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Wilson, Shawn R. *Student Violence on College Campuses: An Ecological Systems Approach to Identifying At Risk Students and Subsequent Intervention Strategies*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to review literature on campus shootings. A total of 38 references were found to answer the question: What are the demographics of a school shooter and what recommendations are available for college campuses to help deter this catastrophic event from happening? An ecological theories perspective was the framework for looking at the background that the individual, as well as the institution, brings to such a horrendous event. There were several recommendations that were proposed in this paper including the use of the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), counseling, use of a crisis team, and ideas to enact in the aftermath of a tragedy. The discussion section culminates with six important principles for sustaining a positive campus climate for all college communities: purposefulness, communication, justice, discipline, caring, and celebration.

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Chapter I: Introduction

A number of college campuses have been forever changed since the dreadful day in April of 2007 when 32 students were killed by a full-time college student at Virginia Tech. This event, along with others, has brought the attention of student violence on college campuses to heightened awareness. The United States has witnessed nearly 30 deadly school shootings in the past three decades (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010) and the death of the victims and suicide of the school shooter are national tragedies. The outcry of media attention, panic of university personnel, changes in federal policy, and personal tragedies felt by the families of the victims have made this an important topic to review. Because of these catastrophes, awareness of current risk factors, specifically at the varying levels of the ecological system, along with specific recommendations will be the purpose of this paper.

Statement of the Problem

On April 16, 2007 from approximately 7:00 a.m. until 9:15 a.m. a total of 33 students and staff were killed in a mass murder-suicide at Virginia Tech University. The mass murderer was a 23-year old college senior, Seung-Hui Cho. The incident began when Cho entered a residence hall and killed two students. He then went back to his own hall, changed clothes, and proceeded to go to the local post office to send letters to the news media about the "privileged, spoiled, and morally corrupt by a materialistic society" students at Virginia Tech (Davies, 2008). Another letter, sent to faculty at the University, blamed the staff member for "holocausting" him (Davies, 2008). Upon leaving the post office, Cho returned to campus and entered an academic building, chained the doors locked, and proceeded to enter classrooms and shoot anyone in sight. When university police arrived they shot the door open. At this time, Cho killed himself.

Another campus shooting occurred on Valentine's Day of 2008, less than one year after

the Virginia Tech incident. On February 14, 2008, at 3:06 p.m. a former NIU student, Steven Kazmierczak, entered an academic building and opened fire in a lecture hall. Kazmierczak walked to the front of the classroom and shot the professor before turning and opening fire on the students in the 162-student filled lecture hall. Ultimately, he killed four and injured 18 others before taking his own life ("5 Shot Dead," 2008 and Gray, 2008).

There were several factors that were overlooked by campus officials that could have prevented the incident at Virginia Tech from occurring. Additionally, once the shooting spree began, the lack of communication between students and university administration, as well as police, fostered an environment which possibly led to more student deaths. The rationale for this literature review is to highlight the problem and offer suggestions for combating potential risks and problems associated with campus violence, specifically shootings.

This paper will discuss student violence on college campuses using a family systems approach. This theory emphasizes the ecological perspective and includes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem levels that will serve as a framework when providing insight to the risk factors and recommendations for making college campuses safer. The risk factors will include both information about the preparedness of the institution and the demographics of students who may be at risk for violent behavior. The recommendations will highlight the use of the Family Education Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 in college departments including housing and residential life offices, counseling centers, university police, and academia. A specific emphasis will include counseling of at risk students, the need for crisis teams, training for college personnel, and other miscellaneous recommendations. Furthermore, specific responses for each department will be discussed in the event that a school shooting occurs and how they should handle the situation in the days following the event. The paper will

conclude with a discussion section that includes an overall synopsis of the literature, limitations of both me as the author and of the current literature, and information about how to make a college campus productive and sustainable.

Theoretical Perspective – Ecological Systems

The Ecological Theories System approach focuses on a person and their interactions with their family, peers, school, communities, institutions, and climate (Hong, Cho, & Lee, 2010). Climate includes cultural and societal influences as well as governmental policies and systems that affect the person. The emphasis of using this approach in analyzing the problem of campus violence is because it takes into account the background, outside influences on the individual, cultural and societal norms, and relationship dyads when trying to understand the behavior of a person who commits a violent crime on campus. Recommendations, such as counseling, can address these ecological areas.

Microsystem.

The microsystem is defined as

…a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the individual in a direct setting (e.g., family) with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that would invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interactions with the immediate environment (Hong, Cho, & Lee, 2010, p. 563).

Specifically, influences from individuals or groups of individuals with the person (school shooter) have an effect on him or her. Hong and Liao (2010) state that "Two types of microsystem level factors are relevant…: parent-child relationships and child characteristics" (p. 61). The specific demographics of the student shooters along with relevant factors will be highlighted in the subsequent paragraphs.

Mesosystem.

The mesosystem is derived of interrelationships between two or more individuals (microsystems) that directly affect the person (Hong, Cho, & Lee, 2010). These relationships can be between the individual and his or her parents, peer groups, school personnel, or authority. A specific example of the influence that could be seen in the mesosystem level is the exposure of violence in the home environment of the individual (Hong & Liao, 2010). A school shooter has the potential to be influenced at this level and the associated relationships will be outlined in the following section about risk factors.

Exosystem.

