



*Indirect Victimization and Community Violence Exposure: An
Examination of*

Urban Public School Graduates and *Getting Through*

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

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December 2015

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December 2015

Dedication

In the name of Allah, most beneficent and benevolent. All things are possible through Him. First and foremost, I want to dedicate this document to my father, Qasim Khalil Salaam, who in his last days said, “Baby, you’re gonna be a doctor one day.” I thought you were delusional, but you had foreseen what was to come of my life as you were phasing out of your own. Know, Daddy, I thought of you every day along this journey. I love you more than words could every express. I know that Uncle Bubu, Uncle Wilson, Uncle Jesse, Aunt Katey, and you were rooting for me all the way.

I want to graciously thank my beloved husband, best friend, and soulmate “Timmy D.” Your expertise and guidance helped strengthen this study. Thank you to my precious son, love of my life, baby boy, Samir (Sami). I promise that I will never miss another football, basketball, or baseball game. You have been so patient while Mommy embarked on this journey to scholarship.

I want to humbly and graciously thank my mother, Fatimah Salaam, for her continuous support. Thank you for every weekend you watched Samir, every morning you agreed to take him to school, to sports practice, and to the mall, just to ease the pressure and anxiety I was experiencing. You are a true blessing, and I thank Allah for you every day. A special thank you to my grandmother, Earlene Joyner, who paved the way for me to earn this degree. Grams, you are the glimmering in my eyes and the flutter in my heart. I am forever in debt to you.

Thank you to my siblings, Jumal, Ali, Jalil, Walida, and Kanika for always supporting me. Allah (swt) couldn't have blessed me with a better set of brothers and sisters. Thank you to my cousin, Lagene Wright, who always called to check-in to make sure I was sane. Thank you to my SBF (Spiritual Best Friend), Raymond (Rayray) Panek, who has ALWAYS had my back through everything. You are truly my kindred spirit. Thank you, also, to all my friends and family who continue to support me.

Full acknowledgement must be given to my committee members, Dr. C. Michael Robinson and Dr. Theresa Pulos. You have been a tremendous help and support throughout the dissertation journey. A special thank you to my professor, mentor, and friend, Dr. C. Michael. Your kind words of wisdom, insight, and perspective brought me comfort over the last two and a half years. Thank you both for always believing in me, mentoring me, and loving me. Thank you to Dr. Linda Evans for providing me with spiritual guidance throughout this process. You have a warm and loving soul. Every day, I thank god for all three of you. Thank you to my team, the mighty "X-Men," Andy, Wandah, and Asif. A triple phat *shout out* to all of my cohort members. You all are amazing, and I am thankful Allah (swt) brought you into my life.

A special thank you to Mother's Against Gun Violence and the Trauma Response Team for helping to recruit the participants for this study. A special thank you to Ameenah, Kenya, Ksyn, Maya, Omar, Rico, and Thomas for trusting me to publicly share your stories and school experiences. I pray that god continues to ease the pain on your hearts, grants you mercy, and guides you on the path of righteousness.

Last, I want to dedicate this document to Kamilah Archer, Kihary Blue, Johnny Chambers, Joshua Fredette, Lavonna Hamilton, Charles A. Pitts, Jr., Anthony Sistrunk,

Rantwan Smith, Troy Mims, Kewan Rush, Lee Scott, Rashawn Walker, Jr., Alex Williams, Daquan Williams, and all of the other fallen angels in our communities who have lost their lives due to street violence. You will never be forgotten. We Love You!!!

Biographical Sketch

Najah Salaam Jennings-Bey is a longtime resident of Syracuse, NY with roots in NYC. She graduated from the Syracuse City School District and has dedicated her life to social justice for unserved and underserved communities. Growing up in a high-crime, gang-populated neighborhood, Salaam Jennings-Bey experienced, firsthand, the negative impact of street violence. Despite the psychological and emotional challenges associated with living in a high-crime neighborhood, her motivation to graduate from high school was to give back to her community. Education was the vehicle.

For over 15 years, Salaam Jennings-Bey has served urban and rural communities throughout Central New York in the field of education as a Spanish teacher in Grades 9-12, as an Academic Dean of a high school, a Program Coordinator for high school students at risk of not graduating, and as a Vice Principal.

Mrs. Salaam Jennings-Bey attended Lemoyne College from 1999 to 2001 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Communication in 2001. She attended Lemoyne College from 2005 to 2008 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in Teaching in 2008. In addition, Mrs. Salaam Jennings-Bey received a Certificate of Advanced Study in School Building Leadership in 2012. She came to St. John Fisher College in the fall of 2013 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mrs. Salaam Jennings-Bey pursued her research in the psychosocial impact of street violence on older adolescents and on their academic

performance under the direction of Dr. C. Michael Robinson and Dr. Theresa Pulos and received the Ed.D. Degree in 2015.

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to identify effective school responses from students who had experienced trauma induced by street violence such as losing a friend, relative, or close community member, due to homicide. The study examined indirect victimization and its impact on the socioemotional development, cognitive functioning, and psychosocial outcomes of seven Syracuse City School District graduates. Data collection and analysis for the transcendental phenomenological qualitative study consisted of three phases: (a) examination of aggregate data, (b) semi-structured interviews, and (c) composition of analytic memos. There were two steps in the data analysis process that consisted of initial coding and in vivo coding. Data suggests gender differences in the ways in which students grieve. The findings suggest there are four major contributing factors to participants graduating from high school, which were: (a) support system, (b) self-determination, (c) staying active, and (d) memorializing the deceased. Recommendations were made on ways in which school personnel can play a more direct role in helping address students' socioemotional needs and keep them both academically and socially engaged.

Table of Contents

Dedication	5
Biographical Sketch	6
Abstract	7
Table of Contents	8
List of Figures	9
Chapter 1: Introduction	10
Introduction	10
Problem Statement	10
Theoretical Rationale	10
Statement of Purpose	11
Research Questions	11
Significance of the Study	11
Definition of Terms	11
Summary	12
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	13
Introduction	13
Summary	17
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology	18
Introduction	18
Research Context	18

Research Participants	19
Instruments Used in Data Collection	19
Procedures Used in Data Analysis	19
Summary	20
Chapter 4: Findings	21
Introduction and Perspective	21
Research Questions	21
Findings and Analysis	21
Summary of Results	27
Chapter 5: Discussion	28
Introduction	28
Implications and Findings	28
Limitations	29
Recommendations	29
Conclusion	30
Conclusion	30
References	32
Appendix A	42
Appendix B	44
Appendix C	45
Appendix D	48
Appendix E	50
Appendix F	51

Appendix G.....53

List of Figures

Item	Title	Page
------	-------	------

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, public schools in urban districts across the United States have experienced a decrease in academic performance and graduation rates (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009). At the same time, the nation has witnessed an increase in violence throughout urban neighborhoods where a number of these public schools are located (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2012; Hoyert & Xu, 2011). For that reason, research is being conducted to identify root causes that may lead to academic failure among urban adolescents (Greene & Winters, 2002; Horowitz, McKay, & Marshall, 2005). There are a number of case studies that attribute low academic performance of urban youth to mental, social, and behavioral disorders associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bell & Jenkin, 1993; Bergen-Cico, Jennings-Bey, Haygood-El, & Lane, 2014; Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Pynoos & Nader, 1990; Richters, Martinez, & Valla, 1993; Rosenthal, 2000).

Equally, researchers use the terms *aggression*, *anxiety*, *depression* (Ng-mak, Salzinger, Feldman, & Stueve, 2004; Richters, 1990; Rosenthal, 2000; Schwartz & Proctor, 2000); *dissociative adaptation*, *peritraumatic dissociation*, and *hypersensitivity* (Denson, Marshall, & Jaycox, 2007; Marmar, Metzler, & Otte, 1997) to explain student disengagement in urban youth. The aforementioned case studies examine the impact of urban violence from the perspective of perpetrators of crime, gang activity, or school

dropouts. Also, the case studies examine the impact of urban violence from the standpoint of elementary and middle school students. Currently, there is a gap in literature that examines older adolescents, specifically youth ages 15-19, who attended school, were indirectly victimized by community violence, but despite the traumatic experience, they graduated from high school. Therefore, the stories and voices of students who overcome the adversity of community violence are often untold.

Problem Statement

Data suggests 90% of urban youth witness a violent act at least once during their lifetime (Epstein-Ngo, Maurizi, Bregman, & Ceballo, 2013). Moreover, data shows, on average, urban youth are exposed to some type of violence by the age of 9 (Lambert, Nylund-Gibson, Copeland-Linder, & Ialongo; 2010). Researchers argue that the impact of community violence exposure (CVE) causes symptoms of PTSD to be present in urban youth, which impedes their academic performance (Bemak, Chung, & Sirosky-Sabdo, 2005); cognitive functioning, psychological development (Rosenthal, 2000); and socioemotional well-being (Denson et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2012). In addition, behaviors such as aggression, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem have been found as contributing factors to student disengagement (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Rosenthal, 2000). For this reason, the increase of crime and CVE continues to be a topic of concern among public school educators, mental health practitioners, and researchers (Nadel, Spellman, Alvarez-Canino, Lausell-Bryant, & Landsberg, 1996; Saltzman, Pynoos, Layne, Steinberg, & Aisenberg, 2001).

A number of school-age children suffer from grief and loss due to homicide (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009) with a significant disparity among different ethnic groups

(Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Voisin, 2007). For example, African Americans, ages 15-19, are twice as likely to be victimized by homicide when compared to any other peer groups (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2010). When examining metropolitan cities, New York City ranked number one for the leading cause of death by a homicide for African Americans (CDC, 2000). Less than 10 years later, New York City was ranked number one as the worst-performing school district in the nation with only 32% of its African American males graduating (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). The same trend was observed among other urban school districts. Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia ranked among the top five cities in the nation for the highest homicide rates among African Americans (CDC, 2000), and they had the lowest academic performance (Greene & Winters, 2002; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). Within a 10-year period, Chicago ranked number two for homicide as the leading cause of death for African Americans (CDC, 2000) and number one for African Americans least likely to graduate (Greene & Winters, 2002). The Baltimore City School District ranked number six for leading cause of death due to homicide for African Americans (CDC, 2000) and the fourth lowest-performing school district in the United States (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). In the same year, New York State had three out of 10 lowest-performing school districts in the nation (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008).

