptions. For a

JSO, who is working toward positive behavior adjustment, these feelings can be crucial to their overall success in school (Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002).

Attitudes

The belief that JSOs are "compulsive, progressive, and incurable," irrespective of age, has driven the inclusion of JSOs in public sex offender registries (age 14 and above) and has prompted the requirement of intensive, long-term, sex-offender treatment (Burton, Miller & Shill, 2002; Chaffin, 2008; McNeil, 2007). In reality, sexual recidivism among juvenile offenders remains low, around 8-14 % (US Department of Justice, 2001). The research in youth offender treatment strongly suggests that JSOs are unlikely to commit future sexual crimes, particularly when they have completed empirically validated interventions such as multisystemic therapy (MST) that supports the caregivers and JSOs alike (Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002; Letourneau, Chapman, & Schoenwald, 2008; Reitzel & Carbonell, 2006). However, with public policy placing stigma upon the treatment of JSOs, it is likely translating into skewed beliefs and attitudes of school professionals and the public.

Misperceptions can alter the effectiveness of school counselors and their ability to be effective with JSOs. Lack of sensitivity directly affects school climate and advocacy services provided to students with special needs (Langley et al., 2010). In order to be effective, school counselors need to be cognizant of the lens through which they operate and the ways their developmental programs extend to all students.

The role of the school counselor is to support all students in circumstances of crisis, not limited to those with risk factors including educational, legal, and familial discourse (Flom & Hansen, 2006). Recent studies of JSOs showed they endured

emotional and physical abuse/neglect, domestic violence and sexual victimization within their homes at higher rates than their non-offending peers (Marini, Leibowitz, Burton, & Stickle, 2014; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2007). While school counselors attempt to fulfill the duties of their roles in schools and serve the needs of JSOs, little guidance in the way of research on the subject of JSO support in schools exists to guide their practice. According to American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012), school counseling programs promote and support academic achievement, personal and social development and career planning for every student. Creating and evaluating support programs that meet the needs of JSOs is unlikely given the absence of data and research pertaining to JSOs in schools.

While school counselors have been charged with the task to support the needs of their entire school, including special populations (ASCA, 2012; Van Velsor, 2009), it is doubtful that the needs of JSOs have been adequately addressed in schools, considering the lack of research on the topic. The literature suggests that the responsibility lies with the school counselor to formulate and exhibit a clear understanding of any developmental issues that may be of hindrance to student success (ASCA, 2012; Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2011). However, considering the lack of knowledge, experience, and training with JSOs, school counselors may be unable to do their job effectively. Consequently, due to the lack of preparedness, school systems are allowing the needs of some students to go unaddressed, placing the school counselor in a position of potential ethical and legal accountability.

Concerns

Interactions with JSOs need to be purposeful and goal-oriented, as with any other support system provided to students aimed at promoting pro-social behavior (Van Velsor, 2009). According to Wilson & Lipsey (2007), school-wide prevention programs are effective at reducing problem behaviors in students, but the programming must be applicable to all students in order to be effective. Administrators and school counselors alike, struggle with the balance of confidentiality and the protection of previous victims enrolled in their schools, thus complicating the inclusion of some JSOs into school-wide programs (Casillas, 2003). Current educational literature lacks specific information about the school counselor's role in working with JSOs, placing school counselors in a position of uncertainty (Casillas, 2003; Reid, 2006). Effective school counselors develop policies, practices, and procedures leading to student success, while diminishing systemic barriers and areas of concern (ASCA, 2014; ASCA, 2012, Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2011). This may be a particularly challenging task, given the complex nature of working with JSOs in schools.

According to Borduin and Schaeffer (2002) positive school environments are a key piece in the recovery and decreased recidivism among JSOs. Letourneau et al. (2008) agreed that JSOs tend to have a lower commitment to their education, with increased dropout potential, and lower academic performance than their non-offending peers do. They went on to note that suspensions and expulsions of JSOs are more prevalent due to their over-representation in special education programs coupled with an increased need to develop appropriate social skills (Letourneau et al., 2008). As a result, JSOs tend to compensate with poor coping skills and internalize problems more

frequently than other delinquent youth, making appropriate peer interaction in school more difficult (Blaske, Borduin, Henggeler, & Mann, 1989). The educational challenges facing JSOs are far-reaching, (e.g., academic and behavioral difficulties, low achievement, literacy below expected grade level, suspension, expulsion, poor social skills, and isolation from same-aged peers) (Awad & Saunders, 1989; Gomes-Schwartz, 1984). Support in the literature for school counselors as advocates for students is not specific to helping JSOs in schools, making their job in advocating for JSOs, in particular, challenging at best.

Recognizing this gap in the literature, the researchers utilized focus groups and consensual qualitative research (CQR) methodology in order to discover the school counselors' and administrators' knowledge of, frequency of, and concerns with regard to, working with JSOs in schools (Hill, 2012; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005). This information guided the formulation of options for how school counselors might prepare to consult, counsel, and provide advocacy, as the issue of JSOs continue to impact school systems across the United States.

