

Investigating School Violence and Prevention Practices Among Counselors in Northeastern
United States

Elliott Stubbs

Marywood University

Abstract

School violence is a prominent issue within disadvantaged communities across the United States. In order to prevent recurring incidences of school violence, best practices must be collected, adopted and implemented to thwart students from hurting themselves and other students. The focus of this study is to find successful methods and best practices to decrease school violence, through counselor intervention and leadership. Through the collection of best practices of counselors in DC Metro schools, a cross-section of answers can be analyzed and explained, to help counter and curb incidence of youth violence. School counselors play a vital role in helping students develop self-efficacy skills –further bolstered by the mentorship capacity of counselors.

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Introduction

Today's news headlines are dominated by the chilling details of incidents of school violence, in the 21st Century. Often, schoolchildren are the culprits behind some of the worst mass shootings in the world. Since the advent of the internet, there has been much more worldwide exposure to many of these senseless crimes. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, over sixty percent of all children in the United States have suffered some emotional, mental or physical trauma before age seventeen (Alvarez et al., 2022). Childhood is a sensitive time, and reporting and imagery of harmed children is hardly palatable for any parent. America has the grim reputation for having the world's most broadcast violence events and over 80% of television programs contain violence (Huesmann, 2007).

As a result, it may not be hard for American students to imagine these news reports. Still photos of grieving mothers and family members clasping candles immediately come to mind. However, these stories are even more often announced in communities-of-color. In 2021, over 60 percent of public schools reported at least one school violence incident during the school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the United States, during the 2020 school year, there were over 1 million incidents of school violence reported (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). What are the reasons for school violence happening? What are ways to prevent future incidents?

In America, youth violence in school settings among students is an emerging issue throughout primary and secondary schools in urban settings. Predictors of school violence perpetration in schools include negative emotional school environment, previous exposure to domestic violence, and other similar factors (Turanovic & Siennick, 2022). Not only does

violence exposure cause emotional damage to students, but it negatively affects their academic performance (Bravo-Sanzana et al., 2021). The role of a school counselor is a critical puzzle piece in schools and their presence is direly needed for mentorship and violence prevention programs. Recent research has argued that school counselors have a unique ability to strengthen children's ability to handle adversity, despite at-risk students' home environments often being rife with malignant social determinants of health (Johnson et al., 2023).

Though popular statistics and news reports dramatically capture the vehemence of school shooting incidents, the voices and stories to curb school violence are often not properly highlighted. The District of Columbia has the displeasure of being the state with the second highest schools shooting exposure, since 2020, reported by the Kaiser Family Foundation (*Examining School Shootings at the National and State Level and Mental Health Implications* | KFF, 2025). Researchers have reported that DC students are exposed to more school violence than all other students in the United States, with more than two times the exposure than other United States students (Brann, 2023). Studies published in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine also concluded that, more than any other race, black adults were exposed to a higher prevalence of school violence as children, which contributed to their future heart disease, drug use, and mental illness problems (Sheats et al., 2018). The comprehensive collection of violence data, warning signs, and systematic gaps may be helpful in effecting change.

Understanding the mindset and environments of innocent lives that are exposed to school violence is paramount. Guidance counselors are a hub for student psychological development and confidential conversations. These school counselors are notably important in helping cultivate students' mental health, responding to student trauma, community advocacy, and so

much more (American School Counselor Association, 2019). These servant leaders are shepherds to children from adverse backgrounds, as they reach for their dreams. Philosopher

Robert K. Greenleaf argues that, in the ethical framework of servant leadership, there must be a subversion of the ego and training of the served to become leaders (Greenleaf, as cited in Gabrielle, 2018). In DC Public Schools (DCPS), counselors must inject positive guidance and selfless motivation amid the interplay of student crises. The student-focused lens of school counselors provides an important tool to describe the problem of school violence in District schools and possible solutions.

Problem Statement

The purpose of a future counselor-focused qualitative school violence prevention study is to explore themes and perceptions that are protective and causative, in DC area public schools, from a school counselors' perspective. As of 2025, the District ranks in the lowest half of the country in education, with their schools ranked 28th out of all other states (Kosmas, 2024).

Washington, DC consists of eight geographical wards of different socioeconomic demographics. For decades, DC Public Schools (DCPS) Wards 7 and Ward 8, which are almost totally minority populations, have been known for their high reports of violence. Over forty percent of children residing in Ward 8 live in poverty and are in single-parent households, respectively (*Economic Justice*, 2024). Findings from The Justice Policy Institute suggests, Wards 7 and Ward 8 have high crime and lower educational attainment than any other places in Washington, DC (Gollub et al., 2019). Individuals in Ward 7 and Ward 8 of Washington, DC have almost 300 times less monthly household earnings, in regards to median income, than their fellow students from all other Wards (Gollub et al., 2019). School counselors serve as in-school social safety nets, partly due to these troubling statistics. These educational leaders provide a

nexus of care for numerous students and have a leadership role in development of young men and women. When violent events occur regularly this leads to the slow degradation of the school district, school systems, and eventually entire cities.

Though there are many problems that exist within the school setting, school violence was selected for this literature review. Other social problems do exist in educational systems, such as poverty and mental health. However, school violence may be directly symptomatic of the social health profile of the entire school. For purposes of this study, school violence that occurs off-campus is not included. For example, violent incidents sparked by students in a chatroom or violent episodes during field trips would not be included.