The aforementioned data and statistics provide evidence to suggest (a) violence is prevalent in urban neighborhoods, (b) urban youth are exposed to community violence at a disproportionate rate when compared to all other peer groups, (c) students who attend public schools in high-crime urban neighborhoods are underperforming, and (d) the

impact of CVE can cause social, mental, and behavioral disorders. Therefore, it is logical for educators, mental health practitioners, and researchers to believe that a number of urban youth suffer from unaddressed trauma induced by street violence which may hinder their psychological development, adversely affect their ability to function cognitively, and prevent them from being academically productive. There is a need for additional research that identifies school-based interventions that may prove to be effective in helping students address the traumatic experiences related to urban violence and encourage student engagement.

Theoretical Rationale

Theory. Prior to the 1950s the field of psychology was saturated with theories and practices supported by psychoanalysis and behaviorism. At the time, psychologists frequently cited works from Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, and Carl Jung to explain human behaviors and cognitive functioning (Buss, 1979). Freud's idea of psychoanalysis suggests that human behaviors are instinctive. From this concept, humanistic psychology emerged embracing the idea that human behaviors are contingent upon personal experiences, specific circumstances, and the environment (Maslow, 1945).

History. Before Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory, which appeared in the early 1950s, scholars in the fields of psychology and behavioral science took a singular approach to analyzing human behaviors and thought processes (Buss, 1979). The fields of psychology and social science were dominated by psychologists who believed in the Freudian approach that suggests human nature cannot be changed. Specifically, human behaviors and mannerisms are reactive and not based on reason or intellect. As a result, societal norms and culture remain the same. The counter arguments to humanistic

psychology, psychoanalysis and behaviorism posit that individuals have free will and freedom of choice, meaning that human beings determine their course and action in life. Humans are not animalistic, and when placed in the proper environment, their behaviors and actions give credence to their existence. Scholars like Allport, Angyal, Fromm, May, and Rogers were considered to be the forefathers of humanism (Buss, 1979). However, during the 1960s and 1970s, the literary works of Maslow (1954) were mostly cited in the fields of education and psychology to explain the phenomenon behind human behaviorism and cognitive functioning (Dillon, 1999).

Maslow's (1954) theory is rooted in the belief that one's environment has the greatest impact on their social, psychological, and emotional development. Although the literary works of Freud, Wertheimer, Goldstein, and Adler influenced his writing, Maslow (1945) enhanced their teachings by asserting that human behaviors are based upon culture and experience. Maslow (1954) found that the fundamental flaw in Freudianism is the fact that it fails to address issues of culture, the environment, and socioeconomic status as it relates to human behaviors. Maslow, the eldest of seven siblings, often stated that his theory of human motivation, specifically the love needs and self-esteem needs, was heavily influenced by his own childhood and adolescent experiences of being raised by Jewish immigrant parents in Brooklyn, New York, who he felt had neglected him both emotionally and socially (Hoffman, 1988).

Hierarchy of needs. In 1934, Maslow began writing articles that he believed best explained human behaviors. In his writings, he argued that most individuals desire external gratification and material gain to validate their existence. As a direct result, human behaviors are contingent upon pleasing others and not themselves. Therefore, they

never reach the ultimate state of enlightenment. As a remedy to self-fulfillment, Maslow (1954) purported that human motivation is based upon four tenets or stages: (a) physiology needs, (b) safety needs, (c) love needs, and (d) self-esteem needs. Specifically, Maslow (1954) argued that individuals only reach their maximum potential when their lower needs and desires are satisfied; each tenet serves as a stair step toward fulfilling one's divine purpose in life. Once the lesser stages are achieved, an individual is able to enjoy the internal state of *self-actualization* (Maslow, 1970), which only 1% of the population obtain.

The first stage includes the physiology needs. Maslow (1954) argued that the physiology need is both biological and physical in nature because humans are living organisms who need food, water, and shelter to survive. He believed that the body as a living organism functions as a unit, meaning, that every organ within the body is systematically connected. For example, when the stomach desires food, neurotransmitters are sent to the brain, which in turn causes individuals to shift their main focus on the need to eat (Maslow, 1970). If deprived of water, the muscles become weak and fatigued. At that moment, the primary focus of individuals will be to satisfy the single desire of satisfying the thirst. Maslow (1954) continued his argument by applying the same scenario to student engagement. He claimed that when placed in an educational setting, individuals' primary concern will be to satisfy the single desire of thirst, thus, hindering their ability to cognitively function and learn.

The second stage of Maslow's (1945) theory includes the safety needs, which are multi-dimensional. He purported that the need to be in a safe environment (e.g., emotionally, psychologically, and physically) supersedes all other basic needs.

Individuals will suppress the physical need to eat, drink, or have shelter if they believe that danger is imminent (Maslow, 1945). Therefore, individuals' primary focus shifts and they will desire to be within a physically and emotionally safe environment; safe meaning free from fear, danger, and chaos. Maslow (1954) stated that, "a man, in this state, if it is extreme enough and chronic enough may be characterized as living almost for safety alone" (p. 376). Moreover, the moment individuals experience fear or danger, the psychological imprint is damaging. For this reason, the younger in age individuals experience pain associated with fear, their worldview is filled with thoughts of hopelessness and despair. Examples include death, "circumstances of war, disease, natural catastrophes, crime waves, societal disorganization, neurosis . . . chronically bad situations" (p. 378). In such circumstances, the parent or guardian serves as a protective factor for the child. If the relationship between the child and parent does not exist, and the child is still immersed in the chaotic and violent environment, neurosis, as an adult will be the most likely result (Maslow, 1945). Neurosis signifies intense feelings of anxiety, despair, and depression (Maslow, 1954). Eventually, to help reduce the continuous feelings of fear, individuals will look to leaders with strong personalities and characteristics. Once the need for safety is satisfied, the desire for love emerges.

Maslow's journals (Lowry, 1979) often described the emotional disconnect between he and his mother. As a result of their estranged relationship, the love needs emerged. In a number of excerpts in his journals, both parents were depicted as being mentally and verbally abusive. Maslow (1954) believed that individuals need to experience transference of love in relationships in order to feel complete. Consequently, the love needs are the continuum for individuals to reach the final stage of self-

enlightenment. Maslow (1954) purported that acceptance or a sense of belonging within specific groups helps individuals define their self-identity and develop a sense of self-worth. Therefore, human motivation is contingent upon self-respect and respect from others. Hence, the fourth stage of the hierarchy of needs include the self-esteem needs.

From Maslow's (1934) perspective, most individuals in society desire a high sense of respect for themselves, which differs from the theories of Freud and Adler (Maslow, 1934). Maslow (1945) claimed that individuals' productivity and contribution will have a positive impact on society when they regard themselves with high self-appreciation and self-worth. However, when the sense of self-empowerment does not exist, "these needs produce feelings of inferiority, of weakness and of helplessness . . . these needs in turn give rise to either basic discouragement or else compensatory or neurotic trend" (p 382). Specifically, without self-esteem, individuals display characteristics of dominance and aggressive behaviors to compensate for feelings of inferiority (Maslow, 1954).

Once individuals conquer the lower self or lower needs, they transition into a state of self-fulfillment or self-actualization. Once individuals reach this point of transcendence, they become psychologically healthy and detach from societal influences that otherwise inhibit their ability to be free thinkers. At this stage, consciously, individuals set goals to fulfill their sole purpose (Maslow, 1954). An example would be an English teacher who loves to dance and becomes a professional ballroom dancer, or an accountant who loves to paint and becomes an artist. Ultimately, the stage of self-actualization results in individuals' ability to consciously transcend into a psychological

state of bliss allowing them to optimize their full potential without societal restrictions weighing upon their actions or decisions.

Maslow's (1954) human motivation theory can be applied to better understand why urban students who live in high-crime, impoverished neighborhoods are academically disengaged from school. For example, data suggests there has been an increase in crime and gang violence in urban neighborhoods across the United States (CDC, 2010). Researchers have found that a correlation exists between the influx of crime in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods (Kubrin & Wadsworth, 2003), community violence exposure, and low academic performance (Cholewa, & West-Olatunji, 2008; Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Overstreet & Braun, 1999). Maslow (1945) stated:

If we remember that the cognitive capacities (perceptual, intellectual, learning) are a set of adjustive tools, which have, among other functions, that of satisfaction of our basic needs, then it is clear that any danger to them, any deprivation or blocking of their free use, must also be indirectly threatening to the basic needs themselves. (p. 384)

Equally, there are mental health concerns related to community violence exposure in urban youth (Rosenthal, 2000; Voisin, 2007; Zona & Milan, 2011). Children who live in high-crime, urban neighborhoods are regularly exposed to some type of street violence, which impacts their ability to cognitively, psychologically, and socially function properly (Overstreet, & Braun, 2000). For example, in New Orleans, 90% of youth participants, ages 9-12, reported having witnessed some form of street violence, which was a similar trend witnessed in larger cities such as Chicago, Detroit, (Osofosky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993) and Miami (Berman, Kurtines, Silverman, and Serafini, 1996). Studies show

that a correlation exists between exposure to urban violence, behavior, social (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Richters et al., 1993; Rosenthal, 2000; Voisin, 2010), and psychological problems in youth (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Overstreet & Braun, 2000; Saltzman et al., 2001).

Moreover, research studies have linked the exposure of street violence to student disengagement (Bowen & Bowen, 1999) and low academic performance (Rosenthal, 2000; Schwartz & Gorman-Hopmeyer, 2003; Thompson & Rippey-Massat, 2005). The high rates of neighborhood homicides, coupled with direct and indirect witnessing of community violence, causes emotional and cognitive detachment from school, thus, causing a decrease in academic performance (Zona & Milan, 2006); there is a higher rate of community violence exposure in older adolescents (Ratner & Chiodo, 2006). Therefore, the theoretical framework of Maslow's (1954) human motivation theory is relevant to the proposed target population of this study.