Method

The researchers examined the perceptions of school counselors and administrators from a qualitative, constructivist perspective utilizing CQR, which uses elements from phenomenology, grounded theory, and comprehensive process analysis (Hill et al., 2005). This positivist, perspective-taking model was determined to be the best fit for this type of social inquiry, due to the complex nature of the subject matter (e.g., human thoughts, opinions, and feelings) and the availability of multiple researchers acting as a team. To gain this type of information from school counselors

and administrators, the researchers conducted a series of focus groups with participants from middle and high schools located in rural and metropolitan areas of Northeastern Texas and surrounding areas of the United States. The 5 focus groups included a total of 34 participants, 18 professional school counselors, 10 teachers (all of whom were in graduate training programs in educational administration with principal licensure), and 6 school-level administrators that were predominantly female (30), and primarily European-American (31). The research team consisted of two school counselor educators, both of whom were former school counselors at the secondary level, and three students enrolled in a master's degree program in school counseling. The focus group interviews measured various constructs related to the participants' perceptions of their work in schools. Participants were encouraged to respond through open-ended questions to initiate discussion and allow for full disclosure on the subject (Hill et al., 2005). The questions included the following:

    1) What thoughts come to mind when you hear the term, juvenile sex offender?

    2) What distinguishes the behavior of a juvenile as a sexual offense?

    3) Are you aware of any JSOs enrolled in your school?

    4) Who, if anyone in the school, is notified when a JSO is enrolled in a school?

    5) What, if any, concerns do you have about a JSO attending school?

    6) What education or training do you have related to working with JSOs?

    7) What do you think a school counselor should know about JSOs?

    8) What is the role of a school counselor with regard to working with a JSO?

The nature of qualitative methodology is to allow for follow-up questions. Divergence from these questions occurred, based upon what participants said, observation of mannerisms, and the nonverbal expressions of the participants (Patton, 2002).

As per the CQR method, the facilitators summarized, linked, addressed responses, requested detail, encouraged commentary on expressed ideas, and guided an emergent dialogue among the participants throughout the audio-recoded sessions (Hill, 2012). This dialogic process integrated varied perspectives, by providing several judges for an interactive and robust construction of knowledge and meaning regarding a human experience (Gergen, 2001; Hill et al., 2005). At the conclusion of each focus group session, the audio recordings were hand-delivered to the hired transcriptionist for typing, and the researchers made notes of their observations, hypotheses, and impressions in their researcher journals. The researchers used these journals to document any biases they had prior to the onset of the focus groups, as well as any biases that surfaced during or after each groups' conclusion (Creswell, 2013). These biases naturally occur within the context of qualitative studies involving human subjects, and addressed by researchers in order to limit their influence on research outcomes. The research team members processed their individual thoughts and feelings on four separate occasions throughout the focus group and data analysis process in order to account for, and limit the impact of, individual implicit biases that might influence the research findings.

Procedures

Once the taped group transcripts returned to the researchers, they employed the qualitative analysis procedures of CQR to review the data (Hill et al., 2005). This method required the team of researchers to examine the data and determine the findings *as a group*. An advantage of using this method is the addressing of naturally occurring biases, as they occur within the group, thus attempting to decrease the

instances of researcher bias finding its way into the results. Hill et al. (2005) suggested that when using CQR, the research team meet over a period of time (in this case, no less than six months meeting once every two months) to review the data collected from the focus groups.

The purpose of the researcher meetings was to code the data into domains, core ideas, category descriptions, and frequency categories. Core ideas are actual quotations from the study participants that capture the essence of the meaning of the data within the domains. Category descriptions are summary statements (from the researchers) that describe the essence of a portion of the data in fewer words, but with more clarity. The category descriptions process involved putting words to the domain, based on a verbal reading of each statement and consequent group discussion of the participants' actual statements (Hill et al., 2005; Watt et al., 2009). The research team then categorized the data by frequency of occurrence, using the quotes selected earlier in the analysis process. These quotes were grouped into three categories, *general* (to represent when a statement was made by all or by all but one participant), *typical* (representing statements made by more than half, but not all the participants), and *variant* (to represent statements made by two or more participants). During each research meeting, the domains, core ideas, category descriptions, and frequency categories went through a compare and contrast process until group consensus emerged for each domain (Watt et al., 2009). The researchers then coded the data from the frequency categories into themes to represent the final analysis, or voice of the participants (see Table 1) (Hill et al., 2005; Watt et al., 2009).

