

COLLABORATION BETWEEN COUNTY SOCIAL WORKERS
AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS WITH
CHILD MALTREATMENT VICTIMS IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

by

Kelly Derlein

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

Guidance and Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

Barbara Kim, Ph.D.
Research Advisor

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
August, 2005

**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751**

Author: Derlein, Kelly A.

Title: *Collaboration between County Social Workers and School Counselors with Child Maltreatment Victims in Out-of-Home Care.*

Graduate Degree/ Major: MS Guidance and Counseling

Research Adviser: Barbara Flom, Ph.D.

Month/Year: August, 2005

Number of Pages: 54

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 5th edition

ABSTRACT

Many factors may impact a child's success or failure in the educational system. These factors are often compounded for children who have been abused or neglected. The literature shows that children who are abused or neglected are at increased risk of failing grades, absenteeism, retention at grade level, and involvement in special education (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2003). A review of the literature indicates that many factors, including children being at risk of school failure based on low socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity; special education needs; changing schools often; demonstrating lower achievement and academic performance in school compared with their peers may impede the ability of children placed in out-of-home care from achieving educational success (Altshuler, 1997).

Child maltreatment victims in out-of-home care need both educational and child welfare services tailored to their abilities and experiences. There must be a collaborative effort on the part of child welfare agencies and school personnel to ensure that these children are provided with necessary services to achieve success. The literature shows that this collaboration has historically not occurred, resulting in children receiving inadequate services from both systems (Altshuler, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to assess the current and historic level of collaboration between county child welfare staff and school counselors when serving child maltreatment victims who were placed in out-of-home care settings. This study explored the roles of various participants in the child's life. This study further considered barriers to collaboration between county child welfare staff and school counselors when working with this population of children, along with future recommendations for improvement. An open-ended interview format was used to gather information from county social workers and school counselors for this study.

Results of this research study showed that although the communication is positive between school counselors and county child welfare social workers, there are areas that could be improved upon. School personnel over-all were perceived to have a lack of trust in county social workers. Social workers indicated concerns regarding the lack of clear guidelines pertaining to information sharing with school counselors. The study also found that although parents of children in out-of-home care should be involved in their child's education, this does not usually occur.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my husband, Kurt, and two daughters, Kassandra and Karissa, for their patience, understanding and encouragement during the completion of my thesis and graduate studies. I wish to further thank my parents for their support and my sister, Kim for her editing assistance.

I also wish to thank Dr. Amy Gillet for reducing the fear associated with completing a thesis. I further wish to thank Dr. Barbara Flom for agreeing to be my research advisor and her gentle and kind guidance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
.....	
ABSTRACT.....	ii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	4
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	4
<i>Assumptions of the Study</i>	5
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	5
<i>Limitations of Study</i>	6
Methodology.....	7
Chapter II: Literature Review	8
<i>Prevalence of Child Maltreatment</i>	8
<i>Prevalence of Out-Of-Home Care Placement</i>	11
<i>Educational Implications</i>	14
<i>Roles and Responsibilities</i>	19
<i>Collaboration</i>	20
<i>Summary</i>	23
Chapter III: Methodology	24
<i>Research Design</i>	24
<i>Participant Selection and Description</i>	25
<i>Instrumentation</i>	25
<i>Data Collection Procedures</i>	26
<i>Data Analysis</i>	26

<i>Limitations</i>	26
Chapter IV: Results.....	28
<i>Demographic Information</i>	28
<i>Qualitative Analysis</i>	29
<i>Summary</i>	38
Chapter V: Discussion	39
<i>Limitations</i>	39
<i>Conclusions</i>	40
<i>Recommendations</i>	43
References.....	46
Appendix A: Consent Form.....	49
Appendix B: Interview Format.....	51

Chapter I: Introduction

The literature in the child welfare field makes many references to the epidemic of child abuse and neglect in today's society. During the last two decades, abuse and neglect rates continued to rise until the last few years (Graham, 1993). Experts indicate that these statistics reflected real increases, not simply changes in reporting practices or awareness (Bartholet, 1999). The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect (2004) reported that the rate of victimization per 1,000 children in the United States declined from 13.4 children in 1990 to 12.3 children in 2002. Although there have been reductions in the number of maltreated children, there were still an estimated 2.6 million referrals made to child welfare agencies concerning the well-being of approximately 4.5 million children in 2002 (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2004).

In Wisconsin, the number of child maltreatment reports has fluctuated since 1991. In 1991 there were 44,963 incidents of child maltreatment recorded (Division of Children and Family Services [DCFS], 2004). The largest number of referrals for child maltreatment in Wisconsin occurred in 1993, with 49,152 reports being received. The lowest number of reports occurred in 2002, with 36,319 incidents recorded. The last year that statistics are available for is 2003, with 40,473 reports being documented (DCFS, 2005).

According to Goldman, Salus, Wolcott, and Kennedy (2003), the three national goals for child protection are safety, permanency, and child and family well-being. Child safety is the paramount goal when children are identified as being abused or neglected and the county child welfare system becomes involved (DCFS, 2005). There are occasions when children must be removed from their home environment and placed into

an alternative living arrangement to ensure their safety. There can be many different living arrangements for children who are not safe in their parental homes due to child maltreatment. Children may be placed with a relative or family friend. Children may also be placed in a foster home, treatment foster home, group home or residential care center. Often, these children may only be placed outside of their home environment for a short period of time if the family can keep the child safe in the home. Child welfare agencies are charged with the responsibility of ensuring for a child's safety along with preserving the family whenever possible (DCFS, 2005).

Children who experience any form of maltreatment frequently bring issues related to the maltreatment into the school setting (Graham, 1993). According to Muro and Kottman (1995), all forms of abuse greatly affect children's views of themselves and others, as well as their performance and behaviors in school. Children who have been maltreated may experience difficulties in learning and academic achievement, low self-esteem and behavioral problems (Lowenthal, 2001).

These educational problems are further compounded when children are placed outside of their parental home. Children in out-of-home care demonstrate a variety of academic difficulties and behavioral problems within the school setting (Altshuler, 1997). Foster parents of children in out-of-home care reported concerns about emotional distress, behavioral problems, attention difficulties, learning difficulties and social skills deficits in the children placed in their care (Viergutz, 2003).

Children who have been maltreated and placed in alternative living arrangements present many issues that may have a negative impact on their educational success. Often these children do not receive proper attention from either the child welfare system or the

school system. The research indicates that there are many reasons these children do not receive the appropriate attention. These may include moving children from one school to another frequently (Altshuler, 1997) and a lack of increases in financial resources for child welfare systems (Graham, 1993). Children who are placed in out-of-home care are often involved in more than one placement, with a large majority changing schools often, usually in midyear (Altshuler, 1997).

Children placed in out-of-home care may also be hindered in their educational success based on a lack of collaboration between child welfare systems and those within the school districts, specifically social workers and school counselors. According to Altshuler (2003), there are few supports for successful collaboration between child welfare and public school systems. These two systems differ in their focus and as a result have difficulty working together. As a result, children receive inadequate services from both systems (Altshuler, 2003).

Altshuler (2003) found that there were two main barriers to educational success for the students who had experienced maltreatment and were residing in out-of-home care. These barriers included the reaction of both the student and teacher to out-of-home care placements and the adversarial relationship between the professionals working in the public school system and child welfare. Students and teachers both indicated in Altshuler's focus groups that being in out-of-home care affected the way that the student behaved in school and also the way that school staff reacted to the student. During Altshuler's focus groups, educators and child welfare workers both indicated a lack of trust in each other.

It is important for maltreated children residing outside of their parental home to experience educational success. Educational achievement is a key component to stability in out-of-home care placement, as well as a successful transition out of the foster care system (Zetlin et al., 2003). One in three adults who had been in out-of-home care indicated that limitations in education and job skills prohibited them from obtaining better employment options (Mech, 1994).