Statement of Purpose

Chapter 2 will demonstrate that there is a vast amount of literature that discusses the psychological, emotional, and socioemotional impact of direct victimization as it relates to street violence in urban youth. However, there is a gap in the literature examining the impact of street violence on effective school-based interventions, schools' response to address street violence, cognitive functioning, socioemotional well-being, academic performance, and indirect victimization. A number of studies examine the effects of community violence exposure on urban adolescents who: (a) attend primary school (Berman et al., 1996; Nadel et al., 1996; Schwartz & Gorman-Hopmeyer, 2003; Schwartz & Proctor, 2000), (b) attend middle school (Bemak et al., 2005; Bowen &

Bowen, 1999), (c) are at risk of dropping out of school (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Thompson & Rippey-Massat, 2005; Voisin, 2007), or (d) are perpetrators of crime or gang activity (Bergen-Cico et al., 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to:

1. Identify individuals, ages 18 and older, who were indirectly victimized by urban violence while attending high school, but despite the experience, graduated high school.
2. Identify, from the individuals' perspective, the strategies, individuals, or resources that helped them get through high school.
3. Uncover, from the individuals' perspectives, how schools can respond to community violence, and how potentially effective school interventions can be implemented to promote student engagement for similarly situated students.

The motivation behind this research was that the participants' might provide better insight into helping educators develop support systems that will encourage school personnel to play a more direct role in helping urban students remain academically engaged throughout their formative educational years.

Research Questions

The research questions used in this study are:

1. How does experience with community violence impact high school students?
2. How do schools support the needs of high school students impacted by community violence?

3. How do high school youth describe their school's response to community violence and does the response satisfy the needs of students exposed to community violence?
4. From the perspective of students exposed to community violence, how should schools respond to students exposed to community violence?

Significance of the Study

Nationally, urban public school educators are faced with the challenge of trying to identify root causes for the low academic performance of students (Gillock & Reyes, 1999; Kubrin & Wadsworth, 2003). Research suggests youth who live in urban environments are regularly exposed to community violence (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993). Consequently, there is either a direct or indirect victimization of CVE that impacts the psychological and cognitive development of students (Ratner & Chiodo, 2006). Moreover, there is a lack of interventions implemented into school policy that address the psychological, behavioral, and socioemotional distress associated with traumatic events, thus, contributing to low academic performance (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Epstein-Ngo et al., 2013; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998; Voisin, 2007).

At the time of this research, there was a cultural disconnect between urban public school districts and the student population being served. Specifically, few urban public schools have established district-wide policies that provide students with the social and behavioral interventions that are needed to address trauma as it relates to street violence. Students' perception of safety is an important factor when discussing their cognitive ability to perform well in school (Maslow, 1954; Ratner & Chiodo, 2006). That said, this

study identifies, from the students' perspectives who have experienced indirect victimization relating to community violence, the school responses that they believe will potentially enhance the school experience for similarly situated students.

Definition of Terms

Dissociative Adaptation – the feeling of numbness or avoidance (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993).

Peritraumatic Dissociation – the dissociative response from an individual who has experienced a traumatic event. Also associated with PTSD (Marmar, Metzler, & Otte, 1997).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide the reader with a brief overview of the increasing problem of urban violence in America and its impact on academic functioning and student engagement. Nationwide, low academic performance, dismal test scores, low graduation rates, and an increase in youth who have been exposed to street violence is a common theme when describing urban students (Ng-mak et al., 2004; Rosenthal, 2001). There is a significant amount of data to implicate that overexposure to violence hinders one's psychological development, especially adolescents, which can result in their inability to focus while in a school setting (Cooley, Turner, & Beidel, 1995; Richters, 1990; Richters & Saltzman, 1990; Richters et al., 1993). A number of these students are from families where poverty, lack of education, and exposure to violence is cyclical. However, this type of student does not define all urban youth. Existing literature supports the idea that when an individual feels they are in a safe and secure environment, their mental capacity to function in society increases (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Maslow, 1954;

Selner-O'Hagan, Kindlon, Buka, Raudenbush, & Earls 1998). Nationwide, urban schools are faced with the challenge of trying to educate students who are at a psychological disadvantage due to living in war-zone communities (Gillock & Reyes, 1999; Hammond, 1991; Lambert et al., 2010). However, how individuals navigate these circumstances is instructive for researchers in this area.

Chapter 2 provides the reader with case studies that examine the impact of street violence relating to emotional distress and student engagement. In addition, Chapter 2 discusses suggested interventions that have proven somewhat successful for urban adolescents. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth account of the methodology used to collect and analyze data for the study. Also, it includes local graduation rates, the rate of violence that occurs within the city of Syracuse, and the context in which the phenomena is being studied. Chapter 4 presents data, themes, subthemes, and categories that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. Chapter 5 synthesizes the information presented in Chapters 1-4, recapping the previous chapters, and presents a set of recommendations to help public school educators play a more direct role in supporting students who have been impacted by street violence.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Since 1985, researchers have tried to develop a better understanding of the behavioral and psychosocial processes of individuals who have been victimized by urban violence (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991; Pynoos & Eth, 1985; Jenkins & Thompson, 1986). Cities, like Chicago and Los Angeles, have served as the hub for a number of case studies conducted on urban violence due to the high rates of gang and drug-related homicides. In 2012, there were a total of 12,765 reported homicides in the United States (FBI, 2012). Of those murders reported, 1,620 of the victims were under the age of 22, and 514 of the victims were under the age of 18 (FBI, 2012). There were 2,800 reported offenders under the age of 22 within the same year (FBI, 2012).

These statistics have increased awareness on mental health issues and urban adolescents. Specifically, researchers wanted to identify if a correlation existed between the impact of urban violence on students' behavioral, psychological, and social development relating to academic performance (Rosenthal, 2000; Saltzman et al., 2001; Voisin et al., 2010). Data suggests that children who live in low-income neighborhoods self-report higher rates of exposure to violence, which includes witnessing someone being shot, stabbed, or robbed at gunpoint (Bell & Jenkins, 1990; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Lorion & Salzman, 1991). Moreover, children who experience such traumatic events suffer from behavioral, social, and psychological disorders, which severely impact

their cognitive functioning (Bell & Jenkins, 1990; Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1993; Pynoos & Eth, 1985; Jenkins & Thompson, 1986). Teachers and administrators who work in these public schools report an increased number of students who display maladaptive behaviors (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Bemak et al., 2005; Lorion & Salzman, 1991). Recent case studies have shown that overexposure to violence impacts student engagement and academic performance (Bemak et al., 2005; Denson et al., 2007; Rosenthal, 2000; Thompson et al., 2012; Voisin, 2007).

Despite the ongoing violence that occurs in urban neighborhoods, as of this writing, there is no national school-based initiative or policy that addresses the trauma and psychological impact associated with exposure to street violence for students. One might argue that the Safe School Initiative study by Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski (2004) provides educators, mental health practitioners, and school personnel with the tools to keep public schools safer. However, the purpose of the Vossekuil et al. (2004) study was to better understand the behaviors and psychological development of perpetrators of school-based attacks, not violence that occurred in the community. One key finding from the Vossekuil et al. (2004) study was that a number of perpetrators had experienced some type of loss such as a close friend, family member, and parent. After the incident, the perpetrators did not receive the proper interventions to help them address the trauma event that left them in a fragile and vulnerable psychological state. For that reason, Vossekuil et al. (2004) recommended that students who experience a significant loss should be provided with the necessary resources to help them develop positive coping strategies. They stated:

Many students, not just those who engage in school-based attacks, experience or perceive major losses in their lives. Most students who face a significant loss or who have difficulty coping with such a loss, are not going to be at-risk for a school-based attack. However, information that indicates a student is facing or having trouble dealing with a significantly difficult situation may indicate a need to refer the student to appropriate services and resources . . . attention should be given to any indication that a student is having difficulty coping with major losses or perceived failures, particularly where these losses or failures appear to have prompted feelings of desperation and hopelessness. (Vossekuil et al., 2004, p. 35)

This study is specific to community-based violence and its impact on school age youth. It does not focus school-based attacks. However, there is a common theme between the Vossekuil et al. (2004) participants/youthful offenders and the population that was studied within this research. For example, both populations experienced unaddressed grief and loss, which causes feelings of hopelessness and despair (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Denson et al., 2007; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998; Ludwig & Warren, 2009). Therefore, mental health practitioners and public school educators continue to research ways in which school personnel can play a more direct role in helping youth identify positive strategies that can help mitigate the psychological impact of urban violence (Nadel et al., 1996; Saltzman et al., 2001). For the purpose of this research, there are three main focus areas to address street violence and its impact on academic performance: (a) emotional distress, (b) student engagement, and (c) school- and community-based interventions.

Urban violence. After the events of the Columbine High School shooting, literature on the topic of violence in America shifted (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). Specifically, there was an emergence of literature that examined the topic of violence from an interpersonal standpoint as opposed to categorizing it as a subset of individual acts committed by one cultural group (Gerber, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1990). As the number of gun-related homicides increased and victims became younger in age, a number of researchers began to identify community violence as a phenomenon and examined the psychological impact it had on children and families who lived within these environments (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Cooley et al., 1995; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Voisin, 2007). Data suggests children who live in high-crime neighborhoods suffer from behavioral, social, and psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, aggression, and low self-esteem (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Lorion & Salzman, 1993; Singer, Anglin, Song, & Lunghofer, 1995). Additionally, researchers argue that public schools are an essential component in helping increase student engagement by developing school-based interventions that address the needs of students impacted by street violence. The purpose of the next three sections is to provide the reader with a review of the literature that illustrates (a) the emotional and psychological distress associated with street violence on adolescents, (b) the adverse impact street violence has on academic performance and student disengagement, and (c) action-based researched interventions that are proven to be potentially effective for urban adolescents that have contributed to school success. Last, Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory serves as the foundational and theoretical framework used to support the notion that urban youth are living in chaotic

and violent environments, thus, presenting challenges and barriers that may hinder their ability to cognitively function at a high capacity and be academically successful.