This review of the existent literature is intended to elucidate the strengths, ideals, and beliefs of counselors on a physical school campus. The challenges of preventing violence in an urban school environment are greatly unexplored, due to factors such as low-visibility of problems and disinterest by wealthy research institutions. Counselors will be selected for interview subjects, in a prospective school intervention, due to their proximity to students and their consolidated experiences with large numbers of students, especially those who are disadvantaged.

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is the intended framework for this study. Nickerson (2025) suggests Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory asserts that human behavior is a complex combination of experiences shaped by social environment, observational learning and individuals' self-efficacy. Role modeling is a component of SCT that is fundamental in the student counseling experience. Students learn by the environment created within the school, and this also directly influences their future confidence to do (or not do) other endeavors. In essence,

humans learn from observing others and the punishment or reward gained from their environment shapes their behavioral patterns (Nickerson, 2025).

In this theory, learners' habits reflect the mixture of experience and mentorship from their social environment. For example, within the constructs of social cognitive theory, a child in a family may adopt their behaviors from a parent's socialization modeling, environment and behavioral choices that are cultivated via constant reinforcement (Connor, 2015). This dynamic interplay of effective factors can create a good or bad outcome for a child. For example, a child may have a guardian that has substance abuse use, that occurs during times of stress. In the future, modeling this behavior, the young adolescent may feel encouraged to use drugs when they encounter adversity.

Instead of humans becoming products of their environment, argues Bandura, the give-and-take of personal (self-efficacy) and (physical, outcomes, social outcomes and facilitators) environmental factors, known as reciprocal determinism, shapes ultimate individual behavior outcomes (Nickerson, 2025).

Basic Outline of Social Cognitive Theory

The basic outline of social cognitive theory is a development of an individual's motivational output from self-efficacy to behavior adoption. Self efficacy can be described as an individual's personal belief that they can make sound decisions (Nickerson, 2025). As self-efficacy, or personal responsibility increases, there are more outcomes that are developed in the individual. For instance, an ER nursing student who is taught how to care/nurse for a patient is a good example. As this person gains more practical training and experiences, they are able to evaluate their performance and improve. In tandem, as self-efficacy bolsters self-evaluation,

socio-structural factors, such as mentors, further enable growth of individuals' good/bad choices that achieve certain goals. In our former example, this ER nursing student is able to achieve outcomes, such as bandaging a wound. These goals (such as a goal to bandage a wound) ultimately lead to ascribed behaviors (i.e., being a competent ER nurse), which are further reinforced or denied by social and personal expectations.

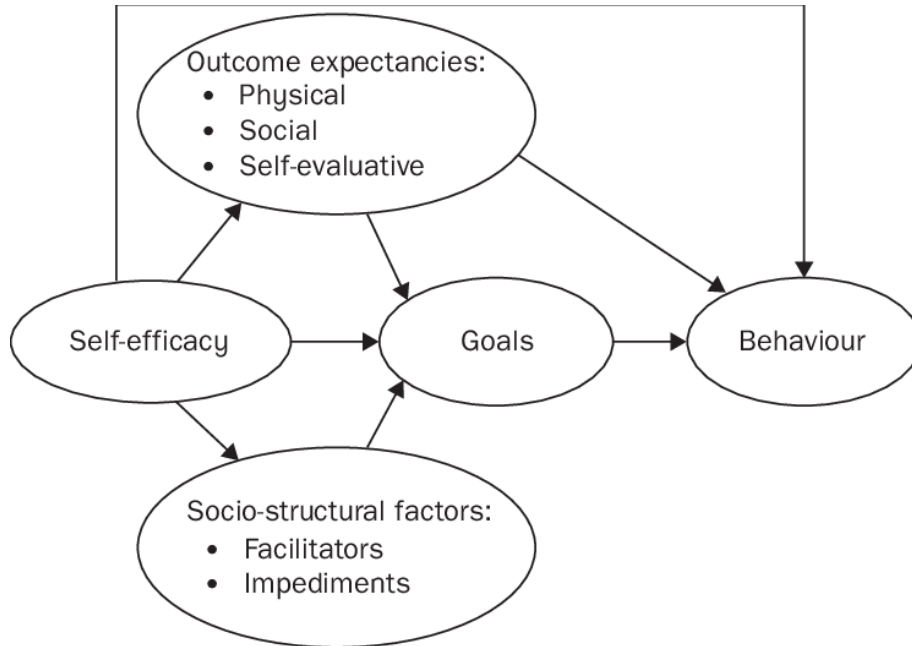


Figure 1. A Basic Outline of Social Cognitive Theory ((Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2015))

Conceptual Framework

In the educational setting, counselors are in a continuous loop learning process, caused by their environment. Training and in-field experiences directly are influenced by a counselor's intrinsic or personal behavior. The interplay between these two factors constantly hone a counselor's ability to be successful in problem solving, or self-efficacy, within their job.

Due to the continuous stream of interactions with students, programs, mentorship, and administrative education, this is an iterative process. As such, a counselor will build their

resilience and ability to navigate situations involving school violence. Below, Figure 2 illustrates the non-stop cultivation of a counselor's self-efficacy in the school environment.