Statement of the Problem

Collaboration between child welfare staff and school counselors is necessary to improve educational success for child maltreatment victims in out-of-home care. School counselors are in the unique position to provide consultation and training to school staff on the issues these children face (Graham, 1993). Child welfare workers must also provide education to the school counselors on the needs and issues that children residing in out-of-home care experience. It is critical to obtain the perspective of both professional disciplines regarding the collaborative effort when child maltreatment victims are placed in out-of-home care. This will assist in ensuring that children can achieve educational success and experience a positive transition from the out-of-home care system.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of perceived collaboration between school counselors and child welfare workers in a small rural county in the upper Midwest, when working with maltreated children in alternative living arrangements. The study also addressed proposed suggestions to improve collaboration between these two groups of professionals.

Assumptions of the Study

The researcher assumed that all participants in the study would answer the open-ended questions honestly and openly. The researcher assumed that all participants had a general understanding of the differing roles of both professions. The researcher further assumed that the participants possessed an understanding of the dynamics of child abuse and neglect, out-of-home care placement, and the educational concerns that maltreated children experience.

Definition of Terms

It is important for the reader to have an understanding of the following terms:

Child maltreatment. Child maltreatment may include any of the following: emotional abuse to a child, physical abuse to a child, physical neglect to a child, sexual abuse to a child.

Emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is emotional damage for which the child's parent, guardian or legal custodian has neglected, refused or been unable for reasons other than poverty to obtain the necessary treatment.

Out-of-home care. Out-of-home care consists of residing in a home other than the parental home. This could include placement with a relative, friend, foster home, treatment foster home, group home or residential care center.

Physical abuse. Physical abuse consists of physical injury inflicted on a child by other than accidental means.

Physical injury. Physical injury includes but is not limited to lacerations, fractured bones, burns, internal injuries, severe or frequent bruising or great bodily harm.

Physical neglect. Physical neglect is the failure, refusal or inability, for reasons other than poverty, to provide necessary care, food, clothing, medical or dental care or shelter so as to seriously endanger the physical health of the child.

Sexual abuse. Sexual abuse may include any of the following: sexual intercourse or sexual contact with a child 15 years of age or less; sexual intercourse with a 16 or 17 year old child without the child's consent; inducement of a child to engage in sexually explicit conduct in order to videotape or photograph the child for such purposes, or producing, distributing, selling or otherwise profiting from such a videotape or photograph; encouragement by or permission of a person responsible for the child's welfare for a child to engage in sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of videotaping or photographing; causing a child to view or listen to sexual activity; exposing genitals to a child; permitting or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study included the small sample group. This study consisted of six child welfare social workers and eight school counselors. All participants were from a small rural county in northern Wisconsin. The study would need to be further expanded to include more participants and a larger demographic area if the results were to be applied outside of the small rural county where the study occurred.

An additional limitation that must be considered is the possibility of the respondents indicating responses that they believed the researcher wanted to hear. The researcher was in the unique position of having prior professional relationships with all of the participants in this study.

A final limitation of this study is that of researcher bias. The researcher was both the interviewer and the sole data analyzer.

Methodology

Chapter Two will examine the prevalence of child maltreatment and out-of-home care both nationwide and within Wisconsin. The educational implications for these children will be considered. The various roles of adults in the lives of child maltreatment victims will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with an in-depth examination of the collaboration between the child welfare system and the educational system.

Chapter Three will explain the methodology of the study completed on the collaboration between school counselors and county child welfare social workers. This will include an explanation of the subjects involved in the study, the procedures used for data collection and data analysis, and the limitations of the study. Chapter three will also describe the semi-structured interview format utilized in the study.

The results of the study will be presented in chapter four. This chapter will include the anticipated and unanticipated findings of the study. Chapter four will end with a summary of the findings.

Chapter Five will be a discussion on the findings from a review of the literature pertaining to child maltreatment, out-of-home care placements and educational achievement, along with the results of the completed study. Chapter five will explore the limitations of this research study and present conclusions based on the information obtained through the literature review and study. Chapter five will conclude with a discussion on the implications of this study and recommendations for further research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

A review of the literature shows that child maltreatment affected almost one million children annually, has devastating effects on children's educational success, and resulted in hundreds of thousands of children being placed outside of their parental homes. Chapter Two will examine the prevalence of child maltreatment and out-of-home care both nationwide and within Wisconsin. Educational implications for children maltreatment victims will be discussed along with the various roles of adults in their lives. The chapter will conclude with an in-depth examination of the collaboration between the child welfare system and the educational system.

Prevalence of Child Maltreatment

Child maltreatment continues to be a national epidemic. It is difficult to determine the actual number of children who have been maltreated due to many cases of child victimization going unreported. Child maltreatment rates may have been underreported by as much as 60%, especially in child fatality cases (Lowenthal, 2001). The Child Welfare League of America (2004b) reported that over 2,600,000 reports were made nationwide alleging that children were being maltreated in 2001.

Historically reports of child maltreatment increased until 2000, when there was a leveling off. There were approximately 2,694,000 children reported as allegedly being maltreated during 1991. This was an increase of 40% from 1985 (Graham, 1993). In 2001 approximately 2,673,000 reports of child maltreatment were made to child welfare agencies across the United States (Child Welfare League of America, 2004b). This number decreased slightly in 2002, with approximately 2.6 million reports being received (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2004). Approximately one-third

of the 2,673,000 reports made in 2001, were actually substantiated (Child Welfare League of America, 2004b). There was also a decline in the number of children found to be maltreated from 2001 to 2002, with an estimated 896,000 children found to be the victims of child maltreatment (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2004).

Categories of child maltreatment that statistics are collected for include neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. Nationally neglect accounted for one half of these reports. According to the research, approximately 50–60% of child maltreatment reports received were for neglect (Graham, 1993; Child Welfare League of America, 2004b; National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2004). Physical abuse accounted for approximately 20-25% of reports received (Graham, 1993; Child Welfare League of America, 2004b; National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2004). Sexual abuse reports made up approximately 10-15% of all reports received (Graham, 1993; Child Welfare League of America, 2004b; National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2004). The final category of child maltreatment recorded nationally was emotional abuse, constituting 10% or less of the reports received (Graham, 1993; Child Welfare League of America, 2004b; National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2004).

Children can be maltreated by anyone. Statistics are commonly gathered by the following categories of maltreaters: parents, other relatives, parent's partners, unrelated people who knew the child, and unknown maltreaters. According to the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect (2004), in 2002 over 80% of the people maltreating children were parents. An additional 7% of child maltreaters were other

relatives of the child victim. Three percent of maltreaters were partners of the child's parent. The remaining 10% of maltreaters included unrelated people who knew the children, such as school personnel or camp counselors, or had unknown relationships with the children.

The statistics for the state of Wisconsin mirror many of the national trends. In 2003, 40,473 children were reported as being maltreated. This was an increase from the year 2000, when 38,021 children were reported as possible victims of child maltreatment, the lowest number of reports received during the period from 1993-2003. This highest number of reports, 49,152 was received in 1993 (DCFS, 2005).

Wisconsin was similar to the nation in the types of child maltreatment reports received. Of the 38,672 children in Wisconsin reported for child maltreatment in 2001, slightly less than half were for neglect (16,070), a smaller number for physical abuse (12,544), still fewer for sexual abuse (8,505), with the lowest reports received being for emotional abuse (466) (DCFS, 2005). This trend continued in 2003, with just slightly under half of the 40,473 reports received being for neglect (16,357). Physical abuse reports accounted for a smaller amount (11,723), with a sexual abuse reports being lower (7,812) and emotional abuse having the lowest reports (407). This is similar to the trends seen across the United States with neglect being the highest reported child welfare concern for children, followed by physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse, respectively.

Within the state of Wisconsin, child abuse reports and substantiations fluctuate from county to county. DCFS (2005) found that the rate of reports per county ranged from 4.7 per 1000 children at the low end, to 69.7 per 1000 children at the high end.

