

AN INVESTIGATION INTO WISCONSIN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SEXUAL ABUSE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

by

Jessica R. Dempze

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Investigation Advisor

The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
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The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751

Abstract

<u>Dempze</u>	<u>Jessica</u>	<u>R.</u>
(Last Name)	(First)	(Initial)

An Investigation Into Wisconsin Public Schools Sexual Abuse Intervention Programs

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Child sexual abuse has become a major concern in recent years. Increased rates of reporting have brought an awareness of this social disease to public attention. Schools are viewed as the best source to provide preventative programs since most children attend school. School counselors are trained in child development and behavior so they are utilized in providing most of the preventative programs and postventative services.

This study used a telephone interview to examine the prevention programs and postvention services provided by a select number of Wisconsin school counselors. It also determined the community resources utilized by school counselors to assist in providing prevention and postvention services. Finally, counselors' opinions on necessary additions to their guidance programs were determined.

Results of this study found that prevention programs were more prevalent at the elementary level, while middle and high programs were more reactionary. Most

counselors at each level felt the services they provided were adequate and that community resources sufficiently supplemented their prevention and postvention services.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Although accurate statistics on the extent of child sexual abuse are troublesome to obtain, research shows that the rate of sexual abuse is alarming. As a society, we are starting to become aware of this horrible social disease, yet those professionals who work closely with children are slow to respond to the growing need for preventative and postventative services. Since most children attend school and most abuse occurs in the home, schools provide the logical setting for providing sexual abuse prevention instruction and postvention services.

Current research provides a wide range of statistical information on the incidence and prevalence of childhood sexual abuse. Accurate data is difficult to obtain due to the underreporting of these offenses and the difficulty defining exactly what child sexual abuse is. These inconsistencies in reporting and documenting data make it difficult to report reliable statistics on current victimization. Current research attempts to provide some indication of the incidence and prevalence, although the true rates may be much greater. A recent survey of the general population revealed that 32% of females and 13% of males reported a history of child sexual abuse (Dayle-Jones, 1998). Other research reports that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 10 boys may experience some form of child sexual abuse before reaching adulthood (Bagley & Thurston, 1996). Because these statistics show that there are victims of this horrible crime, preventative education and postventative services become necessary in our society.

The past two decades have seen an increased awareness of the significant problem of child sexual abuse. This heightened awareness is due, in part, to the increased freedom women have gained since the 1960's. This new freedom for women allowed more victims to come forward and share their personal stories of childhood sexual abuse. Increased reporting is also

due to a growing awareness of crimes committed against women and children; the creation of mandated child abuse reporting laws; the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974; and The Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption, and Family Services Act of 1988 (Berson, Berson & Ralston 1998). All these factors have raised the publics' and professionals' awareness of this social disease. This enhanced awareness emphasizes the need for preventative sexual abuse programs, as well as, postventative programs for the victims of this ordeal.

Programs and services offered by the school can serve to support students who are victims as well as educate students about abuse and how they can protect themselves from becoming a victim. Preventative programs aim to educate and empower children in self-protective responses and encourage children to report abusive experiences (Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 1992). Postventative programs within the schools can include support through individual counseling techniques and referrals to community agencies who can offer more specialized services. The prevalence of child sexual abuse produces a reason for the use of both prevention and postvention programs within a school, especially since educators have "special skills in communicating with children, and knowledge of child development, [that lead to the] notice of behavioral changes that might indicate a child has been abused" (Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 1992).

The literature indicates that parental involvement in sexual abuse education and services offered by the school is important for various reasons. Parental involvement allows parents to be familiar with what is being taught to their children in these programs, to reinforce the prevention lessons being taught at school, and to give feedback to the school on how they perceive the effectiveness of the program (Berrick & Gilbert, 1991). By involving the parents, they "may indirectly affect the success of the classroom-based prevention programs" (Wurtele & Miller-

Perrin, 1992, p.91). The role of parents in prevention efforts are to be willing to permit their child in participating in these programs and to help their children apply this new knowledge to their own lives. When counselors, teachers and parents work together cooperatively, parents may become more aware of the services available to their children through the school and community resources. This awareness becomes invaluable to educators and parents if sexual abuse postvention services are needed.

Child sexual abuse is considered a taboo subject by society (Bagley & Thomlison, 1991). Because of this perception, it is difficult to implement programs that educate children about sexual abuse. Reluctance of acceptance by parents who see sexual abuse prevention/postvention services as sex education and, not personal safety education, also hinder the execution of these programs. Therefore, schools may not be able to offer adequate services to meet the needs of students. Community resources are important and useful, but it is important for schools to acknowledge that students need to be educated about and empowered by sexual abuse interventions and that the school plays an important role in the deliverance of these interventions (Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 1992).

The need for sexual abuse preventative and postventative programs is apparent and collectively, parents, teachers and counselors need to work together with such a sensitive and controversial issue. By educating the students, as well as the parents, schools can work to change the “code of silence” this topic elicits. The knowledge and use of community resources can benefit the efforts of the schools in helping students deal with sexual abuse issues. By providing adequate prevention and postvention child sexual abuse services and programs only strengthens a well-executed developmental guidance program.