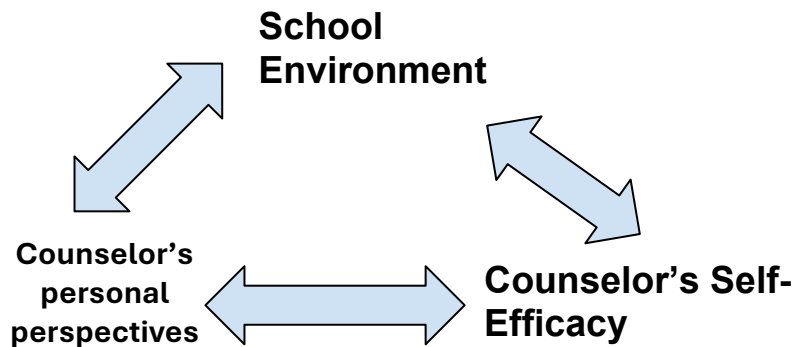


Figure 2. Counselor Behavior and Social Cognitive Theory

Definition of Terms

Resilience – Resilience is an individual's wherewithal to recover from obstacles and failures (Yu et al., 2022). In this study resilience is defined as identifying and enumerating selected protective factors that leaders convey, that protects them, and motivates them in a challenging school environment.

Self-Resilience - Self-resilience is the capability level of an individual to harness training from life experiences and mentorship, to handle getting through adverse events in a successful manner (Rao et al., 2024). In this study, self-resilience is an individual counselor's inherent ability to grow and learn from traumatic experiences.

Middle School - School grades five through eight are defined as middle school (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021*). In this study, a middle school aged student is in grades sixth through eight. In this study, middle school includes students within grades six through eight.

High School - School grades nine through twelve or ten through twelve, typically. In this study, a high school includes students in ninth through twelfth grade (*Definition of HIGH SCHOOL, 2019*). In this study, high school refers to students in grades nine through twelve.

Reported School Violence - Reported School Violence is the documentation or report of mental, emotional, or physical act or threat to commit violence in a school environment (CDC, 2024b). In this study, reported school violence are any recorded instances of school violence, related to a school.

Students - Students are people who attend a school for education (Merriam-Webster, 2019). In this study, students are people who have attended or do currently attend a school.

School Violence - School Violence refers to violence directed to a student(s), in a school environment or setting, that may cause harm and/or hinder learning (CDC, 2024a). In this study, school violence refers to mental, physical or social harm inflicted on a student or teacher or administrative member.

Counselors - Guidance counselors can be characterized as individuals who provided experiential and taught advice (*Definition of COUNSELOR, 2019*). In this study, counselors are guidance

counselors who are within a school. Also, “guidance counselor” and “counselor” ,as terms, are used interchangeably in this study to refer to counselors.

Washington, DC Metro Area - The area including Washington, DC, Northern Virginia. In this study, Washington DC Metro Area contains all of Washington, DC, Southern and Northern Maryland.

Literature Review

In order for there to be effective steering of students towards their ambitions and goals, mentorship is necessary. School counselors provide a bridge between a child and their occupational objectives, especially for students from adverse communities. According to a 2014 Gallup Survey, Okech and Rubel (2019) revealed that professors who students perceived provided care increased students’ future learning zeal and engagement in their work. The role of counselors within a child’s academic experience is a catalyst for student self-resilience and motivation. Along with administrators like principals, counselors provide an essential component of a learning team. Teachers are the teammates who engage students within educational lessons, however, the social morals, leadership, and wisdom skills are often passed down via the counselor’s office.

The power of school counselors lies in their deep, rich relationships with teaching staff and at-risk students. Outside of students’ households, there is an empty psychosocial vacuum that school counselors fill, emotionally and academically. In order to accurately understand the theorized role of counselors, there must be examination of their historical beginnings. During the inception of the school counselor profession, counselors were initially trained and charged with helping match military soldiers with their occupational specialities (Wingfield et al., 2010). As

time went on, psychological scientific advances uncovered the importance of the individual's mental health within the counseling process. However, it was not until the turbulent mid-1900s that school counselors began receiving training on leadership and individual peer counseling (Wingfield et al., 2010). The Civil Rights Movement and sweeping legislation in education also influenced the transition from career assistant to psychological mentor. Decades later, school counselors now champion student success, deliver and implement school counseling programs that are in-line with the schools' mission, and assist students in overall improvement (*Virginia School Counselor Association - Role of the School Counselor, 2023*).

The ability of counselors to be a driving force in a student's development makes them uniquely suited to youth violence prevention. These professionals are equipped to understand the personal needs of the clientele and therapeutic procedures to ease their minds. Especially among more "seasoned" school counselors, principals advocate for school counselor leadership and utilize them as an extension of school authority that is cognizant of diversity and the home-school dynamic of students (Wingfield et al., 2010). Often working with the same student cohorts for years, school counselors directly witness growth, obstacles, relationships and long-term goals of their student clients. In addition, counselors "team up" with administrative leadership (such as principals) in schools to spur student growth and social health (Lewis et al., 2020). The education of school counselors is often master's level and includes state-level licensure, comprehensive exam, and continuing education through the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (Zabek et al., 2022). The coaching leadership style of school counselors is laden with value, instilling non-violent solutions through mentorship. Through recognition of the individual, student-focused leadership methodology of school counselors there may be strides made in mental health programming and meaningful collaboration with teachers .

The subject of school violence, value of counselors, and strategic targets for counselors to be non-violence assets are prominent discussion points for planning future interventions.