Table 1

Themes with Supporting Core Ideas and Quotes

Theme	Core Ideas with Supporting Quotes from Participants
Misinformation	**School Counselors often rely on anecdotal evidence and stereotyping when explaining most aspects of a JSOs life.** • "There was no father at home and the mother was very controlling, and a single parent…very, very controlling mother." • "There is an aggressiveness in personality." • "Juveniles can become just part of the peer pressure."
School Climate	**Schools can be very unaccommodating to JSOs.** • "Quite a few teachers would become a little bit leery about placement in their classrooms." • "We're supposed to be promoting academics and that setting people up to be successful…If you're worried about people in your classrooms you don't feel safe. Safety is one of the things you have to have in place for people to learn."
JSO Knowledge	**School counselors defined JSO's stereotypically, and were unable to derive a consensus as to what a sexual offense is.** • "Some type of sex crime by law…whether that was touching, or penetration, or exposing." • Someone who is a juvenile, so underage to be considered an adult." • "It wasn't the sex act but the empowerment of sense of superiority…I don't think that it's about arousal, but instead the power."
Role Confusion	**The school counselor's role in working with a JSO is undefined.** • "Counselors have such a broad range of duties right now that the true term of 'counselor' has kind of gone away." • "I'm guessing that JSOs probably have to do outside counseling. I don't think school counselors have to be responsible for that." • "As a school counselor, I don't have time to get deep into dealing with a JSO."
Communication and Education	**Dealing with a JSO in the school system is an ambiguous problem represented by faulty or unknown hierarchical structures.** • "It's just like a kid with HIV, if you don't have an educational need-to-know, you aren't going to know…." • "I was never notified, I found out through unofficial channels." • "Based on an educational need-to-know, faculty may be notified that a kid is a JSO." • "I would like to know more about the legal process, rights of the people that work with the student, parents of the kids who go to school, and how are we involved in all that?" • "I just need to know the law, what's the law on this, what am I legally able to do." • "What are the resources that can help breach the gap for students in need? A lot of school districts do not have school psychologists." • "There is no formal or even informal system of modification in any of your school or school districts?"

An external auditor (a professional colleague that had published research using this method of data analysis) reviewed the abstracted core ideas and domains as they pertained to the actual transcripts from the focus groups, and provide written feedback to the team regarding their perceived accuracy. The research team reviewed the auditor's remarks and used the feedback to determine the level of accuracy they achieved through their CQR process. No significant changes to the frequency categories or consequent themes were necessary.

Numbering from four to ten participants, several focus groups are included in this methodology (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006; Morgan, 1998). Topics are predetermined and key questions posed to initiate and direct discussion. Facilitators probe participants about their responses, link topics and information, summarize what is said, and promote a detailed and complex discussion among participants. This dialogic process integrates varied perspectives and provides for an interactive and robust construction of knowledge and meaning regarding a human experience (Gergen, 2001). For the purposes of this study, the researchers conducted five separate focus groups, with six or seven participants present in each group.

Interviews took place in unoccupied classrooms or large offices in a university or public school. Participants came from seven independent school districts in a Northeastern region of Texas in areas that border Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. Researchers obtained written informed consent from each participant, following an explanation of the purpose of the research and a request for volunteers to participate in the study.

Analysis

For the purposes of this study, each research team member carefully read the transcript data on their own, prior to meeting as a group. During the research team meetings, one member read aloud the key statements from the transcripts. Each member then voiced comments, questions, or concerns in reference to the inclusion or exclusion of each significant statement or core idea read. Discussions of varied length lead to the multiple perspective coming together to form consensus. In order to limit the power differential among research team members (professors and graduate students), each member was encouraged to comment on every core idea presented, even if to offer similar insight already mentioned (Hill et al., 2005).

In keeping with traditional CQR methodology, the research process occurred in three steps. First, the team used *domains* (i.e., topics used to group or cluster data) to categorize participants' statements into general areas. Second, the team sought to find the *core ideas* (i.e., summaries of the participants' statements are described using a few, clarifying words) to further group the interview data within each domain. For the purposes of this study, a member of the research team hand wrote each core idea on a separate note card in order to visualize the data grouped into categories. The team members were then able to move the core ideas as the discussions deepened and the categories formed. This process ensued throughout three separate team meetings, spread over a six-month period. The third step found the research team employing a cross-analysis, or a means to look across all participants statements, in order to highlight common themes across all participants (Hill et al., 2005; Watt et al., 2009).

Researchers used specific categories to group the common themes reflected in the core ideas within domains across all groups.

Grouping the core ideas into *frequency categories* (i.e., number of participants' comments that reflected the same or similar core idea) helped the researcher determine the general (all but one), typical (majority), variant (fewer than half, but at least 2-3), and rare (less than 2-3) frequency labels for each comment made on a particular subject (Hill et al., 2005). In this case, the researchers did not conduct a *stability check*, as suggested in Hill et al. (2005), due to the adequate sample of core ideas collected that supported each theme.

Findings

After considering the feedback from the external auditor regarding the domains, core ideas, and cross-reference analysis of the participants' voices, the research team achieved consensus to arrive at the following judgments. Five systematic themes emerged from the CQR process including, misinformation, school climate, JSO and sexual offense knowledge, role confusion, communication and education. Each thematic category below includes frequency labels with the core ideas and supporting quotes from participants in Table 1.