Rational, Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the types of guidance and support programs available to prevent, educate and help children cope with sexual abuse issues in a select number of Wisconsin public schools. The objectives of this study are: 1) to determine what prevention and postvention programs and services are available at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, 2) to determine counselors' opinions on necessary additions to their guidance programs in order to educate students about sexual abuse and offer assistance to victims and 3) to provide recommendations for counselors based on the research findings of this study.

Research Questions

Based upon the a review of literature, the following research questions have been proposed:

- R1: What school based sexual abuse prevention and postvention services are utilized by Wisconsin counselors at the elementary, middle and high school levels?
- R2: What community based sexual abuse prevention and postvention services are offered to students by Wisconsin counselors at the elementary, middle and high school levels?
- R3: Where have Wisconsin counselors received training, if any, on the symptoms of and interventions for child sexual abuse?

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

According to current prevalence estimates (Berson, Berson & Ralston, 1998), every two years each classroom within a school will be confronted with at least one suspected child abuse case that requires mandated reporting. Statistics also show that out of a class of 25 students, five children have been or will be sexually abused by the end of high school (Nelson & Clark, 1986). School counselors are professionals with knowledge in child behavior and development (Hackbarth-James, 1999). Because of this knowledge, school counselors are seen as the “first in line” to identify, provide prevention for and intervention services to victims. School counselors need to be knowledgeable about programs that can assist children in protecting themselves from becoming victims and assist in the healing process of those who are identified as such. A review of the literature will cover the incidence and prevalence of child sexual abuse, the barriers that exist in the execution of child sexual abuse prevention programs, the need for these programs within a school, types of prevention methods, what effective prevention programs teach, how the school can provide postventative child sexual abuse services, symptoms characteristic of sexual abuse, and the school counselors’ role in providing appropriate postventative services.

Incidence and Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse

It is difficult to determine the exact incidence or prevalence of child sexual abuse due to the under-reporting of such offenses. Wurtele and Miller-Perrin (1992) suggest that the pervasive societal belief that child sexual abuse is a taboo subject accounts for some of the under-reporting of sexual abuse incidents. Research estimates that only 20% of child sexual abuse cases reach professional attention. “Barriers exist due to historical, sociocultural, and familial impediments to the child protection process” (Berson, Berson & Ralston, 1998, p. 2). Problems with defining

child sexual abuse also prevent obtaining accurate data on the occurrence. Different definitions are used by various organizations thus creating inconsistencies in professional records (Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 1992). These inconsistencies hinder researchers from reporting statistics on the incidence and prevalence of child sexual abuse. Dayle-Jones (1998) reports that a recent study revealed 32% of females and 13% of males in the general population that were surveyed reported a history of child sexual abuse. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services surveyed all 50 states on child abuse reports. From this survey, 43 states responded and reported that there were 98,339 victims of sexual abuse in 1997. Of these, 5,822 child sexual abuse victims were from Wisconsin. This type of child maltreatment was the most reported in Wisconsin when compared with physical and emotional abuse. This tends to be unusual since most states report physical abuse as the most often reported offense. Since reports indicate that many children are victims of this crime, it is the responsibility of those working with children to be knowledgeable in prevention programs, as well as, the resources available for postvention services for victims.

Barriers to the Execution of Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs

Research suggests that there are many barriers to the implementation of sexual abuse prevention programs in schools. It is suggested that many adults, including school personnel, are horrified by the reality of sexual abuse, thus denying its existence. This denial allows for excusing the lack of protective services to students under the guise of “I didn’t know”, about the potential for abuse (Berson, Berson & Ralston, 1998). Other literature suggests that denial and avoidance of the occurrence of sexual abuse is a way for adults to cope with the discomfort *they* feel. This universal need to deny incest creates the “incest taboo”. (Dayle-Jones, 1998). Many times school personnel are ill prepared or afraid to discuss the subject of sexual exploitation (Nelson & Clark, 1986). Another barrier schools face is the fact that there is little evidence that

these programs actually prevent abuse. It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs due to the inability to create researchable groups consisting of pre and post-sexually abused children. However, most programs do use a pre-test, post-test format to evaluate what the student has learned, but this type of evaluation lacks evidence of prevention. Schools are also apprehensive about the developmental appropriateness of prevention programs and the effectiveness of different presenters and materials (Roberts & Miltenberger, 1999). Prevention materials not only need to be developmentally appropriate, but also varied enough to address the needs of a diverse classroom (Nelson & Clark, 1986). Time is also a concern for busy school counselors. There is very little time for developing new programs, creating lessons plans, and obtaining the proper training or doing research (Nelson & Clark, 1986). Finally, schools located in conservative communities have to be cautious about how they handle any information about sexuality (Lanning, Ballard, & Robinson, 1999). Teachers and counselors are often afraid of the reaction of parents to sexual abuse prevention in the classroom (Nelson & Clark, 1986).

Prevention programs also face some critics who do not question whether prevention programs work, but wonder if they should even be offered. The appropriateness of sexual abuse prevention programs is questioned. These critics believe that by telling children they have a right to say no to an adult, this encourages children to question adults, especially parents, authority. It is also argued that these programs make children more cautious about their contacts with adults, which may hinder the child's ability to form healthy relationships with adults. Instead, these critics suggest targeting abuse prevention at "at-risk" students, that is, students with families in transition and/or under stress. However, research is inconclusive as to who is "at-risk" for childhood sexual abuse. These critics also propose investing resources into treating the negative effects of sexual abuse rather than preventing the occurrence (Daro, 1994).