Actual substantiations of child maltreatment were found in 0.2 per 1000 children for the county at the low end, compared to 15.1 per 1000 children for the highest county.

In the state of Wisconsin, as with the nation, the relationship between the child victim and maltreater is highest for those in the parental role, with over 60% of child maltreatment being inflicted by a parent or stepparent. Other family members account for approximately 10% of the substantiated cases. Adults providing some level of care to the child, such as a childcare provider or school employee make up approximately 5% of maltreaters. People not in a caretaker role account for almost approximately 15% of the substantiated reports, with unknown maltreaters are involved in less than 5% of the cases (DCFS, 2004; DCFS, 2005).

The rates of child maltreatment fluctuated during the recent past, both in the nation and in the state of Wisconsin. Even with these fluctuations, there were over 2,500,000 reports of child maltreatment made nationally each year. Wisconsin also mirrored the nation in the most common type of child maltreatment being reported, child neglect. Similarly, the majority of children in Wisconsin, as those in the nation, who experienced child maltreatment were related to the maltreater.

Prevalence of Out-of-Home Care Placement

Child maltreatment victims are often at risk of future maltreatment and are unsafe. When children are not safe in their parental homes, it is the responsibility of the child welfare system to ensure for their immediate and long-term safety. One way to ensure for this safety is through the removal of victim from the parental home with placement in out-of-home care.

Prior to 1998, the number of children entering out-of-home care increased at a dramatic rate. The number of children in out-of-home care had been growing exponentially for the previous 20 years (Altshuler, 1997). The number of children in out-of-home care during the latter part of the past decade has decreased gradually. From 1998 to 2001 the number of children in foster care at any one point in time dropped slightly, as children entering the foster care system stayed relatively stable, with children exiting the foster care system increasing slightly (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003). In 2001 more than 800,000 children spent time in the out-of-home care system, with approximately 542,000 children in out-of-home care at any one time (Child Welfare League of America, 2004b).

A large percentage of children entering out-of-home care are school age. Approximately 69.7% of the children in out-of-home care in 2001 were school age, with 25.9% between the ages of six through ten, 28.4% between the ages of eleven and fifteen, and 15.5% between the ages of sixteen and eighteen (Child Welfare League of America, 2004a). The median age of children entering out-of-home care during 2001 was 8.7 years (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003). In the state of Wisconsin, more than 9,000 children have been placed in foster homes and enrolled in public schools yearly (Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services & Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2000).

Bass, Shields and Behrman (2004) indicated, "The longer a child remains in care, the greater the likelihood that he or she will experience multiple placements. On average, approximately 85% of children who are in foster care for less than 1 year experience 2 or fewer placements, but placement instability increases with each year a child spends in the

system.” (p.8). An estimated 263,000 children exited the out-of-home care system during 2001. Of those exiting the system, 19% were in out-of-home care for less than one month, 50% for less than one year, 19% between one to two years, 22% from two to four years, and 9% for over five years (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003).

There are a variety of ways that children exit from out-of-home care. Of those children exiting the out-of-home care system, approximately 57% reunite with parents, 18% are adopted, 10% live with other relatives, and 3% are cared for in legal guardianship arrangements (Bass et al., 2004). Most children find stable and lasting relationships, but some fail shortly after the children exit the system, especially when they reunify with their birth parents, as these children may experience poorer outcomes compared to children who exited to other permanent placements (Bass et al., 2004). An average of 10.3% of the children who exited out-of-home care in 2000 were re-entering the system within 12 months of discharge (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003).

Child maltreatment victims often needed to be placed in out-of-home care to ensure their safety. Although the number of children placed in out-of-home care has dropped in the past decade, over 800,000 children experienced an out-of-home care placement in 2001 (Child Welfare League of America, 2004b). The majority of these children were school aged (Child Welfare League of America, 2004a). Many of these children remained in out-of-home care for one year or longer, increasing the likelihood of multiple placements.

Educational Implications

Child maltreatment has severe and often long lasting consequences for children. Child maltreatment victims experienced negative neurological, psychological, and social effects (Lowenthal, 2001). Many of these consequences had direct impact on the child's ability to succeed within the educational setting. The effects of child maltreatment have been devastating to a child's success within the educational system in and of themselves, however, limited research studies reported that these effects were intensified for children residing in out-of-home care placements (Bass et al., 2004). Little research has been completed on educational concerns comparing maltreated children in out-of-home care with maltreated children who remain in their home. As these children have similar risk factors, with both groups experiencing child maltreatment, it is unknown to the extent of intensification of these effects for children in out-of-home placement as compared to child maltreatment victims who remain within their parental homes.

Child maltreatment has been found to be devastating to the neurological system of a child victim (Lowenthal, 2001). Children who were chronically maltreated may produce high levels of cortisol, a hormone that increases in fight or flight situations. High levels of cortisol have caused brain cells to die and synapses to be reduced. Studies have found that child maltreatment victims had a decrease in the size of their brain, often in the areas of memory, learning and emotions (Lowenthal, 2001). These reductions in brain capacity had a direct impact on a maltreated students ability to learn. Many child maltreatment victims showed serious adverse deficiencies in their language and communication skill development, along with decreased cognition and learning abilities

(Lowenthal, 2001). All of these deficits impact a child's educational ability in a negative manner.

When child maltreatment victims were placed in out-of-home care, similar concerns are noted in their cognitive abilities. Children in out-of-home care demonstrated lower achievement and lower performance in school compared to other children who have never been placed outside of their parental home (Altshuler, 1997). These students performed lower on standardized achievement tests, had lower grades reported on their cumulative records and received lower teacher assessments (Altshuler, 1997). Burley & Halpern (2001) found that on average, youth in alternative care scored 15 to 20% below children in their parental homes on statewide achievement tests. Students residing in out-of-home care placements were found to have weaker cognitive abilities, academic performance, and classroom achievement compared to children who were not placed in out-of-home care (Fanshel et al., as cited in Altshuler, 1997). It is difficult to determine if these deficiencies were due to the effects of maltreatment only or compounded by the out-of-home placement.

Children who have been maltreated also experienced psychological effects of the maltreatment that had negative implications on their education. The psychological effects of child maltreatment described by Lowenthal (2001) included a lack of regulation of affect, the avoidance of intimacy, provocative behaviors, and attachment difficulties. Children who experienced maltreatment were often unable to describe their feelings and emotions. Children who were maltreated often avoided eye contact, exhibited hyperactivity and acted out behaviorally (Lowenthal, 2001).

At least one study demonstrated that the behavioral problems that child maltreatment victims experienced increased when children were placed in out-of-home care. Bass, Shields, and Behrman (2004) reported that children in foster care were more likely to have behavioral and emotional problems even when compared to children in “high risk” parental care families. Behavioral problems within the school setting for children in out-of-home care included aggressive, demanding, immature and attention seeking behavior (Altshuler, 1997). It is difficult to determine if this was a result of the out-of-home placement or the maltreatment that the child experienced.

Children who have been maltreated often experienced difficulty in social situations within the school setting. Maltreated children exhibited social problems when they interacted with their peers at school. These problems may have arisen from a sense of inferiority, low self-esteem, feelings of being unworthy of friends, or a lack of self-confidence (Lowenthal, 2001).

An additional concern for children who have been maltreated was that they were at an increased risk of developing health related problems (Lowenthal, 2001). Maltreated children often experienced asthma, heart disease, allergies, or other immune system disorders (Lowenthal, 2001). These illnesses may have resulted in increased absenteeism. Children in out-of-home care had more physical and mental health problems than children growing up in other settings (Bass et al., 2004). Even though these children were more likely to have access to health insurance, they often received spotty or inconsistent care, often due to placement instability (Bass et al., 2004).