Impact of urban violence on emotional distress. Prior to the Safe School Initiative (Vossekuil et al., 2004), research was conducted to better understand the impact of violence on individuals, specifically, those who live in high-crime neighborhoods. Fitzpatrick and Boldizar (1993) were one of the first researchers who examined the psychological impact of community violence exposure on children and their cognitive functioning. Prior to their study, researchers agreed that adolescents suffered from mental health and psychosocial disorders that were subsequent to CVE, but the term PTSD was not associated with trauma as it relates to urban violence. Fitzpatrick and Boldizar (1993) argued that urban youth who live in neighborhoods where there is perpetual violence suffer from psychological disorders similar to war veterans. The case study consisted of 221 African American youth, ages 7 to 18. The primary focus was whether or not there was a correlation between sociodemographics, CVE, and PTSD.

Fitzpatrick and Boldizar (1993) found that 65% percent of their participants were from single-parent households and high crime and low socioeconomic neighborhoods. A number of independent variables were used as measures (a) direct victimization and witnessing violence; (b) gender and the variance in PTSD levels between males and females; (c) socioeconomic status and the relationship between socioeconomic status and increased symptoms of PTSD, (d) household composition, specifically, whether or not single-parent households served as a risk factor or protective factor for PTSD symptoms for the participants. Fitzpatrick and Boldizar (1993) used an adapted version of the Survey of Exposure to Community Violence (SECV) (Richters, 1990). This measurement

tool assesses direct victimization and direct witnessing of a violent act. To measure PTSD symptoms, the four-point, 12-item Likert scale of the Purdue Post-Traumatic Stress Scale (Figley, 1989; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986) was implemented. This scale was created based on the criteria for PTSD established by DSM III-R (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1987). The outcome variables were assessed in three areas: (a) exposure to violence on numerous occasions, (b) dissociative adaptation also described as the feeling of numbness or avoidance, and (c) hyperactivity.

The findings show that 97% percent of participants reported feelings of despair, hopelessness, aggression, and anxiety. In terms of PTSD symptomology, 82% of participants displayed at least one symptom out of five. Of the youth, 27% reported three out of the five symptoms associated with PTSD. In addition, 70% of the participants experienced direct victimization of CVE, 85% percent of the participants reported directly witnessing a violent act that involved a gunshot injury or a stabbing, and 43% of the sample witnessed a homicide. Equally, the data showed that females reported higher levels of PTSD than males, specifically those who had experienced direct victimization (Neugebauer et al., 2014; Shields, Nadasen, & Pierce, 2013; Voisin, Bird, Hardestry, & Shi Shui, 2010). Additionally, Fitzpatrick and Boldizar (1993) purported that individuals who experience chronic exposure to community violence tend to block out the traumatic event that serves as a coping mechanism, which has been reported in previous case studies (Denson et al., 2007; Epstein et al., 2013; Horowitz & Mackay, 2001). In conclusion, Fitzpatrick and Boldizar (1993) stated “teachers, counselors, and administrators” (p. 430) should take responsibility and operate as a community intervention by being trained on how to assess for social, emotional, and psychological

symptoms associated with PTSD in students who have been exposed to urban violence.

Fitzpatrick and Boldizare (1993) also stated:

Several decades ago, these same persons were asked to become aware of signs and symptoms of learning disorders such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). We must ask them now to be responsible for carefully screening for other symptomatology such as PTSD that can be just as damaging to the academic experience and social adaptation of youth. (p. 430)

Berman et al. (1996) conducted research on increasing levels of crime and violence in impoverished neighborhoods within Dade County. To assess the correlation between the impact of violence, crime, and PTSD, the researchers targeted an urban high school in Miami. They argued that community violence is prevalent in urban communities. As a result, adolescents who are exposed to violence are at high risk of developing post-traumatic stress like symptoms such as anxiety, depression, social, emotional, and behavioral disorders. Participants of the Berman et al. study consisted of a diverse ethnic and sociodemographic group of 96 ninth through 12th graders, from a Dade county high school, who were at risk of dropping out. Ages ranged from 14 to 18 years with an average of 16 years. An adapted version of the Survey of Exposure to Community Violence (SECV) (Richters & Saltzman, 1990) was used. As previously noted, the survey was used to measure both direct victimization and direct witnessing of community violence and the level of frequency that occurred in a specified period. As an additional component of measurement, participants were asked to recall the most traumatic event in their lives. Based on the participants' answer, three additional

measures were used to assess students' responses: social support, stress symptoms, and coping strategies.

The Berman et al. (1996) study also used the Analysis of Social Support in School Transition assessment (ASSIST) (Barone, Leone, & Trickett, 1987; Schmid et al., 1989). The tool was designed to measure students' ability to socialize and seek support from adults and peers. Moreover, the ASSIST assessed who the individual sought for (a) social and emotional support once the traumatic event occurred, (b) the viable resources available at the school for the student to speak with about the traumatic event, and (c) how often the student utilized the services/resources available.

Next, Berman et al. (1996), using the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index (PTSD-RI) (Frederick, 1985), assessed post-traumatic stress symptomology. The PTSD-RI is a 20-item, three-point Likert scale that tests symptoms of stress. In order for a child to receive a clinical diagnosis of PTSD using this particular scale, his/her score has to range at a .91 or higher. Last, to assess coping strategies of violence exposure, Berman et al. used Kidcope (Spirito, Stark, & Williams, 1988). The instrument uses a 15-item *yes or no* checklist to assess positive coping strategies used by individuals to address stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for the outcome of the SECV. Results of the analysis found that 60% of the participants witnessed a shooting, 85% directly witnessed community violence, and 38% reported being victims of urban violence. Interestingly, 66.6% of the participants witnessed dead bodies, and 41.6% witnessed a homicide. In addition, over half of the participants tested positively for some form of PTSD. While, 44% were categorized as having mild levels of PTSD, 18.6% were categorized as having severe PTSD (Berman et

al. 1996).

For social support, the results of ASSIST in the Berman et al. (1996) study found that there was a variation in use of social support and resources. In particular, some participants talked about the traumatic event, but they did not share their emotions or feelings. To measure if a correlation existed between PTSD and coping strategies, Berman et al. used multiple regression analysis of the PTSD-RI as a dependent variable, and the responses provided in Kidcope was used as an independent variable. The multiple regression analysis yielded responses from participants that suggested a positive correlation existed between social support, negative coping strategies, and PTSD, $F(2,68) = 7.30, p < .001, R = 42\%, R_s = 18\%$, “with beta weights reaching statistical significance for both Negative Coping Style, $.23, t = 2.15, p < .034$ and Availability of Social Support, $(-.30, t = -2.77, p < .007)$ ” (Berman et al., 1996, p. 333).

Consistent with previous research, the participants in the Berman et al. (1996) study, experienced some form of PTSD (Bemak et al., 2005; Bergen-Cico et al., 2014; Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009). In fact, based upon DSM-III-R (APA, 1987) criteria, 35% of the participants were found to have full symptoms of PTSD. Moreover, data from the multiple regression analysis showed that there was a correlation between the lack of social support, negative coping strategies, and high rates of PTSD. In plain terms, when the trauma of CVE was unaddressed, participants self-reported high rates of PTSD, and they participated in negative coping strategies. Regardless of whether the participant was “a perpetrator or a victim” (p. 333), the results were the same.

Berman et al. (1996) recommended that future interventions be multidimensional in design to better address the needs of urban adolescents. Specifically, they

recommended that interventions include multiple phases such as: (a) providing youth with self-empowering strategies to help increase self-image and self-identity; (b) providing youth with social support in the form of grief and loss counseling to allow them the opportunity to have a positive outlet and discuss their feelings and emotions about the traumatic event, possibly in a group setting to form a “social network” (p. 333); and (c) developing interventions that “not only focus on the symptoms of PTSD, but also on potential moderators of these symptoms of stress” (p. 335).

Community violence and its impact on adolescents is a global concern. Recently, more research has been conducted to affirm the idea that there is a positive correlation between community violence exposure, PTSD, and post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS) for individuals who live in high-crime neighborhoods similar to that of war veterans and children living in war-prone countries (Denson et al., 2007; Voisin, 2007, 2010).

For example, McAloney, McCrystal, Percy, and McCartan (2009) purported that countries, like Northern Ireland, have been experiencing long-term community violence due to “localized political and sectarian activity” (p. 636). The purpose of the study was to provide a better understanding on the impact of community violence and its effect on the health and well-being of children in Northern Ireland into adulthood, using participants’ demographics as an independent variable. They claimed that youth in Northern Ireland who experience chronic exposure to violence suffer from the same symptoms of psychological, and social and behavioral disorders as urban youth living in the US.

McAloney et al. (2009) used cross-sectional data from the 5th year of the Belfast Youth Development Study, which measured the perceptions and behaviors of youth. The sample consisted of 3,828 15- and 16-year olds from Northern Ireland. The demographics of the participants were the variables. They included, community, family size, gender, and the type of school that the children attended (e.g., Catholic or State). Exposure to community violence was measured by a modified version of the Exposure to Violence subscale, which measures long-term and recent exposure to violence. Participants were given nine situations dealing with extreme community violence. The participants were then asked to recall if they experienced any of the described scenarios within the past 12 months. The scenarios were broken down into four categories: (a) loss of a loved one due to homicide, (b) witnessing an individual being physically attacked, or (c) witnessing a violent crime, and (d) direct victimization. To measure psychosis, the Psychosis Screening Questionnaire (Bebbington & Nayani, 1995) was used. The tool identifies present symptoms of psychosis. Depression was measured using the Short Moods and Feelings Questionnaire (Angold et al., 1995). This is a 13-item, 3-point scale used to measure depressive symptoms. Responses ranged between “0 (not true) to 2 (true)” (p. 639). Correlation relationships were assessed using linear regression models in MPlus v5.1 (Múthen & Múthen, 1998-2007) using the TYPE = COMPLEX function, “which uses a maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors to accommodate the non-independent nature of the data” (McAloney et al., 2009, p. 639).

Results of the McAloney et al. (2009) study showed that 77% of the sample reported some form of exposure to community violence, while 64% experienced direct victimization or direct witnessing of violence within the past 12 months. Of participants,

56% reported lifetime exposure to witnessing a physical assault. In addition, 81% of participants reported witnessing violence within the past 12 months, and 62% reported direct victimization. Linear and logistic regression models were used to measure the impact community violence exposure had on the participants' well-being. In contrast to U.S. samples, both urban and rural youth populations reported the same level of exposure to violence (77% urban vs. 74.1% rural). Noteworthy, is that 33% of the total sample reported "at least one symptom related to psychosis, N = 1,103, 96% of positive screen sample" (p. 642).