This level is defined by the outside structures that the individual does not have direct control over. For example, students are influenced by social economic status, parental education, media violence, and campus climate. Specifically, if a parent is working outside of the home it can have a negative effect on the child's development resulting in a negative relationship between that child and his or her parent. These types of relationships will be further analyzed in the risk factors section in the forthcoming pages.

Macrosystem.

The macrosystem is illustrated by the relationship an individual has with his or her cultural background and values. It is a "cultural blueprint" that determines the social structures and activities that occur in an individual's immediate systems levels (Hong & Liao, 2010). Furthermore, these cultural barriers can inhibit the individual from pursuing outside assistance. "The effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all other layers" (Paquette & Ryan, 2001, p. 2). This level also includes the affects of governmental laws and policies on an individual and their beliefs of the

policies including policies at a college or university. Again, these will be explained in the next section.

Chapter II: Methods

Search Terms

I used a myriad of search terms to find articles about campus violence in the literature. Specific key terms, using campus violence as the main word, included: *Virginia Tech, Seung-Hui Cho, Northern Illinois University, shooting,* and *mass murder.* A specific criterion for meeting the inclusion of these articles was that they must have been published between 2007 and the present. To search for theoretical perspectives to help provide the framework for this paper, I searched using the term *ecological systems* and specifically used words including *theory, shooting,* and *college campus.* To find risk factors associated with campus violence I used the following: *risk factors, counseling, campus counseling, mental health on a college campus,* and *student mental health on a college campus.* To search for information regarding FERPA I used the key word *FERPA*, in addition to *student affairs, define FERPA, student rights,* and *Virginia Tech.* Finally, to find articles that referenced recommendations I used the search terms: *recommendations, aftermath of Virginia Tech,* and *crisis response.*

Data Sources

The majority of references for this literature review came from the University of Wisconsin – Stout electronic database, specifically EBSCO Host. Google Scholar was used to find additional references. Additionally, specific information about the campus shootings came from reputable news sources including www.time.com (Time Magazine) and www.cnn.com (Cable News Network). The President's Commission on University Security was provided by the University of Wisconsin – Stout Chief of Police. Finally, I applied ancestral searches by locating various articles using citations in the articles I had previously found. Besides information from

news media sources, only peer reviewed and technical reports were utilized in this literature review. There were a total of 46 sources found ranging from years 1999 to 2011, 37 of these sources has been utilized in this review of the literature.

Chapter III: Literature Review

Literature was reviewed on a number of topics related to campus violence. Specifically, the theoretical framework stemming from an ecological systems perspective has been outlined in a previous section. Utilizing the ecological systems perspective, this section discusses risk factors associated with college students and institution preparedness with respect to each of the ecological systems levels. Information about what schools can do on an ongoing basis to help eliminate school violence will be reviewed, specifically, the influence of FERPA and counseling. The literature review concludes with information about recommendations including response to a school shooting, teaching and training, and the importance of communication.

Risk Factors

Risk factors in this literature review will contain information both about the individual student (school shooter) and the institution, specifically the institutions' awareness and preparation for an event such as an active shooter. The risk factors related to the student will encompass demographic information and influences that act upon that individual at each of the four ecological system levels. The preparedness of the institution will focus on the current system they may (or may not) have in place such as the campus climate in regards to a violent event and the response plan they have for such an event, all along emphasizing the relation it has with the ecological systems theory. It is also important to note that an individual's micro level risk factors will influence every subsequent level as they have more interactions with the different systems in their life.

> …overarching patterns found in micro-, meso-, and exo-systems level that are
> characteristic of a given culture or a subculture, with particular reference to the beliefs
> systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity

structures, hazards, and life course that are embedded in each of these systems

(Bronfenbrenner (1994) as cited in Hong & Liao, 2010, p. 65).

A quick snapshot of the risk factors at each level, for both the individual and the institution, is

available in Table 1. The subsequent paragraphs will provide details of these risk factors.

Table 1

Risk Factors of Students and Institutions and Their Relationship with the Ecological Theory
System Levels

Ecological Theory System	Individual	Institution
Microsystem	• Gender • Mental health issues / background • Child/parent relationship	• Schools as targets because of location and proximity to a number of possible victims
Mesosystem	• Peer relationships • Violence at home • Student / staff relationships	• Student / staff relationship • Qualified and trained personnel who can identify risk factors
Exosystem	• Socioeconomic status (SES) • Media violence	• Media coverage of the University
Macrosystem	• Campus climate (for the student) • Cultural standards	• Campus climate (of the institution) • College policies (response plan) • Government policies

Microsystem risk factors.

Individual microsystem risk factors.

As highlighted in Table 1, there are at least three interactions with the individual that can

be potential risk factors of a school shooter: gender, mental health issues, and child/parent

relationships. When looking at the individual, it has been stated that "…the children who pull the

triggers, the murderers, live dark and painful tragedies long before the shootings occur"

(Warnick, Johnson, & Rocha, 2010). The first risk factor is gender itself. Kalish and Kimmel

(2010) state that "…many of these crimes culminate in suicide, and they are almost universally

committed by males" (p. 451). Furthermore, males are perceived to be more aggressive, prone to violent behavior, and engage in fights more often than their female counterparts (Hong, Cho, & Lee, 2010). In addition, they are more likely to perceive violence as a legitimate way to resolve conflict (Hong & Liao, 2010). Fallahi, Shaw Austad, Fallon, and Leishman (2009) extend this comment with their research on the perceptions of the Virginia Tech tragedy. They write "In ratings of potential reasons why Virginia Tech occurred, females rated violent media, violent video games, cliques in schools, bullying, disconnection from responsible and caring adults, lack of friendships, lack of social supports, and gun control significantly higher than males" (p. 128).