Despite all these barriers, researchers conclude that the numerous behavioral outcomes that result from child sexual abuse will manifest in a school setting. This literature states, “these abusive experiences can cause profound short-term and long-term effects on a child’s mental health and development, ultimately interfering with a child’s ability to function well at home and at school” (Lanning, Ballard, & Robinson, 1999, p.1). Those working with children, especially teachers and counselors, are aware that students who are, “struggling just to survive emotionally, physically or psychologically *don’t learn* unless their situation changes” (Nelson & Clark, 1986, p.81). Literature also points out that school based prevention education programs remain the best-instituted way to limit new victimization (Burkhhardt & Rotatori, 1995). Teachers and counselors have also demonstrated the ability to effectively educate children, “to recognize, resist, and report perpetrators” (Burkhhardt & Rotatori, 1995, p.11). Since children spend most of their time in schools, this provides the logical setting for implementing child sexual abuse prevention and postvention programs (Lanning, Ballard, & Robinson, 1999). “The clearest channel for reaching children who need help is through the schools” (Nelson & Clark, 1986, p.81). The research has suggested, however, that sexual abuse prevention programs should be labeled “safety education”, “personal safety education” or “safety skills instruction” (Bevill & Gast, 1998). This type of labeling eliminates the stigma of “sexual” abuse prevention, and avoids using the term “prevention” since efficacy is difficult to prove.

Types of Prevention Methods

There are three types of prevention methods to consider, primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. First, primary prevention goals are to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring. This type of prevention has not been proved effective by research (Whetsell & Mitchell, 1995). However, primary prevention efforts could include bringing awareness and education of sexual

abuse to the public. This educational message needs to promote the notion that child sexual abuse is, “everyone’s responsibility and everyone’s problem” (Daro, 1994, p.216). Primary prevention also needs to be directed to perpetrators, who especially need to know that, “child sexual abuse is a crime, that there is help available, that abusive behavior can be chronic unless the abuser gets help, that child sexual abuse hurts children, and that children can never consent to sexual relations” (Daro, 1994 p. 216).

Secondary prevention goals aim to detect abuse early and increase reports of those students who are currently or in the past have been abused. This type of prevention is easier to detect. Many research studies report an increase in abuse disclosure after a prevention program has been presented. In one study (Whetsell-Mitchell, 1995) where five schools had prevention programs and one school did not, 20 confirmed reports of sexual abuse were reported in the six months that followed the prevention programs. The control group received no reports. Another study revealed that 28 students reported either current or past sexual abuse in the two months that followed a three-session prevention program (Whetsell-Mitchell, 1995). Daro’s (1994) research also confirms that there is an increased rate of disclosure after safety education programs are presented. Her research cites a study where 24 reports of child sexual abuse were made to guidance counselors at five schools in the six months following sexual abuse prevention programs. Secondary prevention efforts could prevent continued abuse and offer opportunity for victims to report their maltreatment.

The third type of prevention, tertiary, aims to offer comprehensive treatment and services to victims and offenders. These postventative services offered by the school could include knowledge of community resources available to provide treatment and services to victims, what

resources are available to the victim and his or her family, what referrals would be most beneficial to the victim and what appropriate services are available at the school.

What Effective Prevention Programs Teach

Personal safety or sexual abuse prevention programs in schools provide valuable information to help students protect themselves. Research shows that the programs that are effective in teaching personal safety skills related to sexual abuse consistently provide information on: appropriate and inappropriate touch between adults and children, and children and children; the definition of sexual abuse and students rights; the right to say “no”, the right to be assertive and not to be abused; and identifying a “safe” person to talk with (Lanning, Ballard & Robinson, 1999). Research done by Deborah Daro (1994) shows that most sexual abuse prevention instruction given in a classroom setting covers the following topics: helping children to identify the difference between good, bad and questionable touching; letting children know their rights of who can touch their bodies and where they can be touched; emphasize the importance of reporting incidences to trusted adults; teaching assertiveness skills; and identifying support systems for those who have experienced any maltreatment. These successful programs teach a combination of empowering the student, resilience skills and disclosure skills (Bevill & Gast, 1998), as well as providing information for children to become more skilled in recognizing inappropriate behavior and ways to access help (Daro, 1994). Even though efficacy is difficult to prove, research has shown that students have an increase in personal safety and sexual abuse knowledge, and more importantly, are better able to decipher whom to go to for help if they have been abused after having personal safety skill instruction offered through school (Daro, 1994). Although all grade levels were researched, the effects of prevention training were most evident at

the elementary level (Daro, 1994). This supports the need to include personal safety instruction in an elementary guidance curriculum.

When working with grade school children, Bevill and Gast (1998) indicate that behavioral skills training (BST) is the most effective. This type of training includes using role-play, rehearsal of skills, storybooks, games, films, dolls and modeling of behavior. Their research found these approaches were more effective than passive learning approaches. Daro's research discovered similar findings. Her research indicates that most evaluations of sexual abuse prevention programs recommend opportunities for children to practice newly learned skills through role-playing and participant modeling. These methods were found to be more effective than the presenter modeling prevention competencies.