Children in out-of-home care were also at a disadvantage educationally as they often had multiple moves from one school to another during the time that they were

placed outside of their parental home. Often these placements required a child be moved to a different community, leaving one school district to enroll in a new one (Bass et al., 2004). Children in out-of-home care changed schools frequently, often during the middle of a school year (Altshuler, 1997). Children in high-risk families often experienced similar educational disruptions. Changing schools was detrimental to the student's educational success (Altshuler, 2003). Students in Altshuler's focus group indicated the difficulties they encountered when having to switch schools included the need to "prove yourself" and "gain respect" of teachers and peers. Students in these groups also indicated difficulty in performing well in the classroom due to worrying about being moved unexpectedly (Altshuler, 2003).

An additional concern when children in out-of-home care switched schools was with the communication from one school to another. Tracking the services that children had received when they moved from placement to placement was often difficult (Bass et al., 2004). Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kimm (2003) found that when these students were required to switch schools or alternative care settings, their prior educational information was not provided to the new school district or out-of-home care providers in a timely manner. This often led to a delay in the student being able to obtain appropriate educational services.

Two additional educational concerns regarding the implications for children in out-of-home care are the disproportionate number of these children that received special educational services as compared to children who resided in their parental home, and a higher number of grade retentions for children in out-of-home care. Children in out-of-home care had a higher placement rate in special educational services than children who

resided in their parental homes (Altshuler, 1997). Some of these children were found to be inappropriately enrolled in special educational services and mislabeled as having a disability when they did not (Weinberg, Weinberg, & Shea, as cited in Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2003). Research studies also showed an increase in the number of children placed in out-of-home care being retained at grade level (Zetlin et al., 2003), with some studies indicating twice as many children in out-of-home care having repeated a grade, both at the elementary and secondary level (Burley and Halpern, 2001). It is unknown how child maltreatment victims that were allowed to remain in their parental homes compared in these areas with child maltreatment victims who were placed in out-of-home care. It is difficult to determine if these concerns were based on the effects of the maltreatment, the out-of-home placement, or both.

As children in out-of-home care faced a number of hurdles in their lives, many that had a direct impact on their success in educational settings, one must be aware that educational success for youth placed out of the home was essential for them to become successful. Educational achievement was a key component to stability in placement as well as successful transition from out-of-home care, as non-successful students in out-of-home care frequently ended up in the criminal justice system or on welfare as adults (Zetlin et al., 2003). One in three adults who had been placed in out-of-home care indicated that limitations in education and job skills were obstacles to better jobs (Mech, 1994). A study of older youths leaving out-of-home care in one Midwestern state revealed that most left without a job or high school diploma, and that many left with neither (McMillen and Tucker, 1999). Children in out-of-home care who achieved a high school diploma were more likely to be employed than non high school graduates (Mech,

1994). The lower number of placements and the completion of high school predicted greater employment status for youth in out-of-home care (McMillen & Tucker, 1999).

Roles and Responsibilities

Child abuse and neglect has become a community concern. As such, dealing with child abuse and neglect takes a community effort (Goldman, Salus, Wolcott & Kennedy, 2003; Altshuler, 2003). “Each community has a legal and moral obligation to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, which includes responding effectively to child maltreatment” (Goldman et al., 2003, p.7). Many resources have been available to child maltreatment victims within communities. Each resource had its own responsibility and requirements, but all should have been working together for the benefit of children in out-of-home care.

Child protective services have been one of the resources available to child maltreatment victims and have had a central role in receiving and investigating child maltreatment reports. Child protective service agencies were mandated to respond to alleged child maltreatment, determine the safety of children who are the subject of the report, and decide what initial response is needed (Goldman et al., 2003). These agencies were responsible for assuring the safety of the children brought to their attention. It is the child protective service agency that has taken a lead role in the placement of children in out-of-home care. When a child was placed in out-of-home care, it was the role of child protective services to notify the school district of that placement. Department of Public Instruction and DHFS (2000) indicated that the school district where a child will be attending shall be immediately notified, as schools have a need to know when the

residence of a child changes. This notification allowed the school to plan for the educational needs of that child.

For children who have been maltreated and placed in out-of-home care, the educational system has found itself in a unique position. Teachers, school counselors and other school employees could have provided a valuable support system to these children, their families and out-of-home care providers (Altshuler, 2003). Schools could have provided the constant, stable environment that met the child's need for consistency. Schools also needed to be aware of the barriers that may impede these children in their ability to learn and should have been attempting to remove these barriers and providing extra support for these students (Altshuler, 2003).

Children who have been placed in out-of-home care due to maltreatment, benefited greatly from educational accomplishments. In an attempt to obtain educational success for these students, professionals in the educational system should have worked with the foster parents and been sensitive to the child's needs (Altshuler, 2003). There has been a need for out-of-home care providers to receive information on the services available to the children in their care, including educational services and after school activities (Bass et al., 2004). The schools were often the ones providing this information to the out-of-home care providers.

Collaboration

The literature has demonstrated that child maltreatment is a societal problem that must be addressed by the entire community. Children in out-of-home care must be kept safe from future maltreatment and experience success in their lives if they are to achieve a positive outlook on their future. In an effort to achieve the best outcomes for these

children, all agencies in the system must work together, with each relying on the other to provide necessary information and resources (Bass et al., 2004). Neither the child welfare system nor the educational system can provide optimal care without the collaboration and support of other agencies (Bass et al., 2004). Child welfare and other community agencies are finding schools an important partner in helping youth and families, while educators are realizing that they lack the resources to face the challenges of educating students who are less able to learn due to effects of child maltreatment without assistance from the broader community (Keys, Bemak, Carpenter & Sears, 1998). These systems must begin to work together to achieve positive outcomes for these children.

Children in out-of-home care may have fared better if a collaborative relationship existed between the child welfare system and the educational system, however, limited resources have been available to support such a collaboration. Altshuler (2003) indicated that there have been few mechanisms in existence to support successful collaboration between public child welfare and public education systems, despite the fact that most children living in foster care attended public schools. Along with the lack of resources to develop these collaborative relationships, many barriers were found to exist. These barriers included financial constraints (which system pays for what service), identification of appropriate clientele, location and coordination of service delivery, and evaluative approaches (Altshuler, 2003). These barriers hindered the forming of collaborative relationships between the child welfare system and the educational system.

Recent focus groups consisting of students in out-of-home care, educators, and caseworker found that adversarial relationships between the professionals in the public

school system and the children welfare system had an adverse affect on the educational functioning of students residing in out-of-home care (Altshuler, 2003). Altshuler reported that both educators and caseworkers described a mutual lack of trust with each other. Altshuler found that caseworkers do not trust that schools maintain high academic expectations for students in foster care, whereas educators were frustrated with caseworkers' making assumptions and being unreliable, according to Altshuler. Additional concerns described by these focus groups included a lack of understanding regarding confidentiality, a lack of communication, and a perceived lack of caring or commitment to students. Educators felt that caseworkers had withheld vital information and caseworkers felt that educators expected them to share confidential information not needed by the educational system. Both lead to a belief that the other discipline was unwilling to communicate with them. Of greatest concern was the fact that neither caseworkers nor educators felt that the other profession cared about or were truly involved with students in out-of-home care (Altshuler, 2003).

There clearly has been a need for collaboration between the school system and child welfare demonstrated in the literature; however, many barriers exist, and many improvements need to be made if children in out-of-home care are to be successful in their educational endeavors. A model of collaboration found to be successful allowed parents, out-of-home care providers, case workers, educators, youth and counselors to all be viewed as experts in problem solving issues. The goal of this collaboration was to bring professionals and families together to confer as a team (Keys et al., 1998). As members of the team were seen as experts, others began to show a respect for the knowledge and expertise of each person, which was a key ingredient in forming

collaborative relationships (Goldman et. al, 2003). Often school counselors and child welfare social workers were in the position of modeling these collaborative relationships when working with children in out-of-home care, based on their previous working relationships.