Consistent with previous studies, females in the sample reported higher symptoms of depression and PTSD when compared to males, which is a common theme throughout the literature. Therefore, it is logical that in the process of trying to increase student engagement, public school educators, mental health practitioners, and administrators look at developing gender, school-based interventions that help students address the psychological challenges associated with being exposed to street violence.

For example, Shields et al. (2013) examined 247 participants from the Republic of South Africa (RSA), and 162 participants from the United States with a median age of 9. Although the purpose of the study was to explore whether or not a correlation existed between community violence exposure, school violence, and the psychological distress among the two samples, data showed that PTSD was a common theme among both populations. However, there appeared to be a trend in a number of case studies where the levels of PTSD increased among female participants. The children in the US were exposed to violence at an earlier age when compared to the children in the RSA.

Likewise, Neugebauer et al. (2014) conducted a 4-month cross-sectional study to examine the effect of PTS reaction and PTS disorder in adolescents, ages 8-19 years, living in Rwanda. The median age of participants was between 14-16 years. The study was conducted in response to the heightened level of violence and civil war that was taking place between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes in Rwanda. The researchers wanted to assess the levels of PTSD and PTSS that adolescents had experienced. Participants consisted of 942 students from 30 primary and secondary schools within the 11 regions of Rwanda. Within the 11 regions, there are 30 separate communities. As a whole, 50% of the participants were female. Three tools of measurement were used to assess three areas of trauma. For wartime violence, a 28-item Wartime Violence Checklist, adapted from the 1980s Lebanese Civil War Checklist (Macksoud & Aber, 1996), was used. The survey measured the levels of trauma experienced by the direct witnessing of a homicide. To assess PTSD, first, researchers evaluated specific criterion identified by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)* (APA, 2000). From the information provided by the *DSM-IV-TR*, the researchers also used items from the Impact of Events Scale (Sundin & Horowitz, 2003), which is a 15-item Likert scale, and they adapted the questions in order for it to be administered to the target population. As such, the researchers created the Rwandan PTSS Scale, a 21-item Likert scale tool of measurement that placed on emphasis on PTSD symptoms identified by the *DSM-IV-TR* criteria B through D. For Criterion B, the individual had to experience at least one symptom more than once. For Criterion C, the individual had to have experience at least three symptoms associated with avoidance and numbness. Last, for Criterion D, the individual had to experience at least two symptoms associated with hyperarousal, which

can be categorized as the constant feeling of stress and anxiety. In summary, the purpose for the Neugebauer et al. (2014) the study was to (a) prove if there was an increase or decrease in PTSD levels for within a 4-month period, (b) identify a possible correlation between PTSD and low socioeconomic status, and (c) identify if PTSD levels varied between gender and ages. Overall, data results from the study found that females reported higher levels of PTSD, when compared to males, with 90% of the total sample reporting to have directly witnessed multiple homicides.

Voisin et al. (2010) investigated if there was a correlation between PTSD and coping strategies for African American youth living on Chicago's Southside. Voisin et al. (2010) used the grounded theory approach. Through narratives, dialogues, and discussions, the researchers were able to describe different types of violence the children experienced, which included the psychological and emotional impact of CVE. The purpose of the study was to (a) analyze specific types of CVE African American adolescents experienced in high-crime neighborhoods throughout Chicago, (b) examine the coping strategies the youth self-identified as ways to mitigate the experiences, and (c) examine if coping strategies differed between genders. In 2008, Chicago had the highest rate of homicides for youth ages 5-16, when compared to other cities similar in size and population such as New York City and cities in California. Similar to other researchers, Voisin et al. (2010) argued that CVE contributed to multiple mental, social, and psychological problems in adolescents. Moreover, the researchers purported that there were a number of undetected cases of psychological trauma and mental distress induced by street violence among urban adolescents and African American males, who were more likely to experience the direct witnessing of community violence. Consistent with

previous research, females who had been exposed to street violence reported higher levels of PTSD and psychological stress, even when the exposure was based on indirect victimization or third-party witnessing of a violent act (Denson et al., 2007).

Voisin et al. (2010) used a multi-gendered sample of 32 African American adolescents, ages 14-17 years. The researchers noted that participants were selected using a three-prong approach. The first 10 participants were recruited through local community centers. The next group of 11 participants was recruited directly by local community members. The last group of nine participants was recruited because they were referred by another participant. Voisin et al. (2010) conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Recordings of the interviews were videoed, audio-taped, and transcribed to ensure validity and reliability of participants' responses. The method of analysis consisted of a standard qualitative data analysis technique. Specifically, the researchers attempted to identify a set of themes and patterns by coding participants' responses.

As theorized, the male participants self-reported more direct witnessing of gun violence and stabbings, whereas a number of the female participants reported indirect witnessing of violence or third-party accounts. The details described by the participants gave a detailed account of the types of violence the children experienced, which included rape, sodomy, homicide, and physical attacks or being *jumped* (an individual being physically attacked by more than one individual). Physical attacks were also a common theme among both groups of participants. Voisin et al. (2010) noted that the participants believed fighting was so common that a number of respondents failed to report it as a form of community violence. Therefore, the researchers argued that the students normalized the abnormal behavior. For this reason, participants did not categorize

fighting as a traumatic event. Similar to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory, the researchers argued that children will use fighting as a mechanism for survival when they are raised in an environment where violence is perpetual. Nevertheless, among both groups of participants, the most common form of violence noted was gun violence and homicide with the use of a deadly weapon, with a number of the participants directly witnessing someone being shot or they were shot themselves.

Voisin et al. (2010) found four main themes that emerged as coping strategies for exposure to violence. First, *getting through*. This indicated that participants mentally blocked out the traumatic event. Consistent with other research, participants described a feeling of numbness, which is often associated as a coping strategy (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Bergen-Cico et al., 2014; La Roche & Martin, 2011). The second theme was *getting along*, which referred to participants developing relationships with local gang members or powerful community members for protection. The third theme was *getting away*, which included avoiding a situation. The fourth theme was *getting back*, which referred to retaliation through physical assaults. Equally, data showed aggression and depression were the most common coping strategies identified for both male and female participants. In addition, socioeconomic status was not a factor on the psychological or emotional impact of CVE for participants. To emphasize, regardless of the participants' socioeconomic status, the impact of CVE was the same.

In their discussion, Voisin et al. (2010) recommended that: (a) parents of urban youth become more actively involved in helping their children establish positive coping strategies when dealing with community violence exposure (e.g., address the situation vs. avoiding the topic), (b) urban schools should conduct pre-assessments of all students to

determine if any symptoms of PTSD are present, and (c) urban schools should adopt school policy cognitive-behavioral interventions to increase academic performance as a method to address the psychological impact of CVE for students who have been impacted by urban violence on any scale (e.g., direct victimization, indirect victimization, and third-party witnessing). Although the sample was small, the Voisin et al. (2010) findings were consistent with recent literature that suggests that regardless of age, demographics, and ethnicity, chronic exposure to violence can cause individuals to normalize abnormal behaviors as a coping mechanism. This can cause them to suppress the trauma they experienced, and in some cases, cause the individuals to become socially disengaged (Bergen-Cico et al., 2014; Epstein-Ngo et al., 2013; Lambert et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2012).

Consistent with previous studies, Ng-mak et al. (2004) found that a number of urban youth reported feelings of numbness or pathologic adaptation as a coping strategy (Denson et al., 2007; Epstein et al., 2005; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Horowitz & Mackay, 2001). The term *pathologic adaptation* is synonymous with peritraumatic dissociation (Denson et al., 2007; Marmar, Metzler, & Otte, 1997), which terms referring to numbness or desensitization. For this reason, Ng-Mak et al. (2004) theorized the notion that urban youth use desensitization to cope with the trauma of CVE. The authors used three separate models to evaluate ways in which urban youth adapted to violence. The first model was a maladaptation model that suggested that the higher the frequency of violence the individual was exposed to, the more aggressive they became. The second model was the adaptation model that suggested that the higher the frequency of violence witnessed, the more likely the individual was to psychological disconnect as a way to

cope and reduce stress. The third model was a combination of both the maladaptive model and the adaptive model that suggested that the higher the frequency of exposure to violence, the more likely the individual would appear to be psychologically detached but would exhibit maladaptive behaviors. During a 7-month period, 471 sixth graders from New York City, along with their parents, participated in the study. Since previous data suggested that violence exposure impacted males and females differently, Ng-Mak et al. (2004) used gender as a dependent variable when analyzing the results.

For the adolescent participants, exposure to violence was measured using the Exposure to Community Violence Self-Report Version scale (Richters et al., 1990). Experiencing community violence was measured upon the positive answers respondents gave to the first 12 questions within the scale. Exposure to family violence was assessed by using the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). Next, psychological distress was assessed using a 7-point Likert scale from an adapted version of the Internalizing Subscale of the Cairns Interpersonal Competence Scale (Cairns, Leung, Gest, & Cairns, 1995). To compare answers about levels of distress, parents were administered the Anxious/Depressed 14-item subscale.

Ng-Mak et al. (2004) used what they referred to as a hierarchical regression/correlation analysis. They found that almost 75% of both adolescent samples did not self-report, nor did their parents report, any aggressive behaviors. For psychological distress, all of the children reported experiencing anxiety, depression, and sadness. Consistent with previous literature, Ng-Mak et al. (2004) found that the females self-reported higher levels of stress when compared to the males. Also, consistent with previous case studies was the fact that economic status did not affect the children's self-

reporting of violence exposure. All of the children reported experiencing some form of community violence.

