Teachers’ Perceptions of the Effect of School Police Officers on Criminalization of Student Behavior

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CONGRESO MUNDIAL
SOBRE VIOLENCIA EN LAS ESCUELAS
OBJECTIVES...

- The development of the criminalization of behavior in schools.
- Teachers’ perspectives on the role of school police officers in schools.
- How school police officers can contribute to a healthy school climate.
- How the TRIAD model including counseling can be used by school police officers to improve school climates and reduce criminalization of behavior.
School Safety and School Police – Historical Perspectives

- Pre-1990s – Police-School Liaison Programs, preventive and educational programs (some of the very first district police are born (e.g., LASDP)


- Safe Schools Act/Gun Free School Act [1994] led to zero-tolerance policies; zero-tolerance policies were extended over time to use of metal detectors, uniform policies, or school disruptions (Brady, Balmer, & Phenix, 2007); some researchers believe zero tolerance ushered the **paradigm shift from using police for crime prevention to using them for punitive measures** (Stinchcomb et al., 2006)
Crime Escalation in 1990s – 2,000 students assaulted on school premises per day in 1995 (Johnson, 1999); students between ages 12 and 18 subjected to 2.7 million crimes while at school in 1998 (Girouard, 2001); by 1990s schools were reaching a “breaking point” in violence rates (Price, 2009)


As a result by late 2000s school policing became a permanent feature of U.S. schools (e.g., Coon & Travis, 2012; Denham & Combs, 2009; Langberg, Fedders, & Kukorowski, 2011; Theriot, 2009)
CRIMINALIZATION OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOLS

When offenses performed by students in schools are charged and placed on a student’s criminal record.

Arrests, tickets, class C misdemeanors, cuffing for disorderly conduct, enforcement of classroom discipline
School Police Presence and the Criminalization of Student Behavior


- **SOUTH CAROLINA** - Kim and Geronimo (2009) – juvenile court referrals for School Disruption, Class Disruption, and Misconduct in South Carolina were the most common offenses for the 2007-2008 school year;

- **FLORIDA** - 40% of delinquency referrals were based on Disorderly Conduct, or Misdemeanor Assault and Battery.

- **COLORADO** - Price (2009) reported Conduct referrals to criminal justice system increased 71% in Denver public schools between 2000-2004.
School Police Presence and the Criminalization of Student Behavior

- Referrals to municipal courts leave students with criminal records. School police were never conceived to enforce discipline (e.g., Brown, 2006; Maranzano, 2001).
- Researchers claim that school personnel lost the ability to control discipline issues over time (e.g., Benigni, 2004; James, 1994).
- Langberg et al. (2011) declared that overreliance on police caused the teachers to “find their classroom authority usurped by SROs in the name of safety and security” (p. 9).
- Critics of school-police partnerships argue that extension of police power has sanctioned, perpetuated, and intensified criminalization of behaviors.
Empirical Support

- Studies documenting school police impact on criminalization of student behavior are lacking and they **focus on law enforcing and arrest statistics** – Triad Model not utilized

- Petrosino, Gluckenburg, and Fronius (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of quasi-experimental research measuring the effects of police on schools published in the United States and abroad before 2009. They found only 11 studies that matched inclusion criteria. Of those **only** Theriot’s (2009) research measuring the relationship between presence of school police and crime incidence passed the muster.
In 1999, Johnson indicated that the presence of an SRO on middle and high school campuses decreased intermediate and major offenses by 82%.

In 2008, Time and Payne in their study in Virginia, indicated that school officials preferred interactionist remedies first, legal remedies second, and physical remedies last in responding to school violence.

In 2009, Theriot compared schools with and without school police and found that the presence of school police predicted more arrests for disorderly conduct, but decreased the arrest rates for assault and weapons charges.
Theriot argued that among the three charges (i.e., assault, charge for possession of weapons, and disorderly conduct) – disorderly conduct was the most subjective and situational. Decrease in assaults and carrying weapons to school confirmed that school police were effective in deterrence of felonious behaviors.

Findings were interpreted as “Contrary to criminalization hypothesis and may even signify that SROs have a positive impact on schools” (Theriot, 2009, p. 286).

Ultimately, Theriot synthesized that crime statistics alone were not adequate to provide the picture of the police impact on schools. School culture and climate and the role of school police in them should be studied; view shared by other researchers (e.g., Brown, 2006; Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Oaks, 2001).
School Police and Behavior Criminalization – Looking Beyond Arrests

BEHAVIOR CRIMINALIZATION IN SCHOOLS

When offenses performed by students in schools are charged and placed on a student’s criminal record.