Another way to insure a sexual abuse prevention program will benefit children is to repeat the lesson. This repetition strengthens the likelihood of success by creating an initial presentation of safety concepts at the lower grades that builds a critical foundation for later learning (Daro, 1994). Other research agrees that safety concepts need to be reinforced again and again after being introduced. Just as Bandura's social learning theory suggests, this technique will maximize learning (Whetsell-Mitchell, 1995). Children cannot implement skills that are not yet acquired. When students are inculcated with personal safety information they can be empowered with knowledge of how to protect themselves.

Early detection of child sexual abuse is essential to the healing process and the child's future well being. Providing child sexual abuse prevention programs in the schools can aid in this early detection (Lanning, Ballard & Robinson, 1999). Parents and those working with young children agree that safety skills related to abuse prevention are important and research indicates that young children do have the capability to learn these skills with proper instruction (Bevill &

Gast, 1998). Schools also represent a system that is involved in the protection and the well being of the child. These qualities make it possible for the school to be the first to intervene and interact with an abused child. School counselors assess abuse incidents, report suspected abuse, and provide support to the victimized child (Berson, Berson & Ralston, 1998). It is important that school counselors are adequately prepared to encounter the growing number of victims within their schools.

Symptoms Characteristic of Sexual Abuse

Once an appropriate program is implemented, counselors need to have the skills to identify those children who may have been or are currently victims of child sexual abuse. The current research provides some insight into some characteristics of children who have been sexually abused. The types of symptoms include behavioral, emotional, and physical. Behavioral symptoms may include unusual qualities of power and aggression, display of sexualized behavior that is not age appropriate, play that is more anxious, joyless and constrictive, and the child victim may combine violence and sexuality in artwork. Emotional symptoms may include externalizing characteristics of aggression, hostility, anger, irritability, and hyperactivity. Internalizing characteristics are usually depression and anxiety. These attributes usually create, mood swings, feelings of guilt, feelings of helplessness, fear, hyper vigilance, nightmares, sleep disturbances, and decreased attention span, to name just a few. All of these emotional characteristics can hinder school performance. The physical symptoms of sexual abuse are not easy to detect, but there are some things that school counselors can look for. These include bruises, bleeding, pain or itching in the genital area and difficulty walking or sitting. It is cautioned, however, that some sexually abused children may not exhibit any of the above

mentioned behavioral, emotional, or physical symptoms. Also, a child displaying one symptom does not validate sexual abuse (Hackbarth-James, 1999).

School Counselors' Role in Providing Postventative Services

School counselors also have the advantage of access to students' school records. The literature states that school records should be examined to determine any changes in academic performance and behaviors. A sudden decrease in academic performance and attentiveness may help to identify or confirm suspected abuse. These can be considered indicators of abuse since studies have shown that, "long-standing child sexual abuse has been linked to learning difficulty, declining grades, difficulties with concentration and attention, and poor peer relations" (Burkhardt & Rotatori, 1995, p. 139). The literature recommends observing the suspected victim in the classroom to gather information on the appearance of any of these problems. This literature also includes behaviors that are indicative of sexual abuse such as, "delinquency, stealing, running away, and substance abuse" (Burkhardt & Rotatori, 1995, p.139).

These symptoms may manifest themselves in the classroom and in the home. Parents and teachers may observe certain characteristic and suspect sexual abuse. School counselors may provide guidance to parents and teachers who are concerned by these displays. It is recommended that the school counselor model a calm, but concerned demeanor. The research also suggests that the school counselor provide education to school faculty and parents about the symptoms of child sexual abuse and how to appropriately react to the given situation (Hackbarth-James, 1999).

Counselors need to be prepared to provide postvention services to those students who disclose abuse or for those students who may have been identified as a sexual abuse victim. After a student has been identified as a victim, and the abuse has been reported, the school counselor

needs to provide emotional support. The literature suggests that the counselor be empathic and encouraging and can offer mediums of expression, besides traditional talk therapy, through play, art, music, role-playing, storytelling, and writing (Holtgraves, 1986). The counselor must strive to be sure the child feels relaxed and comfortable to enable him/her to express him/herself openly.

Another important role the counselor plays in postvention services is to coordinate services with other professionals. These could include working with social workers, legal representatives, and/or therapists. The school counselor needs to be aware of the resources that are available to assist a student and his/her family when dealing with this sensitive issue. It is beneficial to have professional contact with other agencies and to be knowledgeable in what services can be provided. By coordinating services with other professionals, the school counselor can minimize trauma, avoid duplication of services and best serve the needs of the child at school (Hackbarth-James, 1999).

Conclusion

This investigation will look at what prevention and postvention services are being offered in Wisconsin public schools. A similar study was done to ascertain grief and loss intervention programs used in Wisconsin public schools (Budzinski, 1998). Budzinski's study used the same type of data collection and participant size. Ideas for survey questions were also obtained from this study. Another, similar study examined the child sexual abuse prevention programs in the Texas public elementary schools (Lanning, Ballard, & Robinson, 1999). Their research looked at the types of programs being utilized, what kind of training is available to school personnel, how the schools evaluated their programs, what local agencies were utilized, and the type of funding used. Both pieces of literature helped to define and support this investigation.