"Too often increased numbers of high risk students arrive on campus with mental health concerns, no treatment plan, and health insurance that is inadequate for specialized mental health care" according to Hollingsworth, Dunkle, & Douce (2009, p. 42) This characteristic, mental health issues, is a second variable that poses as a risk factor for a potential school shooter. Hollingsworth et al. (2009) also state that, "Emerging adulthood is also a time when serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorders, and schizophrenia emerge" (p. 41). These students are seeking counseling services at the higher education level in increasing numbers compared to twenty years ago (Hollingsworth et al., 2009) From 1988 to 2001 "…students with depression doubled…suicidal students tripled, and students seen after a sexual assault quadrupled" (Hollingsworth et al., 2009, p.). These students, who are at high risk for committing suicide, make college counselors the most uncomfortable, especially with the homicidal potential that they may 'hold' (Davenport, 2009).

The third microsystem level individual risk factor involves the child/parent relationship. In a survey of students who responded to the question "Who or what is responsible for the Virginia Tech shooting?" the third highest responsible factor (at 13.4 percent) was "Killer's

parents and upbringing" (Fallahi et al., 2009). To further support this claim, the Virginia Tech

Review Panel (2007), reported that the killer (Cho) and his family lacked a relationship and

communication. They cited that this relationship was stressed by the family's business which

required them to spend a significant time at work, away from their children. Additionally, the

parents were concerned about Cho at a young age, stating that he was isolating himself and

generated a high level of stress within the family (Virginia Tech Review Panel). These findings

highlight the risk factor of the parent/child relationships because "Developing secure attachments

at a young age provides children with the emotional foundation for healthy development…"

(Hong & Liao, 2010, p. 61). Furthermore, a study by Jenson (2007) found that "…the importance

of parental-supervision as a protective factor against involvement with antisocial peers" (p. 133)

is critical.

Institutional microsystem risk factors.

The institution being viewed at a microsystem level should be examined in the sense that

it has specific characteristics that are only associated with being an institute of higher learning.

> The school is a place where many of us seem to think that violence is fundamentally
>
> inappropriate; it is supposed to be a site of happy and peaceful events. At the same time,
>
> though, the school seems to be chosen precisely because it must seem appropriate, to the
>
> shooter, for an act of killing to occur (Warnick et al., 2010, p. 383).

While one student may have a favorable experience with school, others can find it boring,

distrustful, and fearful (Warnick et al., 2010).

> Due to their nature, schools are locations where kids of many colors and personalities
>
> come together to share a place of learning. But what they learn early on is that school can

be a nasty, unsafe place where you defend and protect yourself or you become a victim

(Lebrun, 2009, p. 15).

These institutions are at the microsystem level just by the characteristics that exude their existence.

Mesosystem risk factors.

Individual mesosystem risk factors.

Peer relationships are most likely the largest risk factor at the individual mesosystem level. Variables that can affect this relationship include lack of friendships, lack of social support, bullying, and cliques in school (Fallahi et al., 2009). In the case of Cho, it has been well documented that peer victimization was a contributing factor to the school shooting at Virginia Tech (Hong, Cho, & Lee, 2010). More specifically, the Virginia Tech Review Panel (2007) reported that he was 'ostracized' as a young child and his family tried to determine if bullying was a possibility for his affect. "His sister knew that when he walked down school hallways a few students sometimes would yell taunts at him. He did not talk about feelings or school at all. He would respond "okay" to all questions about his well being (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007, p. 33). As a college student, Cho also did not seem to fit in and "maintained a near-invisibility on campus" (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010, p. 460). Surprisingly, though, the bullies themselves are not generally the victims of students killed in a school shooting (Warnick et al., 2010) "The meaning of school shootings at this point is simple: we have guiltless victims killed by undiscriminating moral evil" (Warnick et al., 2010, p. 374). Some students would suggest that having "a friend to speak with" could be a factor that may have prevented the Virginia Tech shooting (Fallahi et al., 2009). Not only is bullying the issue, but so is the social support from peers that the student may have or need.

Another risk factor for the individual student is the violence that he or she may see at home. Youth who witness violence at a young age are more likely to experience mental health issues (Hong & Liao, 2010) as highlighted in the microsystem level, thus showing a relationship between the varying levels. This violence can include altercations in the community or between families. Bradshaw, Rodgers, Chandour, and Garbarino (2009), in their survey study, found that 86% of respondents had seen someone being beaten up in their community, 46% had heard guns being shot in their neighborhood, and 35% witnessed someone pulling a knife on another person. Furthermore, individuals from the racial minority are more likely to witness violence than those living in suburban neighborhoods (Halliday-Boykins & Graham, 2001). In a review of the literature, Edelson (1999) found many trends among children who had witnessed domestic violence in their homes. He found that these children are more likely to have behavior and emotional difficulties and have an attitude that is more likely to believe violence can 'solve the problem.' Similarly, he found that these children had mental health issues later in their life and were more likely to participate in violent acts as adults.