Lambert et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal and cross-sectional study of 543 African American students from Baltimore, MD. Researchers kept track of participants and their progress from Grade 1 until Grade 8 with the intent to identify emerging themes in their response to CVE over an extended period of time. Five tools were used to examine the levels of community violence experienced by participants. First, psychological distress was measured using the Baltimore How I Feel Self-Report Questionnaire (Ialongo, Kellam, & Poduska, 1999). This 45-item tool is used to assess symptoms of anxiety and depression in youth. Second, direct victimization, witnessing violence, and psychological distress was measured using the Children's Report of Exposure to Violence self-report survey (Cooley et al., 1995). And third, disruptive behavior was measured using the Teacher Report of Classroom Behavior Checklist, which was derived from the Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation – Revised scale (Werthamer-Larsson, Kellam, & Wheeler, 1991). Combined, the tools of measurement helped the researchers better assess students' ability to adapt in different learning environments. Adult supervision was measured through individual interviews using the Parent Management Skills and Practices Youth Version subscale (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Last, Lambert et al. (2010) assessed the correlation, if any, between deviant peer affiliation and participants' behavior.

The data collected through the Latent Class Analysis and Latent Transition Analysis yielded several results. The findings were: (a) participants' environment influenced the frequency in CVE; (b) by middle school, 80% of participants reported

being exposed to violence; and (c) although the majority of the sample reported experiencing exposure to violence, only 16% reported exposure on multiple occasions. However, the researchers found a correlation between high levels of anxiety, 0.58, $p < .00$, depression, 0.84, $p = 0.03$, and maladaptive behaviors, 0.86, $p = 0.003$, among those participants who reported frequent exposure to violence, which is consistent with other research. Similar to Shields et al. (2013) study, Thompson et al. (2012) found that adolescents in the US who were exposed to violence at an early age changed their perspective on future success.

In their 8-year longitudinal study, the authors interviewed a sample of 843 adolescents. At ages 6 and 8, the authors measured the children's exposure to violence using the Things I've Seen and Heard scale (Richters et al., 1990) that assessed the frequency of violence the participants had witnessed. At ages 12 and 14, the same sample was administered the History of Witnessed Violence scale (Knight, Smith, Martin, Lewis, & The LONGSCAN Investigators, 2008) that assessed the participants' exposure to violence within the past 12 months. Thompson et al. (2012) found that although there were risk factors that contributed to low future expectations, such as social and economic barriers, trauma due to exposure to violence was prevalent.

Impact of urban violence on student engagement. Consistent with previous research, youth who live in urban communities are exposed to violence. The impact of violence causes an adverse effect on their psychological and cognitive development. As a result, it is logical to believe that school districts located in high-crime neighborhoods are faced with the challenge of trying to educate children who suffer from mental health,

social, and behavioral disorders that impede their ability to cognitively function in school settings.

Schwartz and Gorman-Hopmeyer (2003) conducted an investigative case study to determine if there was a correlation between community violence and academic performance for a sample of urban elementary students. They argued that there is a body of research that suggests youth who live in urban neighborhoods experience first-hand acts of violence on a continuous base. As a direct result, the negative psychological impact of witnessing a traumatic event can be observed through external behaviors that are displayed in the classroom such as aggressive and disruptive behaviors. In addition, the researchers declared that adolescence is the turning point for students academically.

Schwartz and Gorman-Hopmeyer (2003) purported that a common behavior of children who experience violence is the inability to remain on task for extended periods of time. Therefore, the behaviors observed in the classroom may be similar to a child who has attention deficit disorder (ADD). To investigate whether a correlation existed between CVE, low academic performance, poor classroom behaviors, and depression, Schwartz and Gorman-Hopmeyer (2003) created a self-regulation model. The theoretical model measured self-regulation which they defined as, "basic psychological competencies that allow a child to adaptively modulate emotion, attention, and behavior despite external challenges" (p. 164). Participants consisted of urban youth who attended an elementary school in Los Angeles, CA. There were 237 students in total who participated in the study, with an average age of 9.5 years. In contrast to previous studies cited, the majority of the participants were Latino and European American with African Americans at 2% of the sample.

Six variables were used to measure participants' exposure to violence. First, an adapted version of the Community Experiences Questionnaire (Schwartz & Proctor, 2000) was administered. The initial survey was a 4-point Likert scale that measured direct exposure to violence such as shootings and stabbings. Responses from the survey ranged from *never* to *a lot of times*. The second scale used was the 5-point Social Behavior Rating Scale (Schwartz, 2000). This tool of measurement is based on teachers' responses to participants' individual levels of aggressive behaviors that are observed in the classroom. Responses varied between *almost never true for the child* to *almost always true for the child*. Next, symptoms of depression were measured using the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) (Kovac, 1985). This is a 27-item survey that allows students to self-report symptoms of depression. Last, the researchers assessed academic functioning by participants completing the Stanford Achievement Test-Ninth Edition (Psychological Corporation, 1996). Participants scores were based on "Reading (M = 0.54, SD = 0.24) and Math (M = 0.63, SD = 0.24)" (p. 167). Students' grade point averages (GPAs) were also taken into consideration when analyzing the data.

To properly analyze the results, several tools of measurement were used. The Structural Equation Modeling (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999) was used to analyze data results for both direct and indirect relationships between academic performance and exposure to violence. In doing so, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (Bentler, 1990) was used to identify any comparison between the model selected and other models whereby the independent variables are not correlated. The output range of the CFI is between 0-1, "with values greater than .95" (p. 167). A chi-square was used to identify if any variables did not fit with the intended outcomes. The root-mean-square residual of approximation

was used to assess specific variable outcomes to ensure they could be applied within the model. To analyze the correlation between violence exposure and academic performance, a structural equation model was used. The results from the data showed that exposure to violence alone did not impede students' academic performance. However, coupled with depression and anxiety, community violence exposure had a negative impact on academic functioning, $X^2(1, N = 233)$ with a difference of 0.4 ns.

Rosenthal (2000) argued that community violence was a national epidemic, and if unaddressed, it would continue to negatively impacted youths' cognitive and social ability well into adulthood. That said, Rosenthal (2000) examined the social, psychological, and behavioral effects of CVE, and separated it into four main categories: (a) anger, (b) anxiety, (c) depression, and (d) dissociation. In addition, Rosenthal (2000) examined what she referred to as "real-life exposure to violence" (p. 272), meaning individuals who either witnessed some form of violence (mugging, shooting, stabbing) or who were victims of violence. Moreover, the researcher sought to investigate if constant exposure to CVE during ones' mid adolescence (ages 16-19) was the root cause of psychological trauma.

Participants consisted of 455 older adolescent students who came from public schools within the Queens and Brooklyn urban neighborhoods. Rosenthal (2000) used a number of measuring tools to analyze the data. By use of a multivariate approach, two different survey modes of questioning occurred within a single questionnaire. The first scale addressed the victims of violence, while the other reflected the witnesses' account or reaction to violence. Both scales were based on participants' answers for community violence experienced while attending high school. The victim scale asked questions based

on direct experience. Meanwhile, the witness scale questions were based upon the direct witnessing of violence. Responses were tallied based on how often a participant reported exposure to violence. Rosenthal (2000) used the Trauma Symptom Inventory (Breire, 1995) to identify the four emotions of “anger, anxiety, depression, and dissociation” (p. 275). Each subscale consisted of 34 items that described an emotion.

Using multiple linear regression and the Bonferroni technique, which “adjusts the probabilities of falsely rejecting the null hypothesis when multiple statistical tests are carried out” (p. 276), Rosenthal (2000) found that within the 3 years prior to attending college, the freshman participants were either victims or witnesses of community violence. Almost half of the participants were victims in at least one of the categories. The strongest correlation was that anger was the most identified symptom of trauma while depression was the weakest (16% anger vs. 4% depression). Thus, Rosenthal (2000) concluded that the findings in the study denoted that chronic exposure to CVE for high school students living in large urban areas was related to various types of traumas and psychological issues that included the four categories of anger, anxiety, depression, and association. She also concluded that additional risk factors contributed to participants reporting psychological symptoms that were discussed, and that the symptoms varied depending on the violent act committed (e.g., murder of a loved one).

Thompson and Rippey-Massat (2005) conducted a study to explore the impact of PTSD and its impact on the academic performance of urban African American adolescents. Similar to other authors, the researchers argued that a single account of experiencing trauma caused psychological distress. They contended that there was a correlation between academic performance and CVE for urban youth. Specifically,

Thompson and Rippey-Massat (2005) purported that because urban school districts did not understand the dynamics and multilayers of urban violence as it effected the population they served, urban youth were mislabeled. The sample consisted of 110 sixth graders who attended school in high-crime neighborhoods throughout Chicago. The methodology used was a descriptive correlational cross-sectional design that collected data on PTSD, CVE, aggressive behaviors, and academic performance. Three types of violence were measured: (a) family violence, (b) direct witnessing of community violence, and (3) direct victimization of community violence. Next, PTSD was assessed using the Extended Childhood Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index (Pynoos et al., 1993). Then, to measure behavior, the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991) was used. This tool of measurement is based on a 3-point Likert scale with answers ranging between “2 (a lot) to 1 (not at all)” (p. 380). The scale has a “test reliability of .87 and an inter-rater reliability of 0.96” (p. 380). Last, participants’ academic achievement was measured using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Hieronymous, Lindquist, & Hoover, 1979). This measurement tool assessed the children’s skills in reading, vocabulary, language, math, and writing.

Thompson and Rippey-Massat (2005) found that 70% of the sample experienced indirect victimization of CVE, meaning the participants knew someone who had been shot or stabbed, 40% were verbally threatened, 31% witnessed a shooting or stabbing within the last 12 months, and 26% were threatened with a weapon. In addition, the study participants reported high levels of anxiety and stress. In fact, a number of participants reported physical symptoms associated with high levels of stress such as headaches, stomach aches, and anxiety. When assessed by behavior patterns, 66% were violent

offenders. Insofar as academics are concerned, only one out of 110 participants passed the Iowa test with a score of 10 out of 20. Consistent with previous research, Thompson and Rippey-Massat's (2005) study found that the more acts of violence a child experienced, the higher the level of stress reported. However, the data did not definitively conclude there was a strong relationship between PTSD and academic functioning.