Teachers’ View of SROs
SROs and School Climate
TRIAD Model – Law Enforcing, Teaching, and Counseling
In 2014, Robles-Piña and Denham found that SROs who were part of school districts were more likely to use mediation and intervention strategies related to bullying school violence. SROs who were contracted by the school district resorted to more punitive interventions.

The study underscored the **NEED** to assess school policing and behavior criminalization as well as behavioral violations and interventions based on **policing MODEL USED (i.e., contractual and school embedded police)**.
Differences in Bullying Interventions

ISD SROs
- Agreed their school had a plan for dealing with bullying behavior
- Agreed on pairing loners with other students
- Agreed on encouraging students to talk with each other as a means of preventing bullying

CONTRACT SROs
- Between Agreed and Unsure
- Unsure
- Unsure
# Themes for Qualitative Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>ISD SRO (106/95)</th>
<th>CSRO (78/44)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Awareness</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Policy, rules, guidelines</td>
<td><strong>14%</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.3%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Conflict resolution</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Peer mediation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Empathy building</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Cooperative learning</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Social skills against victimization</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Punitive law enforcing</td>
<td><strong>8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>23%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Triad Model

- Girouard (2001)
Violation of Behavioral Norms and Victimization

- Ballooning rates of bullying and cyber-aggression in schools (e.g., Bhat, 2008; Sampson, 2002)

- Non-violent school crimes linked to spillover effects on crime-perception based on fear (e.g., Wilcox, Augustine, Bryan, & Roberts, 2005) – experience with less serious crime such as theft engendered perception-based of fear of crime in general

- School crime has been dropping, but new forms of school disorder have emerged that MAY BE as deleterious to schools.
Teacher victimization and violence directed against teachers have become a silent epidemic in the United States and have received limited media and policy attention. Yearly incidences of victimization from bullying, intimidation, gang activity, locker theft, weapon use, or assaults were reported by 80% of the nation's teachers and 94% of those incidences were caused by students. Nearly 44% of teachers reported physical attacks ((Espelage, et al., 2013).

Smith and Smith (2006) reported that 30% to 50% of new teachers abandoned their posts within 5 years. Moreover, one third of teachers gave fear of violence as the main reason why they were fearful about going to school.

Perceptions of teachers on ISD SROs’ impact on school climate based on functions they performed which is currently lacking in the literature could focus our understanding of the effectiveness of school policing overall.
Our Study

PURPOSE

- To assess **school district police (uniform model)** comprehensively based on all functions they perform in schools (from law enforcing to mentoring – **Triad Model expanded**)
- To evaluate school teachers’ perceptions of school police impact on school climate based on **police functions** performed in schools
- To identify any relationships between **healthy or unhealthy school climate** and the impact of school district police on it based on function performed
The bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) clearly positions school police and teachers’ interactions in proximal environments in **proximal environments in the microsystem of the student (i.e., school).** Proximal processes forming the cornerstone of the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) are particularly useful to examine the ISD SROs’ impact on school environment.
The ISD SRO model of school policing has been permanently embedded in school organizational structures. Thus, taken from the bioecological perspective of human development, ISD police reside within the central microsystem of school community together with teachers and it would be expected that in their functions to include mentoring and advising capacity of ISD police are the most proximal to teachers and students. Espelage et al. (2013) called for the utilization of socio-ecological theory (e.g., Bronfrenbrenner, 1977) when assessing teacher victimization.
What are the perceptions of teachers on ISD SROs’ impact on school climate in Texas schools based on the function performed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District Police $n = 172$</th>
<th>School Teachers $n = 162$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Role of Law Enforcement in Schools; A National Survey (Travis &amp; Coon, 2005)</td>
<td>➢ School Resource Officers and School Climate Survey (Oaks, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Function Variables: (a) law enforcing, (b) advising and mentoring staff, (c) advising and mentoring groups, (d) advising and mentoring students and families, (e) engagement in school events, (f) engagement in school safety planning, and (g) teaching</td>
<td>➢ Climate Variables: (a) atmosphere of caring, trust, and respect, (b) open communications among students and adults, (c) clear rules and expectations, (d) staff and student morale and satisfaction, and (e) school safety.</td>
</tr>
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Sample

Overall, school district officers from 49 ISD PDs in Texas responded to the survey. There were 25 small, 15 medium, and 9 large ISD PDs represented by the district officers in the study. The smallest ISD PD to respond to the survey employed four ISD SROs.
Analyses

Reliability
(Cronbach alpha [Cohen, 1992])

Bivariate Correlations (35)
– Spearman $\rho$
(nonparametric distribution)
Results