The final individual risk factor at the mesosystem level involves the student / staff relationship. The survey from Fallahi et al (2009) points to the lack of a relationship between Cho and staff members at Virginia Tech as a possible reason for the shooting. Furthermore, students who were surveyed suggest that if he had had professional intervention it may have prevented the tragedy. While many students who suffer from mental health concerns are not violent, others may need to seek assistance from professionals in dealing with these 'high-risk' issues (Hollingsworth et al., 2009) to help prevent heinous acts. For Cho specifically, he brought pre-existing conditions into his college career. In high school he qualified for services in special education for children with emotional behavior disorders but did not make college personnel

aware of this, thus not receiving the specialized services that he may have needed when he entered college (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The Review Panel also recognizes that there were several missed red flags by different departments due to a non-standing member being on the care team. This review indicates that five departments (e.g. Virginia Tech police, residential life, academia, judicial affairs, and the counseling center) all expressed concern about Cho, but no one connected the dots to view Cho as a very volatile individual.

Institutional mesosystem risk factors.

In situations that arise such as college shootings, "…the university community turns to student affairs professional for assistance and expects them, either implicitly or explicitly, to fix the problems" (Hollingsworth et al., 2009, p. 44). As stated in our last section, the student / staff relationship is also important at this institutional mesosystem level as a contributing risk factor. The need to have the staff to deal with these students and situations is apparent. Again, had the staff at Virginia Tech 'connected' the dots, then the care team may have been able to provide assistance in preventing the horrendous act of April 16, 2007.

A second risk factor for the institution at the mesosystem level is if they do not have qualified and trained personnel who can identify and act on student risk factors. As previously stated, there were five different departments that were aware of the high risk factors of Cho, but failed to communicate the information, thus lacking the qualified and trained personnel to act and make decisions. "All members of the campus community must become aware of and vigilant regarding potential individual or environmental circumstances that might indicate a heightened propensity for violence" (New Directions for Student Services, 2008, p. 11). In addition to helping the individual students, the staff needs to train other students, staff, and faculty to be aware of mental health issues and what pose as a risk for these individuals (New Directions for

Student Services, 2008). Partnering with colleagues in academia who are 'on the front line' because of their interactions in classes with students is also an essential piece in combating this mesosystem risk factor.

Exosystem risk factors.

Individual exosystem risk factors.

The literature identifies two variables that are individual exosystem risk factors: student's socioeconomic status (SES) and media violence. As highlighted in the microsystem level, the relationship between the child and the parent can have an influence on the potential school shooter. To further that, the need for Cho's parents to be at work late, to alleviate or lessen financial worries, (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007) could have contributed to the overall demise of Cho and represents a risk factor at the exosystem level. "His parents worked very long hours and had financial difficulties. They were worried about the effect on their children because they had less than optimum time to devote to parenting" (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007, p. 33). The burden continues, "…low income individuals tend to have fewer social contacts, receive lower levels of material and social support and can be part of social networks that are a source of stress" according to Eamon (2001) as cited in Hong and Liao (2010, p. 64).

From the infamous Bobo Doll experiment in the early 1960's conducted by Bandura and colleagues, we know that children often mimic violence that is portrayed in film. "Social learning theory can also explain the relationship between media and violence; violent behavior can potentially result from observing a model acting violently" (Hong, Cho, & Lee, 2010, p. 567). This second exosystem risk factor may have a correlation between the individual and school violence. "U.S. citizens appear to be concerned about the sheer volume of media reports detailing violent conduct among adults and young people in the past several years" (Jenson,

2007, p. 132). To support this statement, Fallahi et al. (2009) reported that students thought

media was one of the contributing factors responsible for the Virginia Tech shootings and that if

the student would have limited access to violent media in their childhood the shootings may have

been prevented. Chapin and Coleman (2006) argue that the perception of the media violence as

realistic or unrealistic influences the overall effect it has on an individual. Beresin (2010), a

medical doctor for the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, reports that

> …children's exposure to media violence plays an important role in the etiology of violent
>
> behavior. While it is difficult to determine which children who have experienced
>
> televised violence are at greatest risk, there appears to be a strong correlation between
>
> media violence and aggressive behavior within vulnerable "at risk" segments of youth (p.
>
> 1).

Institutional exosystem risk factors.

The media coverage of campus violence is an institutional exosystem risk factor because

it is something that the higher education setting may not have control over. Hong, Cho, and Lee

(2010) report that "Cho expressed his admiration for Columbine shooters…" (p. 567), which

clearly received a lot of media coverage. Additionally, the problem is exacerbated when

individuals are reliving or viewing the tragedies that have occurred on campuses. Media

exposure is increased at this time and "so do the number of symptoms experience by students…"

(Fallahi et al., 2010, p. 132). For example, students who were exposed to three or more hours of

news coverage exhibited more psychiatric symptoms than those who did not (Fallahi et al.,

2010). Because campus personnel cannot control the television viewing of their students, this is a

risk factor that must be addressed. What is also concerning is that students may hold the

misperception that violence is less likely to happen to them or at school compared to other

schools around the country (Chapin & Coleman, 2006). This naivety should be alarming to institutions. Ultimately, though, when the community responds to this coverage with anger and fear, the shooter has "succeeded in their aim" (Warnick, Johnson, & Rocha, 2010, p. 381).

Macrosystem risk factors.

Individual macrosystem risk factors.

Two macrosystem level examples play a potential role in the risk factors of an individual: campus climate from the perspective of the individual and culture. Kalish and Kimmel (2010) explicitly convey the risk of not feeling a part of the campus climate:

> But what if one does not feel valued as a member of their college community? What is it like to feel excluded in 'Hokie Nation,' as the Virginia Tech campus culture is called? What if one isn't much interested in football, or in sports-themed, beer-soaked weekend party extravaganzas? It's possible that to be marginalized, 'Hokie Nation' doesn't feel inclusive and embracing, but alien and coercive. If one is not a citizen in Hokie Nation, one does not exist. And perhaps, for some, if *I* don't exist, then *you* have no right to exist either (p. 460).