Theme 1: Misinformation

Without education and experience in working with JSOs, many educators work under stigmatic concepts. Relying on hearsay and subjective evidence, the bias towards JSOs remains stereotypical and disadvantageous. The participants spoke loudly about the tendency to receive information that was incorrect or so informal that it could not be

trusted. Accuracy and timely communication among service providers and law enforcement was lacking, and often left them with rumors more often than facts.

Theme 2: School Climate

As stated previously, the school climate in which students are educated often predicts student performance and feelings of connectedness to the community (Letourneau et al., 2008). Several factors that affect school climate and awareness continue to be a vital piece to recovery or recidivism (Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002). When the educators of the school become unaware of the JSOs past behavior and experiences, school can become an unaccommodating place. Teachers, parents, administrators, and even school counselors often make it difficult for the JSO to receive the help he/she needs, by ignoring risk factors that lead to recurring problem behaviors (Flom & Hansen, 2006). In this case, the participants felt unprepared to help the JSO assimilate into the school culture, and were unaware of how to help the student reenter the school community. Not being aware of students' needs, or how their past behaviors may have influenced current peer relationships, school counselors and administrators did not know what constituted successful school transition for JSOs. They also appeared unaware of how the school climate would change as a result of a JSO present in their schools, or how important creating a positive, supportive school climate for all students might be in relation to the challenges JSOs already face in education.

Theme 3: JSO Knowledge

The term *juvenile sex offender* is one that many people speak of in universal terms. Faulty assumptions that JSOs function successfully within the same school culture as other non-offending students lead to misunderstanding and misinformation

(Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002; Baske et al., 1989). In this case, such societal stereotyping may constitute a lapse in judgment. As with any group of students, each individual is unique in characteristics and experience. Gaining an understanding of what those characteristics, potential risk factors, and experiences look like from the students' perspective, would allow educators to fully reach and engage all students (Borum, Bartel, & Forth, 2003; Letourneau et al., 2008). The participants defined JSOs stereotypically and were unable to derive a consensus as to what constituted a sexual offense. Based on the statements made by the group participants (see Table 1) it was clear they were speaking about specific offenses, searching for the right words to describe a JSO accurately.

Theme 4: Role Confusion

Overall, our focus group participants were disoriented and unaware of their exact role in working with JSOs enrolled in their schools. With the label of JSO, many school districts seem to operate under the consensus that law enforcement will handle those cases in which a student would be a threat to the school community (Reid, 2006; Zimring, 2004). From what we know from the literature, a strong correlation exists between a student's ability to achieve school success and their treatment within school walls (ASCA, 2012; Eliot et al., 2010; Koth et al., Leaf, 2008). However, the participants believed that the JSO may not overcome negative stigma at school without help from their school counselor, and a school counselor may not be equipped to offer support if they were unsure of their role in the JSO's life. This confusion, coupled with a lack of education, knowledge, and support, may leave school counselors in a very precarious position, and one that may carry liability as well (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009).

Theme 5: Communication and Education

A large part of educator responsibility is providing resources for those students in need of social and emotional support (ASCA, 2012; McMahon, Mason, & Paisley, 2009, Van Velsor, 2009). Once convicted and returning to school, a JSO is in need of several resources (Stover, 2005). Without access to education and the support of the school community, the advocacy measures for a JSO remains lost (Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002; Reid, 2006; Stover, 2005). Findings from the focus groups concluded that school counselors believed that they should counsel and guide a JSO with the same intention as they would any other student. However, JSOs may present a different set of needs than those of other students without this attached stigma. This deprivation of understanding and sensitivity for a student with unique needs may prevent him or her from thriving within the school community.

Discussion

With JSOs already under extensive pressure from various contexts of their lives, school counselors and educators alike need to be aware of potential damage that can occur in working under a lens of misinformation. In order for school counselors to effective, they need must understand the student population within their school walls (ASCA, 2014). When a counselor is unprepared to work with a JSO, that student may not build the necessary relationships within the school to experience academic and social success (Anderman & Midglay, 2004). Crucial in a student's ability to learn, is the school climate in which they are educated (Eliot et al., 2010; Zullig et al., 2011). It is unlikely that learning will take place when a student feels ignored or deprived (Anderman & Midglay, 2004). School counselors are in the unique position to involve a

JSO in school activities and help promote a healthy, stable environment in which learning can take place (Sink, 2005).