As the literature indicates, child sexual abuse is an issue that deserves attention. Schools are viewed as “first in line” to provide sexual abuse services because educators are professionals with knowledge in child behavior and development, students spend most of their time in schools, and schools are involved in the protection and well being of the child. For these reasons, it is important that every school with a developmental guidance program include child sexual abuse services. The inclusion of such programs only strengthens a well-developed guidance program.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the types of guidance and support programs available to prevent, educate and help children cope with sexual abuse issues in a select number of Wisconsin public schools. The objectives of this study are: 1) to determine what prevention and postvention programs and services are available at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, 2) to determine counselors' opinions on necessary additions to their guidance programs in order to educate students about sexual abuse and offer assistance to victims, and 3) to provide recommendations for counselors based on the research findings of this study.

Subject Selection

Fourteen school counselors within five school districts in the state of Wisconsin were surveyed. The five districts were selected based on district population and their use of a developmental guidance program. The five districts selected were determined on the following enrollment census figures: Less than 5,000 students, Chippewa Falls; 5,001 to 10,000 students, Merrill; 10,001 to 15,000, Wisconsin Rapids; 15,001 to 20,000, Eau Claire; and 20,001 and greater, Green Bay. A counselor at the elementary, middle and high school level was surveyed in each district, except Eau Claire in which the high school counselor did not partake in the survey. Eight female and six male counselors participated in the survey. An explanation of the survey was given to the counselors as well as assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

Instrumentation

A structured telephone survey was developed by the researcher for the purpose of gathering information on current guidance and support services. This survey can be found in appendix A. The questionnaire consists of 9 questions:

- 1) What type of prevention services and programs are included in your guidance program that address child sexual abuse?
- 2) What type of prevention services and programs are available in your community other than school programs that address child sexual abuse?
- 3) What type of postvention services and programs are included in your guidance program that address child sexual abuse?
- 4) What type of postvention services and programs are available in your community other than school programs that address child sexual abuse?
- 5) In your professional experience are there any services that you do not currently provide that you think would benefit your guidance program addressing child sexual abuse?
- 6) Have you had any training in the identification of symptoms of sexual abuse?
- 7) Have you had any training in effective intervention strategies for sexual abuse?
- 8) Does your district have a written policy for mandatory reporting of child abuse?
- 9) Is your written policy different for physical/emotional abuse than sexual abuse?

The survey questions were derived from a current literature review of prevention programs and interventions used within the school and mental health communities regarding child sexual abuse.

Research Procedures

The researcher conducted the structured telephone interviews with the selected respondents during the months of April and May 2000. Upon completion of the telephone survey, counselors were given the opportunity to ask questions and request a copy of the results and summary of the study.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the telephone interviews was analyzed with respect to the research questions posed in Chapter One. The survey results were examined to determine what prevention and postvention services are being offered to students in the selected schools. Descriptive information was summarized and recommendations for guidance counselors presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The objectives of this study are to ascertain what types of guidance and support programs are available that address the prevention and postvention of child sexual abuse in the selected elementary, middle and high schools. This study also determined counselors' opinions on what additions to their guidance programs would benefit their prevention and postvention sexual abuse services. Five elementary, five middle school, and four high school counselors were surveyed.

Elementary

The types of school prevention services included in guidance programs ranged from none offered to specific units addressing the recognition of sexual abuse and where to seek help. Four of the five elementary schools surveyed offered personal safety or protective behaviors instruction that addressed sexual abuse to all grade levels. Many schools varied their sexual abuse prevention lessons from "Stranger Danger" for the lower grades to incorporating sexual abuse education and prevention in human growth and development units for the upper grades.

Community involvement utilized by elementary counselors in the deliverance of sexual abuse prevention education varied also. The services provided ranged from a community agency teaching four lessons at each grade level on sexual abuse prevention to providing funding to schools for abuse prevention services. All schools utilized some kind of community resource to either provide all sexual abuse education or to supplement what the school was offering. Most schools mentioned that Human Services and/or Health care providers offered information to educate parents about childhood sexual abuse. One school mentioned that community agencies are willing to come in and give instruction on sexual abuse when asked by a school staff

member. “Officer Friendly” was used in two of the schools surveyed also to provide lessons on sexual abuse prevention.

Postvention services offered to students through school based programs include referrals to community agencies and individual and group counseling. All five elementary schools surveyed offer referrals to their students so that they can obtain the necessary services not provided through the school. Three of the five schools offered individual counseling, while the other two conducted follow ups with the victim and Social Services after the referral had been made. One counselor mentioned being with the student when meeting with Social Services and/or the police to allow the student to feel more comfortable. One school surveyed utilized sexual abuse support groups as a postventative measure based on need and parental approval, while another counselor believed that sexual abuse support groups were too sensitive to have in the school setting.

Postvention services and programs provided by community agencies include individual and group counseling for referred victims. Three elementary counselors were familiar with community counselors who specialize in treating sexual abuse victims. One counselor stated that their local health care center also provided individual counseling. Many counselors were aware of sexual abuse groups provided by community and private agencies for all age levels.