Understanding the Background of School Violence and the School Environment

The genesis of school violence has its roots in patterns, environment, and predictable social context. In order to understand ways to fully utilize counselors as school violence prevention advocates, there must be a discussion of why school violence exists and what spawns it within school environments. Social Determinants of Mental Health (SDOMH), the living and resource availability of people, must be acknowledged. Students who experience poor SDOMH also systematically suffer from poor mental healthcare, financial barriers, and unsafe neighborhoods (Johnson et al., 2023). The combination of inequality of each of these aspects of life can place children down a future path that is a bleak, self-fulfilling prophecy of poverty. Bell and Marmot (2022) found that, when these inequalities are experienced early in life, this may cause individuals' ability to experience future positive learning and lifestyle outcomes more difficult. Not just physical, the school environment also pervades the minds of schoolchildren, greatly influencing the decisions they make, and is integral in the initiation of negative school incidents.

Most children's lives are spent in school hallways, and educational facilities. These places become a semi-permanent microcosm of their reality. In Washington, DC, children regularly spend over 5 hours a day in the classroom setting (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This time is invariably spent in the hands of teaching staff and counselors that help shape their immediate introduction to life. The World Health Organization posits healthcare, education, neighborhood, and built environment are all factors that influence the

mental health of schoolchildren (Johnson et al., 2023). In Washington, DC, many of the young learners are residents in food deserts. Food deserts define areas that are distanced from healthy accessible foods and over 20 million Americans could be classified as living in food deserts less than 15 years ago (Karpyn et al., 2019). In fact, in Southeast Washington, DC, it is likely that many students' lunch meals are purchased at a corner convenience store or gas station, due to lack of fresh foods. Lack of nutritional food access may only heighten the mental anguish that disadvantaged children experience during their academic lessons. Research has also suggested that long-term exposure to bullying at school increases susceptibility to developing post-traumatic stress disorder and even earlier death in students (Hikmat et al., 2024). Truly, the schoolyard can be an unhealthy environment that leads to mortality, without the life line of outside assistance. Most successful school behavior interventions require community participation, involving parties such as teachers, parents, health workers, government workers and counselors (Hikmat et al., 2024).

Historical data has suggested low-income students in underfunded school districts also encountered higher student-to-counselor ratios than wealthy school districts, increasing poor learning outcomes, burdening of counselors, lower attention per-pupil, and negative mental health effects for counselors (Brown & Knight, 2024). Outdated school books, sparse libraries, parking lots that resemble prison yards and decaying gymnasiums are only a few symptoms of this disparity, in schools in Southeast Washington, DC. Inside the classroom, these shortcomings leave challenges within the realm of psychological space for counselor intervention. Negative outcomes are historically linked to children who have poor schools. There must be discourse and evidence-based solutions for the role that school funding causes when

considering the health of a school. Perhaps, finding ways to strategically invest in counselors, in poorly funded schools, can breach the socioeconomic barriers of the student body.

School violence is not only physical, but has a lasting mental impact on the lives of children. Haunted by bullying or threats of violence, children may feel more unsafe to attend classes. Contrary to earlier research on child development, most recent developments indicate adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) cause brain development delays and later psychological trauma (Powell, 2022). This physiological harm may irreversibly stunt the potential of students who can have brighter futures, despite their family's circumstance. The biological component to ACEs is a looming public health issue that can further stall children when they become adults. Sequelae of childhood bullying include anxiety, depression and PTSD, as evidenced by research in *The Journal of Childhood and Family Studies* in 2019 (deLara, 2019).

Scholarly studies conducted on school violence reinforce the idea that victimized students can be protected via mentorship. In 2021, a multilevel analysis was conducted among high school students in Chile to monitor the effects of student violence and bullying. This longitudinal study uncovered that school violence disrupted academic performance, but was offset by mentoring, student-mentor relationships, and holding students to certain academic baseline expectations (Bravo-Sanzana et al., 2021). As evidenced, the guidance counselor can act as a counterbalance to the insidious cruelty that can hinder students living in unequal living conditions.

Counselors as Assets

Throughout the United States, school counselors are recognized as “social connectors” in each of their prospective school campuses. They possess a strong intuition and specific

knowledge of the needs and barriers that their student body experiences. Their specialized and person-centered role includes interaction and coaching with students that complements the teaching environment. Principals sampled from thirty-two different schools suggested that they valued counselors bonding with students, mental health strategies and trauma solutions (Lewis et al., 2020). These diligent leaders are community liaisons, housed inside the educational system (and often underutilized). School counselors are invaluable assets that have specialized access to students' well-being and academic development.

Social advocacy for causes such as anti-racism, community meetings, policy makers and community boards are environs that can be informed and led by adept school counselors (Johnson et al., 2023). Often, students have personal relationships with counselors that help the students “bridge the gap” for important issues. Font and Maguire-Jack (2020) argue that parents are the foremost mentors and modelers of social and education skills for children, and this has profound impacts on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Guidance counselors are challenged to be a fruitful role model for kids from disparate backgrounds – often creating motivational, life-changing stories. For most schools, school counselors are deeply involved in the college selection and admissions process, helping elucidate student opportunities. In many school settings, counselors behave as the “cheering squad” for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. School counselors work directly with parents, community leaders and school staff, utilizing their specialized training to advocate for minority students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Wingfield et al., 2010). In this way, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) encourages school counselors to be part of comprehensive school trauma prevention programs that prioritize the students' needs, analyzes school environment statistics and provides access to outside professional referrals (Alvarez et al., 2022).

Data from the American School Counselor Association in 2022 concluded that school counselors' presence was particularly powerful for minority students and students of economic disadvantage (Domina et al., 2022).