Related to the feelings Cho may have had about campus, it is also documented that "His marginalization also appeared cultural, and class-based, not entirely the result of his obvious over-determining psychiatric problems" according to Kalish and Kimmel (2010, p. 460). Culture can include the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course that the individual is influenced by (Hong & Liao, 2010). Hong, Cho, and Lee (2010) report that Cho's family had several obstacles to overcome to have Cho seek services while he was growing up because seeking this type of help is viewed as a "sign of shame" for the Asian American culture. To also confound this problem,

cultures have criteria for gender performance and 'codes of masculinity' (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). These variables culminate as risk factors at the macrosystem level for the individual.

Institutional macrosystem risk factors.

It has been documented previously that the culture of the school can be a risk factor for the individual. It is also apparent that the culture of the school plays an institutional macrosystem risk factor too. "Students with more connection to the school culture are rewarded with more status" according to Kalish and Kimmel (2010, p. 460). Being a part of the 'Hokie Nation' or similar types of traditions at each institution is part of the social hierarchy within a campus community and is means for worry for those not in the "in crowd." Furthermore, students who feel connected to this campus climate are more likely to be social and receive higher grades, while their counterparts may experience isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Sulkoski, 2011). The article "A Survey of Perceptions of the Virginia Tech Tragedy" reports that campus climate is important. In their discussion, Fallahi et al. (2010) state that students felt that student-faculty relations were favorable, professors treat students with respect, and professors care about students. These relationships can have an impact on the cultural climate of a school. The New Directories for Student Services (2008) suggest that "fostering a caring community is a powerful strategy for the prevention and mitigation of such acts" (p. 9). Sulkowsi (2011) highlights that if the climate is one in which students have a willingness to report threats of violence it could ultimately help save lives on campus.

The second macrosystem level risk factors are the college and government policies that may or may not be enforced. From campus response plans to governmental gun control legislation there is a clear link that policies must be in place to help combat problems. "…college campuses need to be doing more to address campus safety across all categories of university

constituents" (Hughes, White, & Hertz, 2008, p. 310). A way to address this problem is through the use of response teams at the institution level, unfortunately these are "foreign" to some colleges (Davies, 2008). These teams need to be available to meet the needs of diverse possible incidents from toxic spills to active shooters (Davies, 2008). In addition to the team, academia members need to be involved as members because their lack of involvement is currently a problem that impedes effective school safety policies (Hong & Liao, 2010).

Gun control is the most apparent governmental policy being reviewed in the literature on campus violence. In the case of Virginia Tech, Cho was able to buy a gun through a 'loophole' in gun control legislation (because he had a documented history of mental health problems) (Jenson, 2007). This loophole has now been addressed at the federal level. Another issue that has been addressed at the legislative level utilizes the FERPA. Because no one called Cho's parents to tell them about his current mental health status, there was a disconnect between the family information about previous mental health issues and the current situation he was experiencing at the University (Davies, 2008). Had they had this communication, which is allowed by FERPA and discussed in the next section, the school may have alleviated the killings.

This section began by defining the ecological systems theory and the four key levels that it encompasses. From specific demographic information about the individual student to the campus climate that affects both the individual and the institution to the governmental policies that are enforced at institutions, a myriad of risk factors have been discussed about campus violence in regards to the ecological systems levels. These risk factors help the reader understand the importance of the next section, which highlights numerous recommendations that should be enacted by school officials and institutions to lessen the disaster that can happen when a school shooting occurs on campus.

Chapter IV: Recommendations

In addition to reviewing literature about the risk factors involved with campus violence, there are a number of sources that provide recommendations to try to alleviate these unfortunate events. This section will be divided into two key areas: specific national recommendations and institutional level recommendations. At the national level, the use of FERPA will be defined and its rationale to be used with different departments at the university level will be discussed. The institutional recommendations will include advice for student affairs professionals and academic personnel in addition to response plans for college campuses.

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

FERPA defined.

"In 1974 Congress took a significant step to ensure the rights of students and parents to the access and confidentiality of student records" (Weeks, 2001, p. 39). The FERPA legislation includes four basic rights: to access, to consent, to challenge, and to notification. Specifically, an institution can disclose a student's records to his or her parents if the child is claimed as a dependent; however, these records do not include records from law enforcement, employment records, and medical records. The student must give written consent for personally identifiable information to be released, except for 'directory information.' Of course, some records can be disclosed without consent, including records that other school officials have a "legitimate educational interest" in having. Next, the right to challenge allows a student to dispute the information in his or her educational record if he or she believes it is inaccurate or misleading. Finally, students need to be notified of their FERPA rights. FERPA specifically addresses parental communication and involvement by not allowing for disclosure of their financial information to their child, parental rights to educational records if their child is a dependent, the

ability to access health and safety information when appropriate, and disclosure of student

information relating to disciplinary and behavioral activities.

Use of FERPA by school personnel.

There are several documentations that explain that FERPA is either misunderstood or

underutilized at the college level because of the sense that the student has a right to privacy.