Similarly, Bowen and Bowen (1999) concluded that more research was needed to definitively conclude a correlation existed between PTSD and academic performance, but they did find that there was a close relationship between student disengagement and PTSD. The researchers conducted an empirical study using Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs of physiology and safety to examine the impact of crime and neighborhood violence on academic performance and student behavior. First, Bowen and Bowen used the School Success Profile (SSP), a self-report questionnaire designed to collect information about students' perceptions of school, family, friends, peers, and their community. The researchers collected 4 months of data from a two-stratified sample design of 1,828 middle and high school students from suburban, urban, and rural districts. The demographics of the sample consisted of 52.6% female, 48.4% male, 64.7% European American, 13.4% African American, 9.3% Latino, 4.0% Asian, and 8.6% of the students categorized themselves as being in neither of the listed categories (Bowen & Bowen (1999)).

Through multiple-regression analysis, Bowen and Bowen (1999) found the older adolescent population reported exposure to violence more frequently when compared to the younger sample, despite the demographics. However, when categorized by ethnicity, the data showed the African American participants from the urban community self-

reported CVE at a higher level than any other ethnic group identified within the population, $N = 1,828$ ($\alpha < .05$; $M = 1.81^b$, $SD = 1.61$, African American vs. $M = 1.27^a$, $SD = 1.39$ European American. The rate of absenteeism was calculated using multiple-analysis regression. The data shows that as the threat of danger and safety increased, as a whole the rate of student absenteeism decreased, $F(2,1814) = 39.671$, $p < .05$. On the other hand, the data showed student absenteeism was less of a factor for the urban African American population, despite higher self-reports of criminal and violent activity and lack of safety. In addition, the analysis showed that as the threat of danger increased, students' grades decreased. For this reason, researchers Bowen and Bowen (1999) concluded that for the population studied, as violence and neighborhood conflict increased, students' academic performance decreased.

In comparison, Overstreet and Braun (1999) argued that more research was needed to assert there was a positive correlation between PTSD, urban violence exposure, and low academic performance. The researchers conducted a study on the effects of community violence and academic performance with 45 urban African American middle school students from low-income, single-female-parent households. First, students were issued a 26-item self-report questionnaire in which they recorded the frequency of violent crimes they had witnessed in their neighborhood. Second, the participants were given the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994), which was intended to measure how children's family environment affects their productivity or lack thereof. Last, participants were evaluated with the CDI and Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (Reynolds & Richmond, 1978), which measures the effects of stress and anxiety in relation to student performance. Overstreet and Braun (1999) concluded that zero-order correlations,

“revealed that exposure to violence was related significantly to academic functioning ($r = -.23, p < .05$), indicating that as exposure to violence increased, academic functioning decreased” (p. 388).

Intervention. Although the results in data vary, the research surrounding urban violence and its impact on urban youth is clear. Adolescents living in urban communities are chronically exposed to community violence, and as a result, the children suffer from extreme levels of psychological distress. It is fair to say that the unaddressed trauma experienced may be a risk factor for low academic achievement, aggression, and substance and alcohol abuse. The increased numbers of homicides, gang activity, and fatalities create multiple dimensions of trauma suffered by adolescents who do not receive treatment (Saltzman et al., 2001). There are some researchers who claim more longitudinal studies need to be conducted based on long term intervention and prevention measures for the target population. As a direct result, schools should focus on such measures and implement them for the academic and socio-emotional advancement of the aforementioned population (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009). Voisin et al. (2010) argued that because the results of CVE are different and varied by gender, intervention should be gender specific and individualized to the needs of females for therapy purposes. On the other hand, Rosenthal (2000) suggested that urban school districts should implement an intervention system that is specific to high school students to include regular monitoring of students who are exposed to community violence. She called for a greater awareness of school personnel to provide the proper interventions to help these adolescents to become better citizens of society. Therefore, non-traditional interventions that address the

impact of trauma as it relates to urban violence should be implemented in urban public school settings (Rosenthal, 2000).

Through random sampling, Griffin, Chen, Eubanks, Brantley, & Willis (2007) conducted a school-based intervention between three different groups using separate models, and they assessed whether the responses differed between genders. They also wanted to provide implementation of components relative to violence prevention. The researchers argued school violence is prevalent throughout the United States. Schools are seeing more incidents with violence because it occurs within the school buildings. As a result, Griffin et al. (2007) purported that as violence within the school increases, students' academic functioning decreases as well as the level of expectation from school personnel. Using statistics from the national database from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (2001), the researchers found that 4% of students were absent from school because of the lack of safety they perceived. In response, the researchers saw a need to implement a school-based violence prevention/intervention program that provided students with the necessary social skills and adaptive behaviors to become successful into adulthood. However, Griffin et al. (2007) argued that current school-based intervention programs are ineffective because there are barriers to them. Specifically, (a) educators ignore the power peer culture and violence have on student behaviors; (b) the programs are well written, but poorly implemented; and (c) the preventions and interventions selected are not gender specific. For that reason, Griffin et al. (2007) conducted an experimental research approach between three separate groups of students with urban low-income students.

In the initial random sample, researchers selected a total of 336 students, Grades 6-8. However, only 206 students in Grades 6 and 7 received the intervention for 2 consecutive years, due to the eighth graders in the original study being promoted. As a result, the data from the sixth and seventh graders was reported. The researchers used two different schools to compare their data. The third group was a combination of two middle schools with students who, unlike groups I and II, were volunteer participants. Three conditions were assessed. The first group intervention approach was identified as a *whole-school intervention* whereby instructional staff, social workers, and administrators worked as a team to complete a set of specified goals and objectives related to behavioral, psychological, academic, and emotional development of students. The concept of the whole-school intervention approach was adapted from the Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline Restorative Practice Model created to address school culture and climate (Freiberg, 1999; Freiberg, Connell, & Lorentz, 2001). The action teams were created to address academics, and behavior interventions were used to assess students' environment, and then recommendations were made as how to help reduce school violence. Two other models were used as supplements in the whole-school intervention model.

Group II used the "pull-out" (p. 70) method where students were removed from class twice a week for 50 minutes per intervention session in year 2, and then they were removed from class for 90 minutes twice a week the following year. Group II's intervention consisted of the Second Step Curriculum (Beland, 2000) a school-based violence prevention curriculum and not an intervention model. One component of the prevention was to address cultural awareness. The curricula that was implemented was:

Growing up Black and Proud (Bell, 1988) in the first year and *The Journey* (Hill, 1998) in the second year. A set of videotapes, *Dealing with Anger* (Hammond, 1991) was used to help participants with self-regulation skills when addressing their anger. In addition, once a week for an hour and a half, teachers received coaching and professional development by trained specialists to help prepare lesson plans that aligned with the curriculum, and the school scheduled team meetings to ensure fidelity when implementing the intervention. An anger-management component was also added.

To collect data, the National School Crime Safety Survey (Kingery, Minogue, Murphy, & Goggeshall, 1998) was distributed to participants four times in a 3-month period. The survey consisted of three scales that assessed students' behaviors toward violence. First, Motivation to Fight, was a six-item, 2-point Likert scale that posed questions based on students' desire to engage in a physical altercation. Responses to the survey were "agree or disagree" (p. 71). Second, the Common Perpetration Scale (CP) was a six-item scale that assessed students' aggression and likeliness to be violent with another individual within the past 30 days. Third, the Common Victimization (CV) Scale assessed the frequency of a student being physically attacked by another individual within the past 30 days. Since the intervention occurred within a 2-year period, the case study was a longitudinal analysis. MANOVA analysis was used because the study evaluated more than three independent variables to identify student outcomes. For reliability, Griffin et al. (2007) set the p value at $p < .05$. In addition, a univariate analysis was used for analyzing data specific to responses by gender. The purpose was to determine if there was a variance in responses. Griffin et al. (2007) did not find a wide variance in how male and female participants responded to the intervention, " $p < .55$, CV

$p < .64$, and CP $p < .50$ " (p. 74). When the groups were analyzed individually, the researchers found that students in Group II showed the greatest reduction in overall behaviors. Overall, the participants in both groups showed a decrease in violent behaviors. However, female participants in Group II had a higher report of decreased CP, Cohen = 0.07, when compared to the female participants in Group I. Cooley-Strickland et al. (2009) argued that research on prevention or intervention methods tended to be from an analysis of the perpetrators but rarely from the affected individual. The case study examined adolescents and communities within the Baltimore, MD area that were similar to high-crime urban neighborhoods across the nation. The longitudinal study, entitled the Multiple Opportunities To Reach Excellence (MORE) Project was created with the intent to cross reference research to enhance their understanding of how chronic exposure to community violence affected urban adolescents. However, using the data they collected, the authors wanted to present an intervention model as a framework of study for practitioners to implement within school policy.

Most of the children that experienced chronic exposure to violence were from the most impoverished neighborhoods. Similar to Bowen and Bowen (1999), Cooley-Strickland et al. (2009) declared that more research was needed to make a definitive correlation between CVE and low academic functioning. In addition, previous studies concluded that due to the high level of stress from CVE, students were less likely to be engaged at school due to preoccupied thoughts of safety. Whereas some authors advocated for more parental involvement, Cooley-Strickland et al. (2009) stated that parents and guardians also experienced chronic exposure to violence, and as a result, they may have not been capable to adequately address the academic, social, and emotional

needs of their children; they are equally traumatized. Again, acts of violence are said to be cyclical and generational.

Bemak et al. (2005) created the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS), which was an intervention model designed to provide African American high school students with effective counseling to help empower them.

The objective of the case study was to place emphasis on the need for school counselors to provide urban students and public communities with a group-counseling intervention approach that was culturally competent in helping students with issues that plagued the community such as violence. The authors argued that without an outlet, the students internalized their emotions, and as a result, displayed negative behaviors in the school setting and within the community.

To this end, Bemak et al. (2005) expressed the need for school counselors to become aware of the community issues urban students faced. This meant the counselor should set aside their own Eurocentric perspectives and change their mindset to that of the urban population and student body in order to be effective. The participants in the study consisted of seven African American females who were considered at-risk students based on their absenteeism, poor academic performance, and poor behaviors. Unlike traditional group session, the participants created the topics of discussions. The idea was to provide students with a sense of empowerment whereby they believed their input was valuable in their healing process. That said, the topics discussed ranged from relationships with friends and family, to experiencing the loss of a loved one due to homicide, teen pregnancy, relationship building with teachers, and academics. The group session topics often led to effective grief and loss counseling and their need in urban

communities. The authors thought it was important for the students to hear and share the experience of their peers.