Trust is an essential component of relationship building, especially in the educational field. Students must feel safe and within their means to seek out solutions from caring adults for personal issues, not just simply learn lessons at school. In a national survey of school counselors, parents have responded that they feel school counselors are supportive and trustworthy professionals in their children's lives (Brown et al., 2024). In settings of systematic disadvantage this is even more important, as students often lack family or guardian supervision. Outside of their family, this relational trust allows at-risk and disadvantaged students to present private problems to school counselors. Who can tell me what is appropriate attire? Where can I go for a meal if my parent's food benefits "run out"? How do I deal with sadness from a life event? These are all questions fielded by knowledgeable counselors in a healthy school environment. Without this outlet, there may be academic "silent sufferers" who have trouble transitioning into college, dealing with assignment troubles and other issues.

Randomized controlled trials that involved school counselors teaching students mindfulness and emotional regulation for five weeks, reported lower stress environments and reported teacher stress (Molina et al., 2022). A troubled student may be "acting up" because of trauma within their household due to abuse. However, there is little to no way to learn this within the confines of an academic classroom period. Indeed, counselors are personally valuable to psychologically strengthen individual students, via their personalized contact. In contrast, teachers and teaching professionals are too busy with lessons and class management to personally advise students.

Strategy and Counselor Deployment in School Violence Interventions

Counselors occupy an important leadership role in the direct implementation of prospective school violence interventions through their close relationships with students and trust. These professionals are a healing force, harnessing interpersonal relationships with students to cultivate success in their lives. In the realm of leadership, counselors can be characterized as servant leaders, focusing on the care of their pupils, to increase their overall perceived worth and self-confidence (Kumar et al., 2022). An ideal future intervention would be informed through a data-driven process that can be tailored towards schools in low socioeconomic schools in Washington, DC.

Though counselors are known as important puzzle pieces in the school system, opportunities to prepare school counselors for incidents of violence are often neglected or unassigned. Research findings suggest school counselors need to gain threat assessment training, which will make the most efficient use of their clinical interpersonal skills (Ellington et al., 2023). Constructing a viable school violence prevention intervention requires preparation for critical incidents such as gun violence, which is not inclusive in normative counselor training.

Analysis

Much of the existing literature within the last ten years, related to counselors and violence, is centered around three different perspectives. These perspectives are 1) the value of understanding school socioeconomic issues (macroscopic), 2) the importance of psychosocial interaction with individual students (individual) and 3) cultivating effective programs with school-wide participation (research focused).

The most special attribute of counseling is the fact that this practice taps into individual needs of students. This benefit is often not openly recognized by teachers or administrative staff because they are rarely so intimately involved in the lives of their students. Originally only vocational guidance, the counselor role has evolved, according to the ASCA National Model, to be a holistic profession that includes professional and personal goals of students. There is a need for evidence-based studies that longitudinally examine the success of counselors helping an at-risk population. Through a lens like this, lessons can be parsed on what to do or what not to do in school violence interventions, throughout the academic and literature base.

Value of Understanding School Socioeconomic Issues

Throughout the existent United States education research data, there lies a pattern of certain vulnerable aspects that make schools more likely to experience school violence incidents. Studies have asserted that schools with low budgets or non-existent counselor programs negatively impact the success of low-income students, the most (Brown & Knight, 2024). The role of counselor as a safe haven is protective in environments of need. Interestingly, systematic review research over hundreds of school violence interventions has mentioned that interventions investigating youth violence prevention were mostly implemented within wealthy school districts, possibly negating the confounding effect of poverty (Lester et al., 2017). In other words, the adversity that poorer schools encounter is all but absent within the literature, due to bias towards collection of statistics in rich districts. Within the school system, this disconnection also may cause intraschool barriers. The socioeconomic “distance” between teachers from wealthy backgrounds and students in low-income situations (such as those in Ward 8 - DC Public Schools) is a formidable gulf. Circumstances such as low-pay and lack of recognition

have contributed to teachers of color only being 20% of all teachers, according to Harvard University (Shafer, 2018). In particular, a longitudinal study involving at-risk students and teachers in urban American environments is greatly needed.

The makeup of the overall student environment can be informative and an asset in a counselor-led intervention, as well. Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory proposes that the interplay of surroundings, availability of resources, individual socialization and culture all define a human's development (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Following the constructs of the Bio-ecological Theory, the home-life, day-to-day personal school interactions, socialization, acceptance of students, consideration and timeliness of school routines are critical towards healthy child development. For example, low-resource schools with low counselor to student ratio may lead students to experience feelings of loneliness and link this negative emotion to the classroom. In contrast, El Zaatari and Maalouf (2022) found that more wealthy school environments are capable of providing more room for students' needs to be expressed, increasing feelings of freedom, confidence and overall belonging.

The identification of auxiliary peer stakeholders, such as teaching assistants and cafeteria staff, can help to create a comprehensive picture of the school environment. The students see many of these adults as further ways to mirror and develop behavior, due to adverse home environments. These adults, termed "natural mentors", according to Hagler (2018), make up about 25% of young adults non-parent mentors help future adult development. Sadly, the occurrence of natural mentors is more likely in more wealthy environments, but its contribution must not be discounted. A small conversation from a janitor or extra word of encouragement from a teaching assistant each are additive positivity in a student's life. These individuals can provide powerful measures of the adequacy of a student's environment. Not only students, but

those that help them throughout their day, may provide valuable insights into ways to decrease or prevent school violence, too.