(Graham, Hall, & Gillmer, 2008). College staff needs to know, however, that:

> When there is significant concern regarding troubling student behavior, contact with
>
> parents and family members should be made as early in the process as possible, so they
>
> can partner in working with their student and the institution. The U.S. Department of
>
> Education clarified FERPA guidelines in October, 2007, ** highlighting that FERPA
>
> does permit officials in an emergency situation to disclose information to protect the
>
> health and safety of students. This may include disclosing information to parents and
>
> family members (New Directions for Student Services, 2008, p. 15).

A strong recommendation for helping alleviate college violence and campus shootings is to make

student affair's personnel and academia staff aware of its intended use. "The legislative purpose

behind Congress's enactment of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is to

promote communication between institutions and the parents of students" (Weeks, 2001, p. 39).

The research on FERPA's use highlights the application of it with student affair

personnel who include school counselors, housing and residential life staff, and university police.

Left out of much of this literature is the use of FERPA in regards to academic staff members.

While some authors recommend it is best practice for academic staff, it has not received the

attention it needs. Therefore, the recommendations in this section are mostly for student affairs

personnel, but should also include academic staff. This recommendation will also be illuminated in the limitations section of the literature review.

To begin, all student affairs personnel need to know that disclosure to parents is acceptable when there is a serious threat to the health or safety of the student or other individuals (Graham et al., 2008). In addition, FERPA allows employees to break confidentiality otherwise covered by Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996. There must be a notification system that relies on student affair professionals to communicate with parents [following a campus suicide attempt] (Baker, 2009) in these types of situations. Additionally, communication is necessary between and amongst school officials, not just parents. "When a health or safety emergency occurs, school officials can waive the usual rules to allow appropriate official access to the necessary records to address the emergency situation" (Darden, 2009, p. 46).

Residential life staff also plays an important role in the lives of students and needs to uphold FERPA. When these staff members know about individual's suicidal states of mind, it necessitates appropriate intervention (Baker, 2009), such as contacting the family. These staff may also have important information on file regarding the incident and other student information that should be conveyed to other university staff as well as parents (Baker, 2009) in high risk situations. It is also noted that once a student has signed his or her contract agreeing to live in a residence hall, it does not mean housing staff are liable as if it was a custodial relationship (Baker, 2009).

Counseling staff are also an integral part of the team to help at-risk college students, and using FERPA, should be able to communicate with the student's parents. "…parents working cooperatively with student affairs staff to assist a suicidal student is an ideal arrangement so long

as the parental involvement does not complicate the student's counseling and recovery" (Baker, 2009, p. 676). Recommendations for counseling staff will be highlighted as a significant strategy for intervention in the subsequent part of this paper.

Campus security, including university police, also has interactions with students who commit violent crimes or are at risk to do so. Amada (2007) states that when campus security officers need to plan a student's exit from campus they would not be violating FERPA if they contacted the parents if it is clearly established that the student's 'imminent welfare' is at stake. Judicial officers also have the responsibility to make students and parents aware of disciplinary sanctions and the student code of conduct.

New Directions for Student Services (2008) seem to be the only authors that suggest academic personnel be involved with working with the student who is at risk. Under FERPA, these school employees should partner with colleagues in student affairs to communicate about issues and to learn about resources for working with troubled students. Furthermore, they should receive training about the implications of FERPA and HIPAA in regards to the well being of the student (New Directions for Student Services, 2008). The student affairs staff members should be providing the training to academic staff, who are often first to encounter at-risk college students.

Institutional level recommendations.

In this section I will discuss specific recommendations for institutions including creation of crisis response teams, training on risk factors for school personnel and how counselors should treat at-risk individuals, training for academic staff, necessary measures to enact after a catastrophic event on campus, and other miscellaneous suggestions.

Use of crisis teams.

"Campus police, university administration, residence hall staff, mental health counselors, and public health academics need to work together to focus on the appropriate activities for the various levels of prevention that can maintain the safety of the academic community…" Thompson, Price, Mrdjenovich, and Khubchandani, 2009, p. 253). These individuals are likely to work as a team. Regardless of their 'name' (crisis team, threat assessment team, care team, students of concern teams) it is imperative that these teams are running and formalized on college campuses (New Directions for Student Services, 2008). In lieu of the previous recommendation that it is allowable, and encouraged, to communicate with other college staff and parents about a threatening student (supported by FERPA), it is also essential that these individuals pass the information on to the crisis team (Cornell, 2010). Once the crisis team has information, they will determine the threat level, making sure to base judgments on facts and specific information. The Virginia Threat Assessment Decision-Tree has a four step process: identify a threat, evaluate seriousness, intervene, and monitor safety plan. Graham et al. (2008) believe that when schools are creating crisis teams, they begin with a straightforward policy framework that includes standing members and then train faculty. Both Graham et al. (2008) and Cornell (2010) suggest that the crisis team include cross-disciplinary members (law enforcement, mental health, higher education administrative staff, residence life staff, and learning center staff) because they all bring different expertise.

Counseling.

Because of the fact that the demographics of a school shooter are varied and include factors from the varying ecological systems perspective, it is hard for teams to ascertain if a student is at risk. Davenport (2009) argues, though, that a common characteristic of students who commit violent crimes are that they have mental health issues. The role of the counselor is now

to be a "risk manager." Specifically, students who are at risk for mental illness include those struggling academically or socially, presenting with symptoms of depression or anxiety, an eating disorder, substance abuse, impulsive behavior, or anger management issues (Davenport, 2009). Not only do counselors have to assess suicide issues but also homicide as it is now the most significant risk situation (Davenport, 2009). The therapist, or counselor, needs to exercise his or her best judgment without liability in predicting students who are at risk for violent crimes (Mossman, 2009). They also need to communicate information about these high risk individuals to crisis teams. Similarly, though, counselors need to listen to at-risk students and ensure that they are providing the care that the individual student needs.