Education for those working with JSOs in schools should be a routine part of professional development in schools, including information on all federal, state, or district mandates. The participants' voices spoke to the notion that not only was there a lack of education, but no desire to seek confirmation regarding their concerns. This lack of motivation to learn about JSOs may impede the help that JSOs receive in the school. It is the role of the school counselor to provide open communication avenues among all parties involved in a student's educational community, including teachers, parents, law enforcement, administration, and other school professionals (Clemens et al., 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Stover, 2005). Advocacy is necessary in order to provide a consistent system of support that matches the student's needs. The school counselors and administrators in this study also believed they had an obligation to provide support for other students in the event that the JSO showed signs of potential harm to others. In those cases, law enforcement and school administrators would be involved to find alternative educational provisions for the JSO (Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002; Borum et al., 2003; Stover, 2005). While not every JSO is a good fit for their previous educational environment, the participants' approach to the JSOs transition seemed reactive and not preventative in nature. This reactive approach does not fit into a truly comprehensive, developmental, equitable, school counseling program, which school counselors are responsible for providing for all students (ASCA, 2014; ASCA, 2012; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Van Velsor, 2009). It was unclear if this reactivity came from a place of fear, or lack of knowledge or understanding of how to support a JSO returning to school.

Regardless of the root cause of their ambivalence toward a proactive approach to working with JSOs, a need exists to cultivate support versus react to student needs once school failure occurs.

Implications

Literature about JSOs and the impact they have on school climate is scant at best, which may contribute to school counselors' reactivity instead of meeting the needs of students systemically (Casillas, 2003; Langley et al., 2010; Reid, 2006). School counselors and the specific impact they have on JSOs in schools is undocumented in the literature at this time. The focus groups conducted by the researchers found a significant incongruence between what the educators believed about JSOs, and the actual experience of JSOs in schools, as documented in the literature (Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002; Letourneau et al., 2008). In order to effectively advocate for students' needs, and to provide the best practice, school counselors need to gain awareness in how to reach this population if they are to effectively provide social and emotional support to all students (Eliot et al., 2010; Van Velsor, 2009).

Recommendations

The role of the school counselor within any school is to provide the academic, social/emotional, and career-related support they need to be successful (ASCA, 2014; ASCA, 2012; Clemens et al., 2009, Van Velsor, 2009). Advocating for school counselors as the only consistent mental health professional on campus is instrumental in supporting the school counselors' role, and continued professional development is crucial to school counselor effectiveness in their role (Clemens et al., 2009; Martin & Robinson, 2011). Purposeful activism toward working with every student includes

supporting JSOs and maintaining an understanding of their experience and concerns. Incorporating the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (AMBSS) into practice with JSOs might provide school counselors a familiar framework in which to conceptualize their approach to providing support, through their existing comprehensive counseling programs. The AMBSS (2014) are comprised of six mindset standards that indicate how a student views themselves in relation to school capability, and behavior standards, which include three areas commonly associated with student success (learning strategies, self-management skills, and social skills). Together, these standards provide a checklist for school counselors to utilize as they develop systemic guidance programming. While the standards, as a whole, provide a framework for student success, several areas directly address JSOs needs within the school. For instance the mindsets, *Self-confidence in ability to succeed*, and *Sense of belonging in the school environment*, both speak directly to the JSOs feelings of isolation and shame (Marini et al., 2014). There are several behavior standards that offer specific support for JSOs including, (ASCA, 2014, p. 2):

- Identify long- and short-term academic, career, and social/emotional goals, (Learning Strategy)

- Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem, (Self-Management Skill)

- Create positive and supportive relationships with other students, (Social Skill), and

- Create relationships with adults that support success (Social Skill).

Each of these standards addresses specific student needs. While JSOs represent a limited population in most schools, these standards, if met, would actively provide systemic support for their academic, social/emotional, and postsecondary success.

In addition to working from the lens of the AMBSS to address JSO needs, it may be prudent to borrow proven treatment strategies from clinical mental health practice, modifying interventions to fit into the school counseling program. This may be the best way to meet each student standard, without exhausting the school counselor's capacity to perform her/his role.

Flom and Hansen (2006) offer three keys to successfully working with youth in crisis, which may translate into effectively providing appropriate support to JSOs in schools. The intervention strategies include 3 key components; the first involves the school counselor function of individual planning (ASCA, 2012) to encourage the student to discover their own strengths and interests and to learn how to navigate both in order to reach future goals (speaks to AMBSS Learning Strategy #7, ASCA, 2014). The second involves the school counselor role of providing systemic and data-driven, developmental guidance curricula that allow for structure and feelings of security to evolve within the school, which is especially critical for students who have a lack of, or perceived lack of, support outside the school (speaks to AMBSS, Self-Management Skill #10, ASCA, 2014) (Flom & Hansen, 2006). The third school counselor function is to provide individual student support and make personal connections with JSOs who may be experiencing public school for the first time (speaks to AMBSS, Social Skill #3, ASCA, 2014). This connection may be crucial for JSOs to feel connected, supported, and welcomed into an environment that in the past may have proven inhospitable to the JSO (Flom & Hansen, 2006; Osher & Warger, 1998).