According to the elementary counselors surveyed, most felt that there were no necessary additions to their guidance program needed regarding sexual abuse services. Reasons for not implementing new services included not being aware of any further services to provide, having no time to implement new services and being satisfied with the current services provided. One counselor stated that having additional parental involvement with the deliverance and follow up of sexual abuse prevention lessons would be a beneficial addition to their guidance program.

Additional information was sought concerning the training school counselors have had in the identification and intervention of sexual abuse. Most elementary counselors had attended conferences and workshops that gave training in the symptoms of child sexual abuse. Three of the counselors specifically named the Mid-West Conference on Child Sexual Abuse as a good source of information on symptoms of and interventions for sexual abuse. One counselor mentioned a yearly meeting of community agencies to discuss current sexual abuse issues. Another counselor stated that little intervention is given, instead the abuse is reported and referred out to specializing agencies. Instead, the counselor conducts an individual follow up on the abused student to ascertain that proper services were obtained.

Middle School

School based prevention programs at the middle school level included units within health classes and other general education classes. Four of the five counselors surveyed reported this type of prevention education delivery. One counselor mentioned staff education on sexual abuse as an important prevention method. Another counselor stated the importance of educating parents as well as the students in prevention strategies. Only one counselor reported giving classroom guidance lessons on sexual abuse prevention and awareness. This counselor stressed the importance of repetition for the retention of information learned and to also provide information to parents by letter on what will be covered in the lesson and what they can do for follow up with their child.

At the middle school level, counselors utilized more community resources in the deliverance of sexual abuse prevention education. Many utilized community counselors, human services, community agencies and the police to supplement their guidance program. One counselor stated that a community agency provides funding to a teenager abstinence program

that addresses sexual abuse issues. Counselors reported that community agencies often provide parent and teen brochures with information about sexual abuse. One counselor specifically mentioned T.E.A.C.H.R, Together Educating and Celebrating Healthy Relationships; a monthly school based effort to help students understand domestic violence, including sexual abuse. This group consists of concerned persons from many community agencies who meet with school staff to educate and raise awareness about all kinds of abuse for students, parents and staff. Another counselor mentioned that different community agencies present information about sexual abuse in the schools. These lessons are not consistent and happen only periodically. One middle school counselor reported that sixth and eight grade students are given information about sexual abuse prevention through community agencies. The seventh grade class is taught a guidance lesson by the counselor regarding sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

School based postvention programs at the middle school level include individual and group counseling and referrals to community agencies. Three of the five counselors offered group therapy to students based on need and parental support and approval. A counselor that does not offer groups stated that there was not enough time to implement groups at school. Another postvention service offered is to work with the families to provide resources and referrals to support agencies. Most counselors mentioned following up with students who were referred to outside agencies to be sure proper intervention is being obtained.

Community resources that provide postventative services reported by middle school counselors were individual and group counseling by community agencies and private counselors who specialize in sexually abused children. Most counselors mentioned human or social services, county and state agencies, health care providers, and private counselors as community postvention services most often used. One counselor stressed the importance of establishing a

good rapport with persons from other support agencies to share information about potential victims and perpetrators. As a way to follow up with students referred to other counselors, one surveyed counselor reported obtaining a release of information from parents to be able to talk with the “outside” counselor.

When asked what services could be added to their program regarding sexual abuse services, responses varied between counselors. One stressed the need for more parent education. Another wished to utilize group work more often, but stated a time restriction hinders the development of such a program. Another counselor mentioned the need for better communication between agencies so as not to duplicate services provided to the student. Another service mentioned was the desire to have more community agency services offered at the school for convenience and comfort of students. One counselor wished they had more time to offer more postventative services while another stated that school counselors do not go looking for abused students, but only provide referrals to students who choose to disclose abuse to the counselor.

Middle school counselors training on the symptoms and intervention of sexual abuse includes conferences, workshops and university classes. All five counselors surveyed reported that they had some training on the symptoms of sexual abuse from conferences and university classes. Four counselors had attended workshops that provided information on the symptoms of sexual abuse. One counselor stated the importance of having information available to parents, such as books and brochures, and another commented on sharing important information with faculty and staff. By sharing information with parents and teachers they are able to help with the identification of potential victims.

Middle school counselors reported fewer training opportunities in intervention strategies. Most noted conferences, workshops and university classes as where they had received some information on intervention. Two of the counselors specifically mentioned the Wisconsin School Counselors Association conference. One counselor stated, however, that he had “not really” received any training on intervention.

High School

Most high school guidance counselors reported that school based sexual abuse prevention was offered through some general education class that all students are required to take. Some elective classes also offer information on the prevention of sexual abuse. Units like “protective behavior”, “personal safety” and “healthy relationships” covered the topic of abuse prevention, including sexual abuse. These units were offered in such classes as physical education, health, psychology and sociology classes. One guidance program educates all freshman through classroom instruction on what abuse is, definitions of different types of abuse and an explanation of mandatory reporting. Another specific program utilized addresses sophomores on sexual abuse issues and is instructed by the school social worker. Another prevention strategy reported is the ability to provide information to parents on sexual abuse issues.