Summary

Nearly one million children in the United States annually experienced some form of child maltreatment, with approximately 800,000 children spending some time in out-of-home care each year. Although these numbers fluctuate each year, child maltreatment and out-of-home placements continue to affect a large population of children each year. Children who were maltreated or in out-of-home care were found to be at greater risk of failure within the educational system than children not experiencing these conditions. Educational success was paramount to these children being successful later on in life. For this reason the educational system and child welfare system have needed to work together, but this was not historically the case. Little collaboration was found to exist between the two disciplines when working with children in out-of-home care (Altshuler, 2003). There is a need for this collaboration to increase and improve if these children are to be successful in the future.

Chapter III: Methodology

A qualitative study was completed to examine the collaboration between professional school counselors and child protection social workers when child maltreatment victims are placed in out-of-home care. A description of the semi-structured interview format utilized in the study is found in this chapter. A discussion follows of the research design, the participants involved in the study, the procedures used for data collection and data analysis, along with the limitations of the study.

Research Design

This qualitative study consisted of a semi-structured interview format that examined the collaboration between professional school counselors and child protection social workers when working with children in out-of-home care. A set of open-ended questions was asked of all participants, with follow-up questions being used to gather additional information. Participation was voluntary. Participants acknowledged their approval for participation through a signed voluntary consent form (Appendix A). All child welfare social workers and all but one school counselor from a small rural county participated in the study. The school counselors who participated in this study were from two separate school districts within the county. It was critical to obtain the perspective from both professional disciplines regarding the collaborative effort when child maltreatment victims were placed in out-of-home care in an effort to ensure that children achieve educational success and experience a positive transition from the out-of-home care system within this small rural county, as the county has a higher than average reporting and substantiation rate. The small rural county that was chosen for this study had a higher rate of referrals per 1,000 children as compared to the majority of counties

within Wisconsin. The county selected for this study also had a higher substantiation rate of child maltreatment per 1,000 children.

Participant Selection and Description.

The participants in this study consisted of six social workers and eight school counselors from a small rural county. Four males and ten females participated in the interview process. The average years of experience for social workers was 6.3 years. The average years of experience for school counselors was 16.375 years.

Three elementary school counselors, one middle school counselor, three high school counselors and one kindergarten through twelfth grade school counselor participated in the study. The school counselors were from two different school districts within the county.

All social workers from the county social services department providing services to children participated in this study. The social workers participating in the study had differing job responsibilities, with two of them completing assessments, three providing on-going services and one foster care coordination.

Instrumentation

The semi-structured, open-ended interview format was developed by this researcher for the purpose of this study (Appendix B). The interview format gained insight into the current collaboration between school counselors and child welfare workers when working with children in out-of-home care. The interview format also addressed the perceived barriers to effective collaboration between the groups of professionals. The interview format also sought out suggestions to improve the collaboration between the school counselors and child welfare workers.

The interview format has not been tested for validity or reliability as this tool was developed specifically for this study.

Data Collection Procedures

Permission was obtained for the county social services department along with the school districts within this county to conduct open-ended interviews with the social work staff and school counselors. All participants also completed voluntary consent forms.

A series of semi-structured, open-ended questions were asked of the participants. Some questions applied only to one profession and were asked only of that profession. Questions applying to both professions were asked of all participants. Follow-up questions were asked based on respondents' answers.

Interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes and were conducted in person with each participant, usually in the participant's office. Notes were taken by the researcher during the interview process and verbally summarized to ensure accuracy upon completion of the interview. Any corrections made by the participant were noted.

Data Analysis

Results of the semi-structured interviews were grouped according to main concepts and themes by the researcher. The main concepts were analyzed following an iterative process to show any commonalities or discrepancies using general (all respondents), typical (half or more of the respondents) and variant (fewer than half but three or more respondents) themes.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included the small sample group. This study consisted of six child welfare social workers and eight school counselors. All participants were

from a small rural county in northern Wisconsin. The study would need to be further expanded to include more participants and a larger demographic area if the results were to be applied outside of the small rural county where the study occurred.

An additional limitation that must be considered is the possibility of the respondents indicating responses that they believed the researcher wanted to hear. The researcher was in the unique position of having professional relationships with all of the participants in this study.

A final limitation of this study is that of possible researcher bias. The researcher was both the interviewer and the sole data analyzer. There was no opportunity for outside audit of the results. It is possible that another researcher may have uncovered different themes.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter will present the results of the semi-structured open-ended interviews concerning the collaboration between school counselors and child welfare social workers when children are in out-of-home care. The demographic information regarding interview participants will be reported first. Data collected on each of the interview topics will then be given.

Demographic Information

The subjects in this study consisted of six social workers and eight school counselors from a small rural county. Four males and ten females participated in the interview process. The average years of experience for social workers was 6.3 years. The average years of experience for school counselors was 16.375 years. Three out of the eight school counselors had experience working with child abuse and neglect issues outside of the school setting. Two of the six social workers interviewed had experience working within a school setting prior to entering the social work field.

Three elementary school counselors, one middle school counselor, three high school counselors and one kindergarten through twelfth grade school counselor participated in the study. The school counselors were from two different school districts within the county.

All social workers from the county social services department providing services to children participated in this study. The social workers participating in the study had differing job responsibilities, with two of them completing assessments, three providing on-going services and one foster care coordination.

Qualitative Analysis

Field notes that had been verified for accuracy by participants of the study immediately following the completion of the semi-structured interviews were reviewed for common topical areas. Then, within each topic area, commonalities were grouped by theme. The findings are reported as general themes (all respondents indicating theme), typical themes (half or more of the respondents indicating theme) or variant theme (fewer than half but more than three indicating theme).

Collaboration between child welfare social workers and school district staff. This topic was explored through Question 1.i (How do you see the relationship between county child welfare staff and school staff in general?) along with Question 1.v (Is there trust between the Department of Social Services and the School District?).

The typical response ($n = 10$) to the question regarding how the respondents saw the relationships between child welfare social workers and school personnel was that these relationships were positive. Social work staff identified positive professional relationships three times more often than school counselors. Five school counselors identified concerns from other school professionals (teachers/administration) regarding reporting and a perceived lack of action on the part of the social service system as the main concerns. School counselors felt the need for all school district employees to have additional education about the social service system that child welfare workers are governed by.

Collaboration between child welfare social workers and school counselors. The respondents' answers to the over-all collaboration between child welfare social workers and school counselors were addressed in Question 1.ii (How do you view the relationship

between professional county child welfare social workers and professional school counselors?).

The general response of all participants was that the working relationship between school counselors and child welfare social workers was positive overall. Two typical themes emerged during the interview process regarding general communication between school counselors and social workers. These included issues surrounding confidentiality and previous professional relationships with members of the other discipline.

Concern regarding confidentiality was one of the typical themes expressed by both school counselors and social workers, with seven respondents reporting this. Two of the school counselors indicated that concerns regarding confidentiality could be overcome by the social worker obtaining signed releases of information from the parents, while the two of the social workers identified concerns with parents refusing to sign releases of information between them and the school. Three social workers also identified a concern regarding how much information could be or should be shared with school counselors about specific children. Both disciplines indicated that once releases were signed, open communication usually occurred.

The second typical theme that emerged regarding the collaboration between the two disciplines, with twelve of fourteen respondents responding, was that communication was more positive if school counselors and county social workers had a previous working relationship. Both school counselors and county social workers identified that the type and amount of collaboration differed based on who the social worker was and who the school counselor was. Social workers identified that working with smaller schools or school districts often made it easier to collaborate with the school counselor. Five of the

respondents indicated that it is helpful to know someone from the other discipline prior to needing to have contact.

Collaboration between school counselors and child welfare social workers when children are placed in out-of-home care. The questions related to this topic include the following: Question 1.iii (How would you describe your working relationship with professional social workers/school counselors when children are placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?), Question 1.iv (Have you noticed any changes in the collaboration between the social workers/school counselors in regards to these situations?), Question 1.vii (Describe the contact between the professional child welfare social worker and yourself when a child is placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment; for school counselors only), Question 1.viii (Describe the contact between the professional school counselor and yourself when working with a child placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment; for social workers only), Question 2.vi.1 (Are you or have you been aware of children in your schools being placed in out of home care due to child maltreatment?; for school counselors only), Question 2.vi.2 (How did you become aware of these placements?; for school counselors only), Question 2.viii (When placing children in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment, at what point do you notify the school of placement? Who do you notify?; for social workers only).