The job of the therapist or counselor will not be easy, especially because "Humans are mentally biased to remember danger and be attune to risks…as unmistakably obvious warning signs. In hindsight, we perceive tragedies as being more easily foreseeable than they really were" (Mossman, 2009, p. 123). Preventing future tragedies can only be done by counselors if there is truly a significant connection between the mental illness and violence (Mossman, 2009). Most importantly, though, treatment needs to be provided to the at-risk student. Clinical interventions are often of direct benefit to patients and may also reduce violence (Mossman, 2009).

Training for students, faculty, and staff - especially those in academia.

Campus-wide education is important for the at-risk individual because it can help the campus community know when to seek help for persons in distress (Cornell, 2010). The training and awareness should be provided by individuals in student affairs (New Directions for Student Services, 2008) or university police (Thompson et al., 2009). It is especially important for faculty members to receive training because they are the members who play a role in the lives of the

students and have continual contact with them. Graham et al. (2008) suggest that faculty

members can assist students by doing things such as reporting excessive absences, reporting

students who may be in danger of failing, using office hours to connect with students and hear

their concerns, and understanding policies in place for when to seek guidance (such as from the

crisis team). When dealing with student's misconduct directly, it has been advised that

instructors use more hard and directive language and approaches to show that they are not

indifferent to the plight of the student (Amada, 2007). Unfortunately this training is not

widespread as the research team of Thompson et al. (2009) found in a survey of police chiefs that

faculty were not aware of what steps to take in case there was an 'active shooter' nor were they

trained to identify troubled students.

> ### *Responding in the aftermath of an event.*

One way to respond in the aftermath of a tragedy is to have communication avenues

available for both school and community members. "Under the Clery Act, campus administrators

have a legal duty to provide the campus community with a timely warning when they believe a

situation poses a threat to students or employees" (New Directions for Student Services, 2008, p.

20). Hughes et al. (2008) suggest that a web-based incident reporting system would allow for

reports to be submitted to anyone and anywhere on campus, thus allowing for more instant

communication. Kennedy (2010) advises campuses to have phone alerts, desktop alerts, pre-

written messages, electronic message boards, and emergency telephones.

The response of university police is also important. While it may not be feasible to

lockdown the entire campus, the police do need to secure the perimeter and specific buildings

(New Directions for Student Services, 2008). Additionally, one in four campus police chiefs

report that experiences with firearm related events have occurred on their campus and that they must have a plan to react when an active shooter situation arises (Thompson et al., 2009)

In mass casualty events when families need to be notified, New Directions for Student Services (2008) suggests that 'family rooms' and specific school staff are assigned to specific individual students and families. This can provide for a personal and effective communication system. In addition, the students who are directly and indirectly affected by a school tragedy must be cared for after the event. Providing ongoing counseling and support from student affairs staff is critical as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be prevalent (Hughes, Brymer, Chiu, Fairbank, Jones, Pynoos, Rothwell, Steinberg, & Kessler, 2011). In addition "…follow-ups of students experiencing a crisis and who may be prone to violence are essential in reducing campus violence" (Thompson et al., 2009, p. 253). Often times after a tragedy groups will bond together creating a unity amongst the group (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). This can be beneficial because it provides an outlet for the student victims and community.

Other recommendations.

A list of low cost steps to help make campuses safe and secure was provided by Kennedy (2010). He suggests things such as reducing access to roofs and windows by up keeping facilities, numbering doors and rooms in a logical manner, and ensuring that classrooms have two way communication devices with a central system. He also suggests that campuses have emergency medical services available directly on campus and that employees could be trained students.

Some authors are suggesting that criminal backgrounds checks be done on their incoming students (and staff) to assess risk (Hughes, White, & Hertz, 2008 and New Directions for Student Services, 2008). There appears to be no guiding principle in this, but ethical, legal, and moral

considerations must be upheld. This background information must "…reflect care for the applicant's interest in pursuing education and in receiving appropriate support in pursuing that goal with the safety and security interests of the other members of the campus community" (New Directions for Students Services, 2008, p. 16). In a survey by Rasmussen and Johnson (2008) they found that 40% of schools were asking applicants if they have been convicted of a felony on their admission application prior to the Virginia Tech incident, but afterwards, the percentage increased to 57% of schools asking their pre-admitted students. Other questions that may be in the background check include asking applicants if they have been involved in a crime that included aggressive or violent behavior, if students are currently taking medications to treat a psychiatric or psychological condition, or if they have been hospitalized for psychiatric reasons (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008).

Chapter V: Discussion

I began this literature review with a compelling argument about the prominence of campus violence, specifically school shootings. The method for inclusion criterion for articles for this paper was then explained. In the remainder of the paper I then focused on a review of the literature. I began with reviewing the ecological systems theoretical perspective and then putting these four levels in contexts of risk factors for both individual students and the institution. Once the 17 risk factors were explained, I then provided recommendations. The appropriate use of FERPA was designated as a very important component of this section. Next, I gave specific institutional level recommendations including the use of crisis teams, counseling, training for college personnel, responding in the aftermath of a tragedy, and then other miscellaneous suggestions from the literature.