Importance of psychosocial interaction with individual students

The value of the counselors' persistent individual student focus is present across multiple studies, in this literature review. In contrast to teachers, students can have a 1-on-1 or "in-office" level communication with their counselor. This active mentor relationship and office-level relationships with students can be similar in social positioning to that of a student with their parents. In this proximity, counselors occupy a very intimate ear towards the fundamental needs of their clients. From the school administrators' vantage point, students are often only viewed as part of classrooms, by principals and staff. Principals hire counselors to schools and this tandem can foster safe learning spaces for at-risk youth and tackle important administrative goals (Lewis et al., 2020). In times of shortage of administration, counselors may even fill in roles of important staff members and are able to utilize their knowledge of the needs assessed from their student clients. The office of the counselor is a valuable, rich basin for school child psychology data that may be used to monitor and serve the perspectives of individual or disadvantaged children.

Pertinent soft skills of the school counselor to connect with students include tools like building conversation with individual students, letting teachers know select students socioeconomic barriers and brainstorm strategies for students from low-income environments (Wingfield et al., 2010). Due to their settings and home life, students may put up an emotional barrier which counselors must skillfully and delicately dismantle. Though prepared for difficult conversations from graduate school training, these professionals must exert more to maintain

composure in unstable, understaffed schools. Data from the United States Census Bureau confirms that counselors from poor school districts and districts that were primarily minority students had astronomically high counselor to student ratios (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016). Due to this high caseload, theory such as Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) is helpful for schools with socioeconomic challenges. SFBT utilizes an approach to individual counseling that focuses on students' assets, despite lack of resources and/or emotional issues. For instance, a student with anger issues due to food insecurity may be asked to focus on a future goal, such as a plan to become an IT professional. In this way, the counselor can create "action steps" that are small and reachable for students to improve their confidence.

Emotional intelligence and the ability to regulate one's socioemotional needs are hallmarks of well-matured individuals. Numerous studies indicate that emotional regulation is a strong value shared amongst students in high-performing schools. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Theory argues that one's ability to manage self-emotions, understand others' emotions, builds important life skills to make good decisions. As such, in the role of the counselor, sessions with SEL develop young learners into people who are empathetic, culturally-competent and career-ready (Paolini, 2019). Understanding emotions prepares learners to face uncertain home and post-school environments, equipped with safe ways to solve problems.

Topics of discussion, from college choices to relationship woes, are able to be fielded by the school counselor, who receives licensed interpersonal psychological training. Emotional intelligence and regulation of moods during life trauma are fielded by counselors, helping end suffering from adverse childhood events (Molina et al., 2022). Barriers such as time constraints and lack of training seem to limit teachers from being able to exact the same level of depth with

students. In certain school scenarios, poor success of students is suggested to be linked with counselors not having adequate time with individual students (Wingfield et al., 2010)

Cultivating effective programs with school-wide participation

Programs focused on curbing school violence that are inclusive of the counselor's participation and training are a recurring theme throughout research literature. There must be unparalleled buy-in from the principal's staff, teachers and the school counselors. This can come as a formidable task, as studies have indicated most schools with disadvantaged students lack appropriate counselor staffing (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016). The vast array of school counselor studies points to low-performing schools distributing the fewest counselor resources towards student achievement. Instead, studies in these low-performing, distressed schools, have suggested that school counselors' roles are often relegated as an ancillary feature of the school environment or left out entirely.

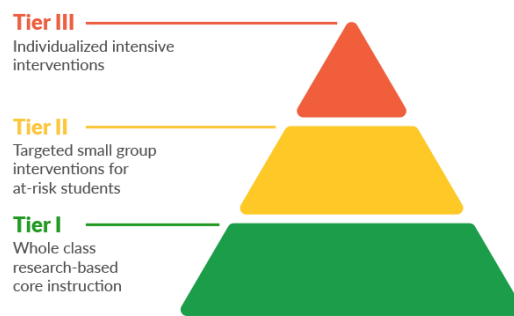
The theory of Structure Functionalism by Durkheim asserts that all personnel within a school have a role in children's learning (function) and an optimal, harmonious school and fruitful future students are evidence of fulfilling these expectations (M. Muhlis Imran & None Shaleh, 2024). Counselors have vital parts to play in reinforcing and building children's confidence by offering support, in order to benefit the world. Alternatively, functionalists argue that the absence or neglect of professional components in schools (including counseling) lead to dysfunction and lack of values in students that leave educational institutions (M. Muhlis Imran & None Shaleh, 2024).

Successful school violence prevention interventions in schools must present an interconnected relationship between school counselors and teachers. Prominent school

counseling researchers suggest the “gold standard” counseling intervention being Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS). MTSS interventions engage multiple facets of support including culturally-competent, academic, and behavioral approaches from the individual through classroom level. In order to effectively implement this multi-level intervention, engagement of counselors is vital in the individualized critical analysis of the student level emotions and activities (Figure 1.). Any absence of counselors leaves out key data from individual counseling sessions and possible resources for select disadvantaged and minority students.

Figure 1

Multitiered Systems of Support



Note. Different levels of support that can be administered by intervention or counselor.