The general theme expressed by all respondents was that there has been no contact between social workers and school counselors when children are initially placed in out-of-home care. School counselors reported that often times these students are placed outside of the school district and they are made aware only after the student is no longer in school, and usually not by the social worker. If students who are placed in out-

of-home care remain within the school, the counselor often becomes aware of the placement from other school staff, the student, or friends of the student.

Social workers, as a subgroup, gave a general response that identified the need to inform the school of a placement at the first available opportunity. However the social workers varied in who they informed in the school, with many of them informing the principal or office staff, a few of them notifying the school district office and only one indicating that they informed the guidance counselor. Social workers reported having a limited number of children in out-of-home care of school age and identified that there is often a delay between these placements and as such they are not always certain of the process to follow when placing a school age child.

A typical theme ($n = 10$) was that there have been improvements in the collaboration between school counselors and county social workers within the recent past with ten respondents indicating positive changes. School counselors identified these improvements more often than county social workers did. A variant response from school counselors was that two of them reported being made aware of a placement by the social worker within 24 hours of that placement.

Similar concerns existed regarding the collaboration between school counselors and county social workers when children were placed in out-of-home care as in the general working relationship between the two disciplines. Confidentiality issues were again identified by both professions, as were previous relationships between the professionals.

Treatment of children in out-of-home care. This topic was addressed with Question 1.vi (Do you perceive children in out-of-home care being treated differently within the school compared to children not in out-of-home care?).

The general theme from all respondents in both professions was that children in out-of-home care are treated differently once the school becomes aware of the placement. Respondents indicated these students are usually treated more favorably by teachers, but often treated more harshly by their peers. Respondents also identified that it is difficult to treat these children the same as other students, as they often display more behavioral issues.

Understanding of effects of out-of-home care on child's education. This topic related to the responses for Question 1.ix (What is your understanding of the effects of out-of-home care placement on the child's ability to succeed in school?; for social workers only).

The general theme of all social workers participating in this study was that children often do better in school once they are placed in out-of-home care. Social workers identified that this may be the first time in a child's life that there is consistency; their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter are met; someone is there to check on progress in school; attendance improves. One social worker did identify that the research indicates that placement in out-of-home care can be detrimental to a child's education, however this worker has not found this to be the case. Three of the social workers indicated that they felt the length of the placement and any disruptions in the child's placement could have a negative impact on the child's ability to succeed in the educational setting, especially if the child had to change school districts.

Perceived roles of participants in the lives of victims. This topic was addressed by responses to the following questions: Question 2.i (What do you see as the foster parents' role in the collaborative process between professional county child welfare social workers and professional school counselors when working with children placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?), Question 2.ii (What do you view as the parents' role in the collaborative process between the two disciplines when working with children placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?), Question 2.iii (How are issues between parents and out-of-home care providers handled?), Question 2.iv (What is your perception of the county child welfare social worker's role when working with a child in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?; for school counselors only), Question 2.v (What is your understanding of the professional school counselor's role when working with a child in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?; for social workers only), Question 2.vi (What has your role been when working with students who are placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?; for school counselors only).

The general response of all participants was that out-of-home care providers are seen as being similar to a parent. All school counselors identified that out-of-home care providers are often the people who provide them with background information on the student; attend meetings; and call if there are problems. Social workers also identified that out-of-home providers are the ones that provide the information to the school; are responsible for monitoring daily activities of the child; and attend school conferences. All social workers also reported a general theme of the out-of-home providers being the bridge between the social worker and the school counselor. Social workers identified that

they often relay messages between the two; keep both sides updated; and are not bound by confidentiality concerns with the school.

The general theme of all of the respondents to the question addressing the parents role in the collaborative process was that when children are removed from their parental home and placed in out-of-home care the parents usually do not have a role in the educational process. All of the social workers interviewed indicated that parents should be involved in the education of their children, however this is not the current practice. Social workers indicated that it would be nice to have the parents be an integral part of the educational plan for the student, but in reality they are not. Both social workers and school counselors identified that parents are often limited in the role that they are allowed to play in their child's education by court orders and legal limitations placed on them through the court system. One social worker indicated that parents are not involved in the student's day to day schooling as they are not there to help with homework, receive correspondence from the school or see the child's completed daily work. This social worker suggested that parents who are having visitation with their children use a portion of this time for these purposes.

When asked how issues between parents and out-of-home care providers were handled, it was the general theme of the entire subgroup of school counselors that they were not aware of any issues between out-of-home providers and parents, as the parents were usually uninvolved in the child's education. As a result the school counselors really had no idea about how any conflicts were handled. Four of the social workers identified the need for open communication between the out-of-home care providers and the parents

and the need for social workers to set limits early on in the case to help reduce the number of conflicts.

The typical theme expressed by five of the school counselors regarding the role of the social worker when children are placed in out-of-home care was that they were not certain what their role was. Although all of the counselors identified that social workers are responsible to ensure that all children on their caseloads are safe, these five school counselors did not know how the social workers did this, or what they considered in determining safety.

The general response of all social workers concerning the role of the school counselor was that the school counselor could be a vital support for the student in out-of-home care. Social workers described school counselors as being in a position to support the student within the school setting, as they are a trusted adult and have more time to provide these services than teachers do. Two concerns noted by two of the social workers regarding the role of the school counselor were the counselor providing therapy when the child may have an outside therapist and also coddling the student too much.

The general theme of all school counselors regarding their role in working with children in out-of-home care was that they had a supportive role in the child's life. Three indicated that they helped with transitions for the students, especially if they needed to move to a different school. Two described their role as checking in with the student but not forcing them to come and meet with them. One school counselor described their role with students as showing them that school is a safe place for them to be.

Barriers to effective collaboration and communication between county child

welfare staff and school counselors. Question 3 (What are the barriers to effective collaboration and communication between county child welfare staff and school counselors?) addressed this topic area.

The general themes from all participants were that the major barriers to effective collaboration were the workload and limited resources for both social workers and school counselors. All social workers identified confidentiality as a barrier, whereas this was a variant theme for school counselors, with only two identifying this as a barrier. Typical themes ($n = 14$) for both professions were a general lack of communication and knowledge of the other system including legal constraints, roles of the professionals, and limitations of each position, with eight respondents reporting this.

Ideas to improve collaboration. Responses to Question #4 (What could be done to improve the collaboration between county child welfare staff and school counselors?) were used to address this topic.

The general response of all participants was that there needs to be open communication between the two professions on a regular basis. Four social workers and five school counselors suggested that there be joint meetings where they are able to put face with name. It was suggested by five of the respondents that meetings be scheduled at the beginning of each school year and also that social workers attend school counselor meetings periodically throughout the year. These meetings could also be a source of educating the disciplines about each other according to a three of the respondents.

An additional typical response ($n = 9$) from participants was that there should be a protocol implemented for placements. All social workers in general felt that checklists would be helpful as part of this protocol. They also felt that a clearer definition of what

could be shared with school counselors and when, would improve the communication and collaboration. Both disciplines indicated that releases should be obtained as quickly as possible when children are placed in out-of-home care.

Summary

School counselors and county social workers participating in this study shared many of the same responses with all participants indicating that there was a positive working relationship between the two disciplines. However, all respondents indicated that there was no contact between the two disciplines when children are initially placed in out-of-home care. All respondents also indicated that two of the main barriers to effective collaboration were the limited resources and the workload, while expressing a desire to have regular open communication between the two disciplines. All participants perceived children in out-of-home care being treated differently from their peers and their parents becoming uninvolved in their educational endeavors, with out-of-home care providers taking a more active role. Many of the school counselors and social workers identified a need for a clearer understanding about the role of the other discipline and the limitations of confidentiality when working with each other.