This final discussion section will include the limitations of both my own literature review and also the limitations in the literature that currently exists about campus shootings. The conclusion will then provide the reader with a synopsis of how an academic community can sustain itself and work productively and positively for all students on campus.

Limitations

Limitations are inherent in any type of literature review. These limitations could be personal in nature or more apparent in the actual articles reviewed; both of these types of limits will be explained in this section. First, there are two personal biases that have had an impact on the writing of this paper. Second, in searching for specific articles I created a limitation. The first personal bias was the strong belief system that I hold that all students and staff must be protected on a college campus. While most would agree with this statement, it has provided a bias in my writing because of the passion that is conveyed. Moreover, the recommendations that I have

reviewed may not be attainable for all schools, especially in lieu of budget issues. I have a strong conviction, though, that they be enacted on all campuses regardless of restraints, because of the necessity to protect the college community. "While it is easy to suggest that colleges and universities should spare no expense in an effort to improve safety, the practical realities force administrators to make decision with financial parameters…" (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008, p. 25). My second personal bias, which goes against what much of the literature says, is that I do not believe that a school shooter must have a mental illness to carry out the heinous act of a school shooting. I would argue that an individual without a mental illness could also commit campus violence, therefore, college personnel really need to look at all risk factors of the student. The third personal limitation of this review is that I only used articles about campus shootings from 2007 to the present. There is evidence that school shootings had happened prior to this time, but the criterion was set to only include articles from the last five years.

Limitations were also recognized in the actual articles that I reviewed for this paper. While I was able to find many important recommendations in the literature it was clear that the suggestions for personnel in academia were lacking. There was not sufficient information about how to train and work with professors, graduate assistants, and adjunct faculty even though they are on the front lines, working directly with college students. A second limitation of the recommendations in the literuatre, which has been addressed in my personal limitations section, is the prolific costs of enacting all of these recommendations. Only one article (Kennedy, 2010) provided low cost recommendations. While our nation is facing numerous financial burdens, the literature does not provide an outlet for creating safety on campus in a cost effective way. Fortunately, 35% of respondents in a survey said that the institution-wide budget for safety and security had been increased since the events at Virginia Tech (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008). A

final limitation in the literature is about the strong dependence of colleges to use counselors to deal with student mental health issues. Unfortunately, this recommendation may also not be feasible because of the small number of counselors hired at the collegiate level. For example, the University of Wisconsin System President's Commission on University Security Final Report (2007) has indicated that the universities have limited counseling staff to work with clientele and that to meet 75% of the national standards they'd have to immediately add staff to six of their 13 four-year campuses.

Conclusion

In an article by Wildman (2008) he explains how a campus needs to sustain its academic community in the aftermath of a tragedy, such as what happened at Virginia Tech. I would argue that these suggestions be instated at the college level even before a catastrophe occurs. The educational community must be purposeful, have communication, justice, discipline, caring, and celebrations (Wildman, 2008). The principles are explained in further detail:

1. *Purposefulness.* The campus community is an educationally purposeful place where all participants share common goals and work together to advance the overall growth and well-being of its members.

2. *Communication.* The community is an open and trustful place, where civility is affirmed, where freedom of expression is protected, and where the channels for communication are not restricted.

3. *Justice.* The community affirms, both socially and educationally, that all individuals are honored and that respect for diversity will be aggressively pursued.

4. *Discipline.* It is recognized that community cannot be sustained in a chaotic atmosphere. Individuals are expected to recognize and accept their obligations to the group and to the social contracts that guide behavior for the common good.

5. *Caring.* The community is a caring place where the well-being of each member I supported and where support for one another is encouraged.

6. *Celebration.* The community remembers the heritage of the organization through rituals and celebrations, and marks both traditions and changes with care.

When focusing on the ecological theory systems level perspectives in relation to these six guiding principles, there is a clear connection between the needs of the individuals and institutions at their varying levels and how these can be addressed in the campuses use of the aforementioned principles. In addition, the principles are also apparent in the recommendations that have been provided throughout this paper. In principle one, which addresses purposefulness of the campus community, we are looking at the individual and institution's macrosystem level: a need for the campus climate to be conducive to its learners. There is a focus on *all* participants and overall well-being of its members. The second principle, which focuses on communication, is clearly described in the recommendations section with the emphasis on the intended uses of FERPA. Furthermore, communication is a key area in how schools respond in the aftermath of a crisis. The third principle, justice, illustrates that all individuals are respected and that diversity is respected. Again, the individual microsystem level is addressed with this principle as is the cultural standards that he or she has. The fourth principle, discipline, addresses both an ecological system and a recommendation. This standard gets at the institutions macrosystem level, specifically contributing to the campus climate in that there is a non-chaotic atmosphere and behavior for the common good. Furthermore, members of the campus community need to

accept their role, which could include active membership in a crisis team. The fifth principle, caring, expresses an emphasis on the individual macrosystem level in that the well being of *each* member is supported. In addition, the recommendation for student affairs and counseling staff to work with each member of the community has been noted. The sixth principle, celebration, specifically relates to the institutions macrosystem level because it emphasizes the campus climate, heritage, and rituals that exist within the community.

Although campus violence is an issue that is ongoing and has unforeseen outcomes, there are a number of approaches to take to help understand, alleviate, and possibly prevent a similar incident from happening. The lives of many have been forever changed at campuses across the nation because of campus violence and school shootings. "The campus is not powerless to act decisively when threats arise" according to Dr. Gary Pavela (as cited in the Governor's Task Force on Campus Safety, 2007, p. 30).

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