Advocacy and encouragement to help guide a JSO cannot be properly implemented without the support and understanding of the entire school community

(Zullig et al., 2011). School counselors can combat stereotyping by improving

communication (ASCA, 2012; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Through faculty in-service

training focused on support and inclusion, school counselors can spread awareness

and help to change school climate and stigma surrounding JSOs in the school. Having

proper consultation is a key factor in successful school counseling programs, when lack

of knowledge is apparent and resources are limited (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Before faculty in-service training takes place, the school counselor must be sure

that they themselves are a knowledgeable resource. Professional development for

school counselors is necessary to remain current when working with JSOs, as the

school community is instrumental in prevention of reoffending and emotional wellness of

the JSO (Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002). School counselors would benefit from effectively

working with JSO probation officers and social service case managers in order to

increase awareness of individual student issues and expectations. As mentioned

previously, multisystemic therapy (MST) is a short-term, empirically supported treatment

that focuses on improving caregiver skills and resources both at home and school, and

has helped many JSOs find academic and life success (Borduin & Schaeffer, 2002;

Letourneau et al., 2008). School counselors can support the MST process by checking

in with the JSO at school and being available to the JSO caregivers, should additional

skills training or resources at school become necessary.

Other helpful ways to stay abreast of new techniques or programs to support

JSOs is through reading current research articles focusing on youth at risk, consulting

with juvenile justice professionals to learn about current best practices, and obtaining

regular supervision (McMahon et al., 2009). Implementing data-driven programs, while

encouraging JSO engagement and participation, is a fundamental step in advocacy. Involving parents/caregivers, local law enforcement, and juvenile probation in the support network surrounding the JSO will increase student success and decrease the likelihood of recidivism (Borduin, & Schaeffer, 2002; Letourneau et al., 2008) so school counselors can effectively provide support to *all* students (ASCA, 2012).

Limitations

Although this qualitative study included voices from the field of school counseling and school administration, they may not adequately reflect the experiences of many other school professionals or other school districts. It is also safe to assume that the participants' statements were not without bias, because few inquiries involving human interactions and perceptions are without bias. The participants selected for this convenience sample resided within one geographic area of the United States (Northeastern Texas and surrounding areas), and within that area the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and professional competencies of education professionals may vary compared to other areas in the country. Another limitation was the lack of information regarding specific training participants had within each of their respective graduate programs, or any post-graduate continuing education experiences each received. It was apparent that none of them had specific training in working with JSOs, but the differences in education of the participants within the groups was not explored to determine the level of exposure to working other types of underrepresented or at-risk populations within schools that might have translated into effectively working with JSOs. Despite the limitations of the study, the findings contribute to the literature regarding school counselors' thoughts and feelings regarding working with JSOs in schools. The

findings further emphasize the need for future research and policy development regarding how school counselors become aware of and effectively engage JSOs in schools to ensure their school success.

Implications for Future Research

More research into the educational pathways and social support networks for JSOs is necessary in order for school counselors and other school professionals to understand the diverse needs of JSOs who attend school. Without clear understanding of those needs and the ability to provide a safe, supportive, nurturing environment, school counselors will continue to be at a loss as how to effectively work with JSOs within the school and academic community. A need exists for more information and specific intervention strategies for how to protect both the JSO from harassment and biases, while acknowledging that some JSOs may pose a potential threat to other students while at school. The literature in school counseling is lacking in concrete ways to be proactive and preventative in working with JSOs, or knowledge of the appropriate type of support school counselors should provide. Within the profession must be best practice policies and procedures, developed in conjunction with juvenile justice professionals and other school stakeholders, to address the unique needs of juvenile sex offenders who attend school.

Conclusion

The researchers explored the attitudes and concerns of a group of school counselors and their role in working with juvenile sex offenders who attend school. Through focus group research, the concerns, attitudes, and beliefs, of a small sample of school counselors and administrators were uncovered. While consensual qualitative

research methodology provided a framework for investigating concerns, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs related to juvenile sex offenders and school climate, further inquiry is necessary in order to identify how school counselors and other school professionals serve the needs of all students, including JSOs.

References

Anderman, E., & Midgley, C. (2004). Changes in self-reported academic cheating across the transition from middle school to high school. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 29,* 499-517. doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2004.02.002

American School Counselor Association (2014). *The ASCA mindsets & behaviors for student success: K-12 college- and career-readiness standards for every student.* Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved from: https://schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/MindsetsBehaviors.pdf

American School Counselor Association (2012). *ASCA National Model for school counseling.* Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ascanationalmodel.org/

Bemak, F. (2000). Transforming the role of the school counselor to provide leadership in educational reform through collaboration. *Professional School Counseling, 3,* 323-331.

Blaske, D. M., Borduin, C. M., Henggeler, S. W., & Mann, B. J. (1989). Individual, family, and peer characteristics of adolescent sex offenders and assaultive offenders. *Developmental Psychology, 25*(5), 846-855. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.25.5.846

Borduin, C. M., & Schaeffer, C. M. (2002). Multisystemic treatment of juvenile sexual offenders: A progress report. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality, 13*(3-4), 25-42. doi:10.1300/J056v13n03_03

Borum, R., Bartel, F., & Forth, A. (2003). *Manual for the structured assessment of violence risk in youth.* Tampa, FL: University of South Florida.