Chapter V: Discussion

Children are being maltreated at an alarming rate throughout the nation. Children who have experienced maltreatment, including those who are placed in out-of-home care, are at risk of failing within the educational system. Educational success is the goal for all students, but is essential for child maltreatment victims, particularly those in out-of-home care. If these children are to experience success, it is critical for the professionals within the child welfare system and school district to work closely together. This has historically not occurred (Altshuler, 2003).

This research study examined the relationship between two key professional staff within these settings, the county child welfare worker and the school counselor. The research study found a number of similarities between the professionals within a small rural county in the upper Midwest and the literature review, along with a number of differences. These will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion section.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included the small sample group as the study consisted of six child welfare social workers and eight school counselors. All participants were from a small rural county in northern Wisconsin. If the results of this study were to be applied outside of the local area, the study would need to be further expanded to include more participants and a larger demographic area. The study is further limited in that the researcher was in the unique position of having professional relationships with all of the participants in this study. These relationships may have increased the likelihood of respondents giving responses they believe the research may be wanting.

A final limitation of this study was that of possible researcher bias. The researcher was both the interviewer and the sole data analyzer. If additional researchers had analyzed the raw data additional similarities and conclusions may have been reached.

Conclusions

Research Question 1. Research Question 1 asked what is the current level of collaboration and communication between county child welfare staff and school counselors when children are placed in out-of-home care settings due to experiencing child abuse or neglect?

When researching the current level of collaboration and communication between county child welfare staff and school counselors many themes emerged. A review of the literature found that there was a lack of trust between educators and child welfare workers. Although school counselors participating in this study felt that there was a lack of trust between educators and child welfare social workers, they did not feel that same lack of trust existed between the social workers and themselves. School counselors felt that the lack of trust resulted from concerns by educators about being identified as a reporter of child maltreatment and a perceived lack of action on the part of the social service system by the educators.

Contributing to the lack of trust, according to the research, was a lack of understanding regarding confidentiality. Educators felt that caseworkers withheld vital information and caseworkers felt that educators expected them to share confidential information not needed by the educational system (Altshuler, 2003). Although neither social workers nor school counselors identified the specific concerns that the research did about confidentiality, respondents from both disciplines did report that confidentiality

was a concern. Social workers reported not having clear guidelines about the information that could be shared with school counselors and indicated these guidelines could assist in information being shared sooner and more consistently between the two disciplines.

Both professions reported that there was an open sharing of information once appropriate releases were obtained. School counselors expressed concern that these releases were not obtained more often, whereas social workers indicated that one of the main barriers to obtaining these releases was the refusal of the parent to sign them.

It should be noted that child welfare workers reported and school counselors concurred that there is a low number of children placed in out-of-home care that are school age. This differs from the research that shows approximately 70% of children in out-of-home care being school age (Child Welfare League of America, 2004a).

The literature review showed that both students and teachers indicated that being in out-of-home care affected both the way that the student behaved and also the way that school staff reacted to the student (Altshuler, 2003). These findings were consistent with the responses of research participants, which indicated a general theme from all respondents in both professions that children in out-of-home care are treated differently once the school becomes aware of the placement. Respondents in the research study indicated that these students are usually treated more favorably by teachers, but often treated more harshly by their peers. Respondents also identified that it is difficult to treat these children the same as other students, as they often display more behavioral issues.

Research Question 2. Research Question 2 asked what are the perceived roles of the various participants in the lives of victims of child maltreatment placed in out-of-home care?

A review of the research shows that parents, out-of-home care providers, case workers, educators, youth and counselors all must be viewed as experts in problem solving issues (Keys et al., 1998). Both disciplines participating in the research study indicated that although parents should be involved in the educational process of their children, even when the children are removed from the home, this is not the current practice. Parents are often not seen and not encouraged to participate in the day-to-day educational activities of their students.

Research Question 3. Research Question 3 asked what are the barriers to effective collaboration and communication between county child welfare staff and school counselors?

Child maltreatment is a societal problem and must be addressed by the entire community if the victims are to experience success. If children are to obtain the best outcome possible, all agencies in the system must work together, each relying on the other to provide necessary information and resources (Bass et al., 2004). There were many barriers to working together identified in the literature review including: limited resources; financial constraints, identification of appropriate clientele, and location and coordination of service delivery (Altshuler, 2003). Participants in this research study identified two of the same barriers to collaboration as the research did; limited resources and financial constraints. They identified that there was a limited number of staff in both of the positions and that with the workload demands, both systems were unable to meet all of the needs of these students. They also identified that limited resources and financial constraints limited the services that were available to these students.

Research Question 4. Research Question 4 asked what could be done to improve the collaboration between county child welfare staff and school counselors?

Research has found that a key ingredient in forming professional collaborative relationships was to come together as a team and begin to develop an understanding of what each person's role and expertise was on that team (Goldman et al., 2003). Respondents in this study indicated that there was a need for more communication between the two disciplines, along with an increase in the awareness of what the responsibilities and requirements are for each position. Participants felt that this could be accomplished in a variety of ways, including joint staff meetings, more in-services, and regularly scheduled telephone contacts. Many participants also indicated that a set protocol, specifically addressing concerns around confidentiality would also be helpful.

Recommendations

Many recommendations can be made regarding the results of this study. These recommendations may only be appropriate to implement within the small rural county where the study was completed, as this was a small sample of respondents. Prior to these results being implemented elsewhere, additional studies involving a larger population and broader geographical area should be completed in regards to the collaboration between school counselors and county child welfare social worker staff. Additional studies concerning the effects of child maltreatment verses the effects of out-of-home placement on children's educational success are also needed.

Based on the results of the study, students would benefit from improved communication between school counselors, county social workers and educators in general. Additional education on the various roles, responsibilities, and limitations of

key players in both systems is necessary to improve this collaboration. It is believed by the research participants that this education can improve the lack of trust between school personnel and county social workers by providing additional educational opportunities about the requirements, parameters and responsibilities of child welfare social workers. As suggested by the participants in this survey, this can be accomplished through in-services or joint meetings between the disciplines.

Additional training in the area of confidentiality would also be beneficial for both disciplines. It would be beneficial for school counselors to understand the limitations of information sharing when parents refuse to sign a release. Social workers must also be educated on what information should be shared and when.

Public schools and child welfare agencies must begin working together to support students' educational functioning by developing a joint plan indicating caseworker's responsibilities along with the school's responsibility (Altshuler, 2003). It is essential that this communication begin as soon as a child is placed in out-of-home care by the caseworker informing the school of the placement immediately. Child welfare workers are often concerned with who to report this information to and the confines of confidentiality (Altshuler, 2003). Educators should also be willing to contact the social worker to obtain information to help them understand the needs of the student in out-of-home care (Altshuler, 2003). To assist in improving this communication, consistent guidelines should be provided for child welfare agencies regarding the information that can be shared when children are in out-of-home care (Altshuler, 2003). These guidelines would assist both professions in understanding the limitations on the information that can be shared, thus beginning to improve the trust between them.

A final recommendation for the educational success for students in out-of-home care is to have more parental involvement in these students' educational endeavors. This could be accomplished by having parents participate in educational functions and meetings on a regular basis. This also could be accomplished by having parents assist their child in completing homework, receiving and reviewing completed work and projects, along with being seen as an expert on their child.