Finally, educators, principals and counselors can help provide a safety net or funnel for detection of emerging threats. Researchers suggest that school counselors' participation in school leadership through collaboration efforts help develop preventative action plans and need assessments (Johnson et al., 2023). This is made even more stronger by school counselors also partnering with other local community-level organizations such as a community health center.S

Ethical Implications

Questions of Beneficence

The professional idea of beneficence is an individual's ethical duty to be kind, charitable and act in the best faith of those whom you serve (Thomson, 2023). Who decides what is the most good for the school? Can students or counselors do the "most good" through intervention? Should the authority of the principal be to blame? Each of these philosophical queries are questions that may be challenged by authorities, and parents, alike.

Authorities and other stakeholders within the school hierarchy may be tasked with uncomfortable changes, if a prospective intervention points out new ways of changing schools. For example, if students are recommended to attend mandatory counselor virtual check-ins, each month, this may interrupt schedules of education paraprofessionals and school liaison personnel (lunch staff, etc.). Also, an even bigger barrier parents may unconsciously possess are their own reservations. For example, a parent could claim that meeting with counselors may not align with their ideals – whether they be personal or even religious in nature. Each of these schedule changes may subtract from class and learning activities, leading some to question their usefulness in the school system. Should parents' time and resources be sacrificed for the "better" of school violence initiatives? Going further, this may create an issue that requires on-boarding and adoption, via liaisons and school violence researchers that are paired with school administration.

Funding concerns from a qualitative intervention may also be met with adversity. In many cases, some teachers do not see counselors as having the same value as the role of the educator. Due to misinformation, teachers often view school counselors as "assistants" or lower qualified helpers, unaware of school counselors' unique training in

individually consultative and culturally competent leadership (Wingfield et al., 2010). This designation can divorce counselors from the teacher-student dyad, and minimize their impact. In fact, special graduate training of school counselors serves as an impetus for adeptly creating teamwork with teachers in order to create a more wholesome educational environment.

Ethical Standards of Leaders

Unlike laypeople, leaders must be able to assume and understand the priorities of other individuals in order to effect change. Experts argue that leaders should be held to the same standards as others, but live up to them more, and with better justifications if they fail to succeed (Ciulla, 2010). In the light of this philosophical mindset, counselors are tasked with a different (and likely more difficult responsibility) than teachers. Guidance counselors must regularly supersede ordinary professional limitations, to reach troubled students. These professionals must fulfill the standards that the ASCA defines for counselors as challengers of systemic barriers, helpers, connectors and school leaders (Wingfield et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Ciulla imagines true leadership involves abandonment of self-concerns, even if it negatively affects themselves (Ciulla, 2005). In their leadership roles, counselors must “shed” their personal obligations and shoulder more responsibility than certain other school officials. For example, a busy guidance counselor may stay late to help a student through a college entrance essay, at the peril of picking their children up from daycare. In another circumstance, ushering a student through a mental health crisis may cause a day of missed appointments. Both of these examples illustrate the selfless conviction that millions of school counselors practice everyday. The willingness to abandon ego and frame outcomes on a

student's behalf is invaluable during crisis situations. As a result, the servant leadership model that counselors exude builds trust and understanding, encouraging students to follow their example.

Practical Dilemma

Reports indicate that counselors in schools most susceptible to violence are often underfunded with resources and staff to commit to large-scale community interventions (Brown & Knight, 2024). Recent researchers have asserted that school counselors are ideal professional assets in institutions suffering from high prevalence of poverty due to their ability to educate teachers about students' socioeconomic struggles, locate resources for the struggling child and create group synergy within the student-teacher dyad (Wingfield et al., 2010).

Though counselors' skills are particularly useful for building up impoverished students, these at-risk schools often lack appropriate funding levels for counselors' necessary autonomy. This creates a dilemma where answers to the school violence problem seem unanswerable, due to unanswered funding queries. Also, with very few (if any) existing frameworks to support violence prevention programming implementation in schools, there is very little guidance. Both creation of school violence prevention programs and manning the programs are stopped, due to economic disparities. Alliances with wealthier school districts and local, state, and federal advocacy may be needed to eliminate this hurdle.

Policy Implications

On Valentine's Day in 2018, 19-year old Nikolas Cruz entered Parkland High School with a semi-automatic weapon and killed over ten students (Isbell et al., 2019). This national tragedy shook the entire United States, causing outpouring of support from activists. One month later, due to massive protests and grassroots advocacy, in March 2018, The Marjory Stoneman

Douglas High School Public Safety Act was created. This act allowed trained staff to be armed as well as expanded mental health services and greatly increased the time counselors had to spend with students in Florida schools (Isbell et al., 2019). The power of legislation to immediately enact changes in school processes is a pivotal method to foster equity and strengthen the ability of school counselors to be leaders in schools.

Stirring changes can occur, in terms of policy change, due to the investigation of school violence prevention in schools. Pools of knowledge from different counselors illuminate the shortcomings and needs of at-risk schools in the DC Metro area. Through these informed approaches, dedicated prevention areas can be identified for enacted legislation. Policies and school customs partially dictate the environmental settings that may foster poor mental and emotional health in students. Informing the correct stakeholders about professional views and practices can certainly lead to fundamental advocacy for legal initiatives.

First of all, the data points collected from school counselors, in regards to school violence are invaluable. These statistics can be used to inform politicians at the federal level, and school districts and school boards, on the local level. On the local level, community groups, parents and local businesses can support local resources. For example, establishment of school policy to record violence incidents in a school-wide database can be shared with administrators. At the state level, staff training and violence prevention standards can be informed with violence incidence data from the school system. On the federal level, legislation can be deftly suggested to systematically effect change on the state level. For instance, in 2025, Representative Jahana Hayes' School Violence Prevention Act (HR 3968) was brought to the House floor and encouraged the Department of Health and Human Services to implement nationwide comprehensive evidence-based trauma prevention programming.