Burton, D. L., Miller, D. L., & Shill, C. T. (2002). A social learning theory comparison of the sexual victimization of adolescent sexual offenders and nonsexual offending male delinquents. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 26*, 893-907. doi:10.1016/s0145-2134(02)00360-5

Casillas, O. (2003). Registry flaws: Police confusion leads to schools unaware of juvenile sex offenders attending class. *The IRE Journal, 28*, 28-29. Retrieved from https://www.ire.org/publications/ire-journal/search-journal-archives/1575/

Chaffin, M. (2008). Report of the ATSA task force on children with sexual behavior problems. *Child Maltreatment, 13*(2), 199-218. doi:10.1177/1077559507306718

Chen-Hayes, S. F., Miller, E. M., Bailey, D. F., Getch, Y. Q., & Erford, B. T. (2011). In, Erford, B. T. (Ed.), *Transforming the School Counseling Profession,* (3rd ed.) (pp. 110-128). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Clemens, E. V., Milsom, A., & Cashwell, C. (2009). Using leader-member exchange theory to examine principal–school counselor relationships, school counselors' roles, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. *Professional School Counseling, 13*(2), 75-85. Retrieved from http://schoolcounselor.metapress.com/content/121824?v=editorial

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dorsey, J. (2000). Institute to End School Violence. In *End School Violence.* Retrieved from http://endschoolviolence.com/strategy/

Eliot, M., Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2010). Supportive school climate and student willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence. *Journal of School Psychology, 48,* 533-553. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2010.07.001

Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., & Chaffin, M. (2009). Juveniles who commit sex offenses against minors. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin.* Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Justice.

Flom, B. L., & Hansen, S. S. (2006). Just don't shut the door on me: Aspirations of adolescents in crisis. *Professional School Counseling, 10*(1), 88-91. Retrieved from http://schoolcounselor.metapress.com/content/y63295087k232148/ ?p=f2f5df2e37c744848fb3771d2a60be84&pi=11

Gendron, B., Williams, K., & Guerra, N. (2011). An analysis of bullying among students within schools: Estimating the effects of individual normative beliefs, self-esteem, and school climate. *Journal of School Violence, 10,* 150-164. doi:10.1080/1538 8220.2010.539166

Gergen, K. J. (2000). *An invitation to social construction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gottfredson, D. (1989). Developing effective organizations to reduce school disorder. In O. Moles (Ed.), *Strategies to Reduce Student Misbehavior*, (pp. 87-104). Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Hernandez, T., & Seem, S. (2004). A safe school climate: A systemic approach and the school counselor. *Professional School Counselor, 7*, 256-262.

Hill, C. E. (2012). *Consensual qualitative research: A practical resource for investigating social science phenomena.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52,* 196-205. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.196

Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2007). *School counseling to close the achievement gap: A social justice framework for success.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Holcomb-McCoy, C., & Chen-Hayes, S. F. (2011). Culturally competent school counselors: Affirming diversity by challenging oppression. In, Erford, B. T. (Ed.), *Transforming the School Counseling Profession* (3rd ed.) (pp.90-109). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Ivanoff, S. D., & Hultberg, J. (2006). Understanding the multiple realities of everyday life: Basic assumptions in focus-group methodology. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 13,* 125-132. doi:10.1080/11038120600691082

Jackson, C., Levin, S., Furnham, A., & Burr, N. (2002). Predictors of cheating behavior at a university: A lesson from the psychology of work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 32(5), 1031-1046. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.2002.tb00254.x

Koth, C. W., Bradshaw, C. P., & Leaf, P. J. (2008). A multilevel study of predictors of student perceptions of school climate: The effect of classroom-level factors*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 100*(1), 96-104. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.100.1.96

Kress, V. F., & Shoffner, M. F. (2007). Focus groups: A practical and applied research approach for counselors. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 85*, 189-195. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2007.tb00462.x

Letourneau, E. J., Chapman, J. E., Schoenwald, S. K. (2008). Treatment outcome and criminal offending by youth with sexual behavior problems. *Child Maltreat, 13*, 133-144. doi:10.1177/1077559507306717

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Liu, Y., & Lu, Z. (2011). Student's perceptions of school social climate during high school transition and academic motivation: A Chinese sample. *Social Behavior and Personality, 39*(2), 207-208.

Littrell, J., & Peterson, J. (2001). Transforming the school culture: A model based on an exemplary counselor. *Professional School* Counseling, 4, 310-319.

MacNeil, A., Prater, D., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 12*(1), 73-84. doi:10.1080/13603120701576241

Marini, V. A., Leibowitz, G. S., Burton, D. L., & Stickle, T. R. (2014). Victimization, substance use, and sexual aggression in male adolescent sexual offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 41*(5), 635-649. doi:10.1177/0093854813507567

Martin, P. J., & Robinson, S. G. (2011). Transforming the school counseling profession. In, Erford, B. T. (Ed.), *Transforming the School Counseling Profession*, (3rd ed.) (pp.1-18). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

McMahon, H., Mason, E. C., & Paisley, P. (2009). School counselors as educational leaders promoting systemic change. *Professional School Counseling, 13*(2), 116-124.