References

- Altshuler, S. J. (1997). A reveille for school social workers: Children in foster care need our help! *Social Work in Education, 19*(2). 121-126.
- Altshuler, S.J. (2003). From barriers to successful collaboration: Public schools and child welfare. *Social Work, 48*, 52-63.
- Bartholet, E. (1999). *Nobody's children*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bass, S., Shields, M.K., & Behrman, R.E. (2004). Children, families, and foster care: Analysis and recommendations. *The Future of Children, 14*(1). 4-30.
- Burley, M., & Halpern, M. (2001). *Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care* (Document No. 01-11-3901). Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- Child Welfare League of America. (2004a). Foster care: Facts and figures. Retrieved April 24, 2004, from: <http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/factsheet.htm>
- Child Welfare League of America. (2004b). *National fact sheet 2004*. Retrieved April 24, 2004, from: <http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/nationalfacesheet04.htm>
- Department of Health and Family Services (Office of Policy, Evaluation and Planning, Division of Children and Family Services) (2004). *Annual report to the governor and legislature on Wisconsin child abuse and neglect*. Madison, WI: Author.
- Department of Health and Family Services (Office of Policy, Evaluation and Planning, Division of Children and Family Services). (2005). *Annual report to the governor and legislature on Wisconsin child abuse and neglect*. Madison, WI: Author.
- Department of Public Instruction (2000, December). *Educational services for children placed in out-of-home care* (Bulletin No. 00.11). Madison, WI: Author.

Retrieved October 18, 2003, from: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/een/bul00-11.html>

Graham, T.L. (1993). Beyond detection: Education and the abused student. *Social Work in Education, 15*(4), 197-206.

Goldman, J., Salus, M.K., Wolcott, D., Kennedy, K.Y. (2003). *A coordinated response to child abuse and neglect: The foundations for practice*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Keys, S.G., Bemak F., Carpenter, S.L., King-Sears, M.E. (1998). Collaborative consultant: A new role for counselors serving at-risk youth. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 76*, 123-134.

Lowenthal, B. (2001). *Abuse and neglect: The educator's guide to the identification and prevention of child maltreatment*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Mech, E.B. (1994). Foster youths in transition: Research perspectives on preparation for independent living. *Child Welfare, 73*, 603-614.

McMillen, J.C. & Tucker, J. (1999). The status of older adolescents at exit from out-of-home care. *Child Welfare, 78*, 339-360.

Muro, J.J., & Kottman, T. (1995). *Guidance and counseling in the elementary and middle schools*. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect. (2003). *Child maltreatment 2002: Summary of key findings*. Retrieved April 24, 2004, from:
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect. (2004). *Foster care national statistics*. Retrieved April 24, 2004, from: <http://www.calib.com/nccanch>

Viergutz, J.L. (2003). The mental health needs of foster children. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 64, 1510.

Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services & Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2000). *Educational Services for Children Placed in Out-Of-Home Care*. Madison, WI: Author.

Zetlin, A., Weinberg, L., & Kimm, C. (2003). Are the educational needs of children in foster care being addressed? *Children & Schools*, 25(2), 105-119.

Appendix A: Consent Form

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research

Title: Collaboration between county social workers and school counselors with child maltreatment victims in out-of-home care.

Investigator:

Kelly Derlein

(715) 627-6521

Research Sponsor:

Dr. Barbara Flom

(715) 232-1343

Description:

This research study will look at the collaboration between professional county child welfare social workers and professional school counselors when working with victims of child maltreatment in out-of-home care. The roles of adults in these children's lives will be examined. This study will also consider barriers to collaboration between these professionals, along with future recommendations for improvement. The study will consist of an individual interview format with professional county child welfare social workers and professional school counselors.

Risks and Benefits:

Child maltreatment is an area that is common to your professional practice. The risks associated with this study are minimal. There may be a slight risk of emotional or psychological distress. The benefits of this study include an ability to discuss the relationship between the two professional disciplines, the experiences you have had working with the other profession, along with the opportunity to propose possible solutions to improve collaboration. The benefits to the county could include an improved collaborative relationship between professional child welfare social workers and professional school counselors. This improved relationship could have a direct benefit to children and their families.

Time Commitment and Payment:

It is anticipated that the interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. You will receive no compensation for your participation in this research study.

Confidentiality:

Your name will not be included on any documents. You will have the opportunity to review the field notes taken during the interview in order to prevent any identifying

information from being disclosed. This informed consent will not be kept with any of the other documents completed with this project.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

IRB Approval:

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have questions, concerns or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator:

Kelly Derlein
715-627-6521
derleink@uwstout.edu

Advisor:

Dr. Barbara Flom
715-232-1343
flomb@uwstout.edu

IRB Administrator

Sue Foxwell, Director, Research Services
152 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg.
UW-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751
715-232-2477
foxwells@uwstout.edu

Statement of Consent:

By signing this consent form you agree to participate in the project entitled,
Collaboration between county social workers and school counselors with child maltreatment victims in out-of-home care.

Signature

Date

Appendix B: Interview Format

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN COUNTY SOCIAL WORKERS
AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS
WITH CHILD MALTREATMENT VICTIMS
IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Introductory Comments:

I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between the professional county child welfare social worker and professional school counselors when children are placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment. I will be asking you a series of open-ended questions related to your experience with professionals from the other discipline. Based on your answers, additional follow-up questions may be asked. Your participation is voluntary and can you request to withdraw from this study at any time. During the course of the questioning, I would ask that you refrain from using any identifying information regarding any specific cases of child maltreatment. I will be taking notes during the interview. At the end of the interview, I will ask you to review the notes for accuracy. All documentation from the interview will be safeguarded. The results of all of the interviews will be compiled and no identifying information will be known to anyone other than the interviewer. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Demographic Questions:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Male _____ | Female _____ |
| 2. Professional Social Worker _____ | Professional School Counselor _____ |
| 3. Years of professional experience _____ | |

General Questions:

1. What is the current level of collaboration and communication between county child welfare staff and school counselors when children are placed in out-of-home care settings due to experiencing child abuse or neglect?

Possible follow-up questions:

- i. How do you see the relationship between county child welfare staff and school staff in general?
- ii. How do you view the relationship between professional county child welfare social workers and professional school counselors?
- iii. How would you describe your working relationship with professional social workers/school counselors when children are placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?
- iv. How you noticed any changes in the collaboration between the social workers/school counselors in regards to these situations?
- v. Is there trust between the Department of Social Services and the School District?
- vi. Do you perceive children in out-of-home care being treated differently within the school compared to children not in out-of-home care?
- vii. Describe the contact between the professional child welfare social worker and yourself when a child is placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment. (school counselor)
- viii. Describe the contact between the professional school counselor and yourself when working with a child placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment. (social worker)
- ix. What is your understanding of the effects of out-of-home care placement on the child's ability to succeed in school? (social worker)

2. What are the perceived roles of the various participants in the lives of victims of child maltreatment placed in out-of-home care?

Possible follow-up questions

- i. What do you see as the foster parents' role in the collaborative process between professional county child welfare social workers and professional school counselors when working with children placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?
- ii. What do you view as the parents' role in the collaborative process between the two disciplines when working with children placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?
- iii. How are issues between parents and out-of-home care providers handled?
- iv. What is your perception of the county child welfare social worker's role when working with a child in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment? (school counselor)
- v. What is your understanding of the professional school counselor's role when working with a child in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment? (school counselor)
- vi. What has your role been when working with students who are placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment? (School counselor)
 1. Are you or have you been aware of children in your schools being placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?
 2. How did you become aware of these placements?
 3. Do you have experience/education working with child maltreatment?
- vii. Do you have experience/education working in the school setting? (social worker)
- viii. When placing children in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment, at what point do you notify the school of the placement? (social worker)
 1. Who do you notify?

3. What are the barriers to effective collaboration and communication between county child welfare staff and school counselors?

Possible follow-up questions

- i. What issues do you see impeding a collaborative working relationship between the two disciplines?
- ii. What are the confidentiality requirements of your position?
- iii. Are finances a factor in collaboration?

4. What could be done to improve the collaboration between county child welfare staff and school counselors?

Possible follow-up questions

- i. What suggestions would you have to improve the collaborative relationship between the two disciplines when a child is placed in out-of-home care due to child maltreatment?
- ii. How would you overcome the barriers that you see in developing collaborative relationships between the two disciplines?