Knowledge about school violence is disseminated through legacy media, but concise reporting from the vantage point of administrators is often absent. Not only gun violence, but other types of interpersonal harm can exist within schools, and should be shared. Data driven solutions, collected from primary sources (counselors) are beneficial in providing detailed personal accounts about different types of psychological and violent harm students face.

School Policies vs. Laws

Finally, counselors can provide valuable insights to inform local and federal legislation, where there may be misalignment or misinformation. For instance, laws and policies exist that ban violence, but these directives can be more nuanced for different schools. School shooting data analyzed over the past twenty years indicates that states with lenient gun laws had overall higher rates of school shooting incidences (Reeping et al., 2022).

For instance, low-income schools may benefit from policies that provide stalwarts against socioeconomic barriers that their schools encounter. According to Bradley (2022), lack of school funding in schools is known to create school settings with poor teacher training, lackluster libraries, poor student hygiene, food insecurity and inadequate resources for teaching students with learning disabilities.

Summary

School violence is a sinister plague that has spread across hundreds of schools throughout the United States. In the DC Metropolitan area, Wards 7 and 8 (Southeast Washington, DC) students disproportionately suffer economic and health disparities that damage students' livelihoods.. Evidence throughout the literature reinforces the idea that the school environment faces many devastating effects due to school violence and the concomitant problems it brings.

The damage from school violence is even more pronounced in schools that are low-income and have minority students, due to lack of adequate staffing and support from counselors.

Recognition of counselors as internal school assets is a critical measure to counteract the harm of unhealthy living and educational institutions. Trauma of all types, including school violence, affects minority youth more than any other race of youth (Pumariega et al., 2022).

When school violence occurs, this is a distraction from students' academic pursuits and an encumbrance to their mental health. Each incident jars the life of students, especially those who already have tenuous lives outside of the classroom. Turanovic and Siennick (2022) found increased incidence of depression, self-harm, drop out rate, and anxiety are some consequences of school violence. This burden is likely disproportionately felt in places like Wards 7 and 8 of Washington, DC, where students share many of the worst living circumstances. High crime rate schools in these neighborhoods may benefit from counselor-led interventions that target the psychosocial root cause of these behaviors.

As well-documented within the context of history, over many decades, the role of school counselors has evolved to include specialized psychological training (modeled through organizations like ASCA) to help wayward students. An intervention that collects the viewpoints of counselors on school violence will be beneficial in shaping effective ways to stop incidents of student violence and create a more safe school environment. The effectiveness lies in the ways that school counselors have close access to children through their multiple capacities within the school system. According to Brann (2023), over 20% of DC schoolchildren in middle school and high school report being exposed to school trauma and violence. In order to have a buffer in these environments, the office of the school counselor provides a safe bastion in the learning institution.

Counselors help learners ford and endure the perils of the school experience, especially for disadvantaged students. Through counselors' specialized one-on-one student mentorship and leadership, there is a safe refuge for these children. In the early 1900s, the inception of the idea of counselors was only created for needs of matching people with jobs. However, now most counselors have psychological training and a deep understanding of topics like the home environment, social determinants of mental health, bullying, and mentorship.

More than anything, counselors are powerful allies for students who very personally know the needs of their student body populations. A common misconception among some school leaders is the idea that counselors are only "helpers" or assistants. Because of this misconception, counselors must continue to be formally recognized, trauma-trained, and selected as leaders of student related initiatives. Guidance counselors' servant leadership style is complimentary to parents and provides disadvantaged students with intuition, healthy emotions and edification of self-resilience. These skills later help students in adverse situations within the educational environment and for threats that may occur later in life.

Findings from multiple studies suggest that counselors are very underrated within the school environment. Socioeconomic inequality is quite important, since the poorer students often necessitate the most advice and development through counselors. School leadership staff should partner with counselors, to improve understanding and preparation of students for traumatic events, through interventions. Multitiered Systems of Support Interventions (MTS) include the individual level, small group level and whole class level as participants, a gold-standard model for counselor violence prevention programming.

Additionally, counselors may be a controversial party to include within schoolwide school violence prevention planning, especially for principals. Often, principals consider their

ideas the best steering for schools, and they disregard the ideas of school counselors. Regardless of this commonly held belief in school administrations, school counselors regularly sacrifice their own priorities and overextend to guide students. Researchers do suggest that funding woes do collapse many educational institutions' ability to utilize and evaluate the impact of school counselors. Policy change to bring counselor data and programming to the forefront of school violence planning is a future direction that is much needed, too.

Lastly, counselors have a natural duty towards service of students, within their defined roles. Ethical scholars would argue that counselor-led initiatives would bring the most effective individual results, due to their relationships with students. The counselors have an ethical imperative that leads them to advocate for the spectrum of a student's needs. In contrast, schoolteachers may prioritize teaching educational lessons higher than caring for the well being of students. The dilemma faced by counselors is that they strive to provide their best performance in schools of low resources, and are stunted due to lack of resources. Through adequate funding, data collected during a counselor intervention may hold the consequential power to inform community efforts that can lead to policy change. More collaboration with local stakeholders and recognition of the counselors power within troubled schools can improve psychosocial outcomes for thousands of at-risk children in the DC Metropolitan Area.

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