Community based prevention programs utilized by the surveyed high school counselors range from none available at the high school level to providing prevention education to parents, students and staff. Most community-based programs provide services outside of school. These services include educating the community through advertisements, literature and classes. Most of these agencies offer sexual abuse prevention education for all age levels.

School-based postvention services offered by counselors at the high school level consisted mainly of referrals to outside agencies. One counselor reported providing individual

counseling to victims who are not receiving “outside” counseling and support to those who are. Another counselor who only offers referrals to victims stated, “by high school they (victims) learn to deal with it (sexual abuse) by themselves”. The surveyed high school counselors reported no other type of postvention services.

Community-based postvention services provide individual counseling, group counseling or support groups and support to the victim and the family. Some high school counselors stated that they knew of private counselors who specialized in working with sexual abuse victims. Social services and human services were mentioned as agencies providing postvention services as well as police, private counselors and non-profit organizations. These services can be easily obtained by the victim and some offer no or low cost services.

High school counselors’ opinions on additions to their guidance program regarding sexual abuse services varied between counselors. One stated the desire to offer groups for victims, but is concerned about the confidentiality and comfort level of the students involved. This counselor stated that groups of this nature would be best provided outside of school. Time constraints also prevent the addition of new services. Another high school counselor believes that more sexual abuse services are needed at the elementary and middle schools. This counselor expressed the desire to have more contact with community agencies to be more proactive by providing more prevention programs, rather than being mostly reactive. Another idea brought forth was having a “Safety Week” where there is an effort to educate and bring awareness about all abuses, physical, emotional and sexual; and to teach personal safety skills. Another counselor wants to provide more parental education. Finally, one counselor was not aware of any services that could be added at the high school level, but believed that it should be addressed more at the elementary level to bring awareness early.

Counselor training in the symptoms and intervention of sexual abuse consisted of conferences, workshops, university classes and self-study. Three of the four high school counselors surveyed reported receiving training in symptoms and interventions at conferences. Two counselors specifically mentioned the Wisconsin School Counselors Association conference as having sessions dealing with sexual abuse issues. Two counselors reported having some training in the symptoms and interventions of sexual abuse in university classes. One counselor mentioned obtaining training through staff development. One counselor reported no training in intervention strategies since all sexual abuse intervention is referred to other agencies.

All counselors at each level, elementary, middle and high school reported having a written policy for mandatory reporting of child abuse, as it is Wisconsin law. None of the counselors reported that this policy is different for physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Their policies for mandatory reporting of child abuse include all types of abuse under one umbrella. However, one counselor mentioned that sexual harassment is also included under the abuse policy.

Summary

The results presented in this chapter will now be summarized in terms of the research questions outlined in Chapter One.

R1: What school based sexual abuse prevention and postvention services are utilized by Wisconsin counselors at the elementary, middle and high school levels?

Most school based prevention programs were provided in the classroom. At the elementary level, most counselors provided the classroom instruction. At the middle and high school levels, most classroom instruction was provided in a general education classroom, such as

health class. School based postventative services mostly included individual and group counseling as well as referrals to outside agencies at all grade levels.

R2: What community based sexual abuse prevention and postvention services are offered to students by Wisconsin counselors at the elementary, middle and high school levels?

Community based prevention programs were utilized by Wisconsin school counselors to either provide all sexual abuse education or to supplement what the school already offered. Middle and high school counselors utilized these services more often than elementary counselors did. Counselors at each level reported that most community based postvention services provide individual and group counseling to sexually abused victims.

R3: Where have Wisconsin counselors received training, if any, on the symptoms of and interventions for child sexual abuse?

Most counselors at each level reported some kind of training in symptoms of and interventions for sexual abuse through conferences, workshops or university classes. Some also mentioned self study on the subject matter. Specifically, the Mid-West Conference on Child Sexual Abuse was mentioned by a few counselors as providing information on both symptoms of and interventions for child sexual abuse.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current child sexual abuse prevention and postvention services provided by a select number of Wisconsin public school counselors. The study also examined community resources available to assist victims of child sexual abuse. Furthermore, counselors' personal considerations of intervention additions that would benefit their guidance programs and mandated reporting procedures were considered. Five elementary counselors, five middle school counselors and four counselors at the high school level were surveyed.

Summary of Findings

The results of this study found that most elementary school counselors provide classroom-based prevention services and access to community resources to their students for preventative needs. Most middle and high school counselors utilize general education classes, such as health, and community agencies to provide most of their sexual abuse prevention services. Postvention offered at all levels included referrals to outside agencies, some specializing in the treatment of sexually abuse children. Community-based postvention services consisted primarily of individual and group counseling. Three of the elementary counselors surveyed provided individual counseling, two provided follow up and only one provided group counseling to victims. Three middle school counselors offered individual and group counseling for postvention services. Only one high school counselor provided individual counseling to abuse victims. Necessary additions to guidance programs ranged from none to the desire to have more parental involvement and education, groups and community agency involvement. Most counselors at each level stated that they do not feel it is necessary to implement new or

additional programs in their guidance curriculum. Most counselor training in interventions and symptoms of child sexual abuse came from workshops, conferences and some university classes.