McNeil, M. (2007). Concerned about juvenile sex offenders, states move to tighten their regulations. *Education Week*, *26*(26), 1-18.

Morgan, D. L. (1998). *The focus group guidebook.* Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage.

Murdock, T., Hale, N., & Weber, M. (2001). Predictors of cheating among early

adolescents: Academic and social motivations. *Contemporary Educational*

Psychology, 26, 96-115. doi:10.1006/ceps.2000.1046

Murphy, J. (1993). Restructuring schooling: The equity infrastructure. *School*

Effectiveness & School Improvement, 4(2), 111-130. doi:10.1080/0924345930

040202

Osher, D., & Warger, C. (1998). *Early warning, timely response: A guide to safe*

schools. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from

http://cecp.air.org/guide/

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand

Oaks, CA: Sage.

Reid, K. (2006). Young sex offenders pose a dilemma for schools: Linden arrest

spotlights shortcomings in notification laws. *Recordnet.com.* Retrieved from

http://www.recordnet.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061009/NEWS01/610090

313/0/SEARCH

Reitzel, L. R., & Carbonell, J. L. (2006). The effectiveness of sexual offender treatment

for juveniles as measured by recidivism: A meta-analysis. *Sexual Abuse: A*

Journal of Research and Treatment, 18, 401-422. doi:10.1177/1079063206018

00407

Righthand S., & Welch, C. (2001). *Juveniles who have sexually offended: A review of*

the professional literature. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Retrieved from http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/184739

Schulte, L. E., Thompson, F., Talbott, J., Luther, A., Garcia, M., Blanchard, S., Conway, L., & Mueller, M. (2002). The developmental and validation of the ethical climate index form middle and high schools. *School Community Journal, 12*(2), 117-132. Retrieved from http://www.adi.org/journal/fw02/Schulte%20et%20al.pdf

Sherman, L., Gottfredson, D., MacKenzie, D., Eck, J., Reuter, P., & Bushway, S. (Eds.) (1997). *Preventing crime: What works, what doesn't, what's promising.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

Sink, C. A. (2005). Fostering academic development and learning: Implications and recommendations for middle school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 9*(2), 128-135. Retrieved from http://schoolcounselor.metapress.com/content/2h0 781p818843985/?p=5c011ed15181427eae5bc1145943562b&pi=19

Sink, C., & Spencer, L. (2005). My Class Inventory-Short Form as an accountability tool for elementary school counselors to measure classroom climate. *Professional School Counseling, 9*(1), 37-48. Retrieved from http://schoolcounselor.meta press.com/content/y720844684111402/?p=abaaaf22f5f547288acef7bf9dfa7110 &pi=21

Stockard, J., & Mayberry, M. (1992). *Effective educational environments.* Newbury Park, CA: Corwin.

Stover, D. (2005). When a sex-offender enrolls in your school. *School Board News, 25*(3). Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.

Turner, H. A., Finkelhor, D., & Ormrod, R. (2007). Family structure variations in patterns and predictors of child victimization. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 77*(2), 282-295. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.77.2.282

United States Department of Justice (2013). Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved from http://ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/offenders/overview.html

Watt, S., Curtis, G., Drummond, J., Kellogg, A., Lozano, A., Nicoli, G. T., & Rosas, M. (2009). Privileged identity exploration: Examining counselor trainees' reactions to difficult dialogues. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 49*(2), 86-105.

Welsh, W. (2000). The effects of school climate on school disorder. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 567*, 88-107. doi:10.1177/000 2716200567001007

Wilson, S. J., & Lipsey, M. W. (2007). School-based interventions for aggressive and disruptive behavior: Update of a meta-analysis. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 33*, 130-143.

Zimring, F. E. (2004). *An American travesty: Legal responses to adolescent sexual offending*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. doi:10.7208/chicago/ 9780226983592.001.0001

Zullig, K., Huebner, E. S., & Patton, J. (2011). Relationships among school climate domains and school satisfaction. *Psychology in the Schools, 48*(2), 133-145. doi:10.1002/pits.20532

Biographical Statements

Leann Wyrick Morgan, Department of Psychology and Counseling, University of Texas at Tyler; Levi S. McClendon, Department of Psychology and Counseling, University of Texas at Tyler; Jenna McCarty, Department of Counseling and Human Services, University of Colorado Colorado Springs; Kirk Zinck, Department of Psychology and Counseling, University of Texas at Tyler.

Leann Wyrick Morgan is now at the Department of Counseling and Human Services, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs; Levi S. McClendon is now at the Department of Counseling, University of Texas at San Antonio; Jenna McCarty is now at the Institute for Family Centered Services, Monroe, Ohio.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Leann Wyrick Morgan, Department of Counseling and Human Services, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, 1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway, Colorado Springs, CO 80918. Email: lmorgan7@uccs.edu