- Based on theoretical framework and the review of salient literature, it was anticipated that ISD SROs’ functions were related to school climate. The assumption was validated partially. There were small to moderate statistically significant relationships between the functions of ISD SROs’ (advising and mentoring students and families, engagement in school events, and engagement in school safety planning) and school climate as perceived by teachers (care, communication, clear rules and expectations, staff and student morale and satisfaction, and school safety). All those relationships were positive.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function Variables</th>
<th>Climate Variables</th>
<th>Spearman rho Correlation Statistic</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advising and Mentoring Students and Families</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff and Student Morale and Satisfaction Communication</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Safety</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff and Student Morale and Satisfaction</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clear Rules and Expectations</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in School Events</td>
<td>Staff and Student Morale and Satisfaction</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in School Safety Planning</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ***Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed); **correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed); *correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)
Results

- First, the level of advising and mentoring to students and families by ISD SROs was positively and statistically significantly correlated with nearly every indicator of school climate as perceived by the educators (i.e., care, communication, staff and student morale and satisfaction, and school safety).

Further, as supportive relationships with mentors have been documented to support resiliency (e.g., Luthar & Zigler, 1991) as well as promote social bonding (Hirshi, 1969; Welsh, 2000), from the standpoint of the fear of crime theories, **ISD SROs as mentors** may contribute to students’ resiliency and positive attachments. Those in turn, may provide a buffer and mitigate fears about the **effects of violence and crime** both in the microsystem as well as in the world external to schools (Welsh, 2000).
The Role of Law Enforcement in Schools: A National Survey (Travis & Coon, 2005) was a sound instrument to measure engagement of ISD SROs in Texas. This finding was very important to this research and to research on school policing overall. The current study was the first research testing the functions of school-based police with respect to school climate developed within the Triad Model concepts and expanded beyond the Model itself and based on the instrument that yielded statistically documented reliable scores.
Results

Atmosphere of trust, caring, and respect - .85
Open communication - .85
Clear rules and expectations - .82
Staff and student morale and satisfaction - .89
School safety - .82
Total Cronbach alpha for instrument .94

- School Resource Officers and School Climate Survey (Oaks, 2001) had never been used with the population of school district police. Therefore, its degree of stability with scores furnished by ISD SROs’ population in Texas strengthened not only the overall results of this study but cemented the instrument’s suitability for use in future studies on school climate and school district policing as well.
Ancillary findings: 41 out of 162 teachers (25%) reported being victimized at school
How SROs Use of Expanded TRIAD Model can Improve School Climates and Reduce Criminalization Behavior

- Concurrent with the U.S. President’s assertion that “the best things schools can do to reduce violence and bullying is to improve a school’s climate and increase trust and communication between students and staff” (White House, 2013, p. 12), this study confirmed that school police can and do impact school climate.

- Specifically, ISD SROs in Texas, contribute to increasing the atmosphere of care, trust, and respect on campuses they serve. They do so by large in advising and mentoring students and families and by engaging in processes related to school safety.
Because numerous studies on school police revealed that school administrators and teachers did not conceptualize SROs’ roles as counselors or mentors and resisted their involvement beyond the law enforcement role (Benigni, 2004; Brown, 2006; Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Finn et al., 2005a, 2005b; Lambert & McGinty, 2002; Robles-Piña & Denham, 2012; VanCleave, 2008), school administrators and school policy makers ought to adjust their perspectives to utilize school police whether district-type or contract-type optimally to foster healthy school climate.
The understanding that the advising and mentoring function of school police is nearly as critical as their law enforcing function as evidenced by this research, needs to be adopted and explicitly spelled out in MOUs and other school-police partnership agreements.

Concurrently, assessments of school police should reflect the advising and mentoring function as well. Further, the DOJ tasked with developing a model for “using school resource officers” (White House, 2013, p. 11) should reassess the robustness of the Triad Model to incorporate explicitly and with suitable measurements the advising and mentoring function of school police as suggested in past research (e.g., Brown, 2006; Coon & Travis, 2012; Finn & McDevitt, 2005).
Moreover, while assessing the expansion of the Triad Model, the engagement in school events as well as engagement in school safety planning functions of school police, linked in this ISD SROs’ research to the promotion of the atmosphere of care, trust, and respect as well as staff and student morale and satisfaction, need to be considered.

The engagement of ISD SROs in this study was also associated with the maintenance of clear rules and expectations, listed by the Administration (White House, 2013, p. 13) as one of the evidence-based strategies to improve school climate. Similarly, the engagement in school safety planning by ISD SROs improved communications between students and adults on campuses.
References

References


References


• The White House (2013, January). *Now is the time*. The President’s plan to protect our children and our communities by reducing gun violence. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/wh_now_is_the_time_full.pdf