Limitations

The limitations to this study must also be considered. First, the sample size of fourteen counselors does not allow for the findings to be reflective of other schools in the state of Wisconsin. Secondly, one high school counselor did not participate in the survey, making it incomplete. This study was also descriptive with no statistics involved in the analysis of the data. Statistical analysis provides concrete and numerical data. The survey questions were also limiting. Additional questions could have provided more information on the types of programs utilized, how often the programs are presented, if counselors feel sexual abuse programs are supported or tolerated by the community, how comfortable the counselor is in discussing this subject, the counselor's opinion on the effectiveness of the efforts in preventing and treating sexual abuse and how often the district evaluates the effectiveness of these programs. All these questions would have given a greater understanding of how select counselors in the state of Wisconsin provide sexual abuse intervention programs. Finally, a written survey to the counselors would have provided more time for them to think carefully about what services the school and community provides.

Critical Analysis

Research shows that most school-based prevention programs include some type of classroom instruction. Effective programs teach a combination of empowering the student, resilience skills, disclosure skills, how to recognize inappropriate behavior and ways to access help (Bevill & Gast, 1998; Daro, 1994). From these programs students learn personal safety skills and where to go to access help (Daro, 1994). The research attests that students learn most from behavioral skills training. This allows for the students to role-play newly learned skills and

provides an opportunity for practicing these skills. Research also indicates that most prevention programs are provided at the elementary level, while most middle and high schools provide postvention services only.

This study confirms current research in that elementary schools provided the most prevention services, while middle and high schools were more involved in the postvention of child sexual abuse. Most of the prevention programs utilized at each level were provided through classroom instruction and most elementary counselors provided personal safety or protective behaviors instruction. Most prevention services offered at the middle and high school levels are provided through units in general education classes such as health.

Research provides some insight as to what schools are providing in postventative programs. Most schools provide some type of counseling service or referral to an outside counseling agency. Research indicates that counselors need to be empathetic and provide emotional support to victims. Counselors also play an important role in coordinating services with other professionals to provide adequate services to victims. This study was consistent with previous research in that the primary postvention service offered was referral to a community agency.

Future Directions for Research

Since efficacy of prevention programs is difficult to prove, more research on knowledge retained from personal safety and sexual abuse prevention programs needs to be conducted. Also, research should be conducted to determine the rates of disclosure following a school based sexual abuse prevention program. Determining what specific sexual abuse prevention programs are utilized by Wisconsin public schools may help to define where improvements in personal safety instruction could be made. For the benefit of victims, research should be conducted to

determine what postventative programs are most helpful in treating sexual abuse. It would also help to ascertain if any school districts in the state of Wisconsin mandate a sexual abuse prevention curriculum, and if so, what type of curriculum is used in these districts. Since school personnel are mandated reporters of child abuse, research on types of staff training in the symptoms and identification of sexual abuse is also needed. Finally, a national survey could be conducted to provide information on school based prevention programs from state to state to determine where improvements could be made and what are the most successful programs.

Conclusion

Research on current child sexual abuse victimization proves that preventative and postventative services are needed to control future victimization and provide needed support to those who have already suffered from this form of maltreatment. Schools are the logical setting in providing most of these services since children spend a lot of time in school and those working in the school have specific knowledge in child development and behavior. This study provided some insight as to what Wisconsin public schools are providing for their students in terms of sexual abuse prevention programs and postvention services. All schools surveyed provided both prevention and postvention services either through school-based or community assistance program. More research must be conducted to determine the efficacy of school-based prevention programs and treatment for victims. This social problem can not be ignored and schools can aid in deterring future abuse by providing sexual abuse education to students, parents, staff and community members. Only through education will society become aware of this horrible and detrimental form of child maltreatment.

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APPENDIX A

Appendix A

Code _____

1. What type of prevention services and programs are included in your guidance program that address child sexual abuse?

Cues: Prevention services and programs could include: Guidance lessons (personal safety, abuse prevention), general education instruction (health class, psychology at the high school level), Parental education, and Instructional activities (Videos, books, etc.).

2. What type of prevention services and programs are available in your community other than school programs that address child sexual abuse?

Cues: Community counseling agencies, Human Services, the police.

3. What types of postvention services and programs are included in your guidance program that address child sexual abuse?

Cues: Postvention services and programs could include: individual and group counseling. Referral to other agencies.

Cues for jr. and senior high: Ex: a 16 yr. Old reports prior abuse that is not occurring now. What type of postvention services would you offer?

4. What type of postvention services and programs are available in your community other than school programs that address child sexual abuse?

Cues: Are you aware of any community counselors who specialize in abused children? Are there any specialized groups that work with sexually abused children?

5. In your professional experience are there any services that you do not currently provide that you think would benefit your guidance program addressing child sexual abuse?

Cues: Guidance lessons, instructional resources, community resources and education, parental education.

6. Have you had any training in the identification of symptoms of sexual abuse?

Cues: Conferences, University classes, self-study (books, videos, research) workshops.

7. Have you had any training in effective intervention strategies for sexual abuse?

Cues: Conferences, University classes, self-study, workshops.

8. Does your district have a written policy for mandatory reporting of child abuse?

9. Is your written policy different for physical/emotional abuse than sexual abuse?