Saltzman et al. (2001) examined grief and loss specifically with urban populations relating to homicide. The researchers stated that traumatized urban adolescents failed to seek professional treatment because of a cultural disconnect. They either did not seek treatment at all, or they did not complete the sessions. In addition, because there was no school policy to address students who had been traumatized by the loss of a loved one specifically due to homicide, school personnel failed to refer these students to facilities where they could seek professional support. From their research, they asserted that peer-group therapy was an effective approach in the grieving process. Similar to Bemak et al. (2005), Saltzman et al. (2001) asserted that group therapy was an effective approach within peer groups because the youth connected with adolescents who shared the similar experiences and traumatic events within their respective communities. Group therapy helped participants develop a sense of bonding and support for each other. In conducting the therapy sessions, the authors wanted to answer two questions. First: How many students were not identified as needing professional services for grief counseling? Second: Would grief-focused psychotherapy increase participant's academic performance significantly as well as improve their PTSD symptoms and depression?

The participants consisted of 26 urban students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. All of the students were between the ages of 11 and 14, and they came from a senior high school and two middle schools in Pasadena, CA. There were six components in the screening process. The first was a self-report survey that participants used to identify their exposure to community violence, PTSD, depression, and grief symptoms using the

Community Violence Exposure Survey (Saltzman, Layne, & Steinberg, 1998), which is a 25-item questionnaire that measures the rates of direct violence exposure, direct witnessing or indirect witnessing of a violent act. Violent exposure was categorized as “serious accidents, homicides, threatened by a weapon, shootings, kidnappings, beatings, and or suicide” (p. 294). The second tool used was the UCLA PTSD Reaction Index (Rodriguez, Steinberg, & Pynoos, 1999). This was a 22-item self-report survey that assessed how often individuals experienced PTSD symptoms within the last four weeks. Positive responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The third method used was the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS) (Reynolds, 1987). The RADS was a 30-point item self-report scale which measured adolescent depressive symptoms. The fourth instrument used was the Grief Screening Scale (GSS) (Layne, Steinberg, Savjak, & Pynoos (1998). GSS was a 10-item, self-report inventory of grief symptoms in adolescents and adults. Last, students’ GPAs were used to determine participants’ academic performance.

Of the 26 participants in the entire study, 14 had high levels of trauma and were low academically, achieving a D average or less, $M = 1.77$, $SD = 0.53$. Based on the initial problem statement posed, the researchers found that throughout the 20-week session, student’s GPA increased at least one letter grade. Based on the results from the PTSD Reaction Index, the RADS, GSS, and GPAs, as a whole, post-traumatic stress symptoms decreased within the 40-week period, $t(25) = 4.19$, $p = .0003$. GPA scores increased, $r = -.48$, $p < .01$, however, participants’ depressive symptoms did not decrease. It is important to note that there was no attrition in the grief group psychotherapy within the 40-week period. All 26 participants completed therapy.

Survey results indicate that a large number of students who attended secondary schools in urban neighborhoods experienced some type of trauma. Hence, community awareness and parental involvement were vital in the grieving process. Saltzman et al. (2001) strenuously urged parents to talk with their children to get an accurate understanding of the issues and challenges they faced in the community. In addition, outreach and further support services should address *comorbid depression*, which is “infatuation with death” (Bergen-Cico et al., 2014).

Suffice it to say, before practitioners can implement therapy, they need to understand the challenges that their clients face. Horowitz et al. (2005) used qualitative data to examine the impact of community violence on urban families by conducting focus groups with parents and children. The intent was to provide schools and community agencies within urban neighborhoods with suggestions on what types of interventions were effective when dealing with the specified population. The researchers argued that the term post-traumatic stress syndrome was inapplicable to urban youth. The use of the word *post* denotes that something finished, however, community violence was continuous. Therefore, the term did not fit the conditions of urban families. The sample consisted of 28 children, ages 8 to 17, from low-income, single-parent households. Their parents were included in the study to capture a full understanding of what forms of interventions were most effective.

To ensure that accurate responses were given, Horowitz et al. (2005) understood that trust among the participants needed to be established, specifically with the parents. For this reason, the president of the parent association was used to communicate and solicit participation based solely on her relationship with the community. To measure the

level of PTSD experienced by the youth sample, the PTSD Index was used. Positive responses to the first 11 questions determined whether or not the child was traumatized by experiencing the event. Next, the adolescents were administered 48 questions abstracted from the *DSM-IV* criteria for PTSD. Criterion A1 was based on how the participant defined the term *traumatic*. Criterion 2 posed questions based on the participant's response to experiencing a *traumatic event*. Using a 5-point Likert scale, the last 24 questions related to feelings, behaviors, and coping strategies used by the participants when they responded to a traumatic event. The results of the PTSD index were that all of the children experienced indirect witnessing of a traumatic event. Of the participants, 50% directly witnessed a traumatic event, and 46% were the victims of a traumatic event.

Based on the responses, 3 main themes emerged. The first theme was the participants' perception of violence in their community. Participants in the adolescent focus group expressed concerns about safety. They believed that their neighborhoods were unsafe. Some of the youth said they felt anxious about playing outside and going to school out of fear of getting shot or hit in the crossfire. Equally, parents acknowledged that their neighborhoods were dangerous. The adults, themselves, reported high feelings of anxiety when travelling outside of their homes. The second theme that emerged was participant's perceptions of outside helpers. Because of past experiences, there was a sense of distrust for people who were not from the community. Police were even viewed as "scary" (p. 360) due to participants witnessing police brutality. The emotions were mixed when asked about school personnel. The youth believed teachers were helpful, while parents felt the contrary. Insofar as protective factors, Horowitz et al. (2005) found

that the children's families were considered the best source of protection based on the participants' responses. At the end of the study, the authors suggested that interventions should be developed specifically for PTSD as it related to urban violence. In addition, they posited that children should be involved in the development of such interventions because they were, in a sense, the experts. Last, in order for treatment to be effective, Horowitz et al. (2005) felt that facilitators needed to be deemed credible within the community.

Taking it a step further, researchers Bergen-Cico et al. (2014) created an intervention model that addressed the subculture of urban communities with a focus on the mindset of those individuals who were perpetrators of crime. They argued that perpetrators of violent crimes, specifically those affiliated with gangs, felt they were addicted to street culture, and they expressed symptoms of withdrawal when not actively involved. As of this writing, this was the first intervention that correlated PTSD, urban violence, and maladaptive behaviors as a disorder similar to that of substance abuse, alcoholism, and gambling. Currently, the Street Addictions Model is the only theoretical framework of its kind that exists (Jennings-Bey et al., 2015).

Through the use of a longitudinal 3-year study, 12 formerly identified gang members, ages 25-40, participated in the Bergen-Cico et al. (2014) study. The participants were all African American males from the city of Syracuse, New York, which in 2003, implemented the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act against gang activity. Qualitative descriptive analysis of the interviews conducted with participants was used to measure results that used participants' own words to describe best practices grief and loss and their experience to chronic exposure to urban violence.

Ethnographic interviewing was also used. It is important to note that prior relationships were developed between two of the researchers and the participants. The fact that two of the researchers were formerly involved with street life, they had established credibility among their peer group, therefore, the participants were more forthcoming with information. The authors cited the prior relationships were a strong contributing factor to eliminating false/truths during the interview.

Themes emerged from the research such as peritraumatic dissociation that was described as the dissociative response from an individual who has experienced a traumatic event also associated with PTSD (Denson et al., 2007; Marmar, Metzler, & Otte, 1997), which participants stated was a contributing factor to participating in violent acts. A few participants identified the absence of intervention to prevent street and gang involvement as well. Bergen-Cico et al. (2014) argued that unaddressed trauma specific to community violence causes urban youth to seek acceptance from peers who perpetrate with deviant behaviors. Consistent with previous studies, the researchers concluded that children's environments impact their social, behavioral, and psychological development as observed by the sample. Anger was also identified as a contributing factor. One participant stated that anger and violence were normal emotions developed from the culture of the neighborhood and street life. Nearly all of the participants reported substance or alcohol abuse as coping mechanisms to address the trauma of what they inflicted or experienced. Of note, is the claim Bergen-Cico et al. (2014) made that unaddressed trauma leads to cyclical and generational acts of violence.

Community violence and its impact on adolescents is not specific to urban America. Guterman, Muhammad, Vorhies, Ismayilova, & Leshem, (2010) examined the

responses of Arab and Jewish adolescents living in Israel who had been victims and witnessed community violence. The three questions investigated in the study were: (a) Is mental blocking of the traumatic event a common coping mechanism? (b) Is seeking help contingent upon cultural norms? And (c) Is there a lack of trust for outside help?

Guterman et al. (2010) contended that a number of studies on community violence focus on U.S. urban populations with statistics that suggest 60% of urban adolescents have been victims of violence, and 50% of urban youth have witnessed a violent act. The researchers argued that the impact of community violence extends far beyond the US. For example, research has been conducted in other countries, such as the Republic of South Africa (Shields et al., 2013), where 57% of the sample were found to have directly witnessed shootings, stabbings and physical attacks. A similar case study was conducted in Eastern Europe where 50% of the sample reported having witnessed severe acts of violence (Vermeiren, Schwab-Stone, Deboutte, Leckman, & Ruchkin, 2003). Both studies yielded results that are consistent with a body of research that suggests there is a correlation between exposure to community violence and psychological disorders, such as PTSD, which impacts cognitive functioning. In their study, Guterman et al. (2010) cited previous studies that gave credence to the idea that individuals who suffer from social, behavioral, and psychological disorders specifically associated with neighborhood violence fail to seek professional help because of the disconnect between therapist and patient. In particular, they argued that mental health practitioners do not use community violence exposure as a risk factor in assessments for behavioral, social, and psychological disorders because they are unfamiliar with the symptoms associated with CVE; therefore, they are unable to provide adequate treatment. These findings are consistent with Ober

and Granello (2010) who found that the majority of clinicians in their sample self-reported that they felt incompetent, due to a lack of experience in that area, to deal with grief and loss as treatment for patients who were impacted by death. Moreover, the therapists believed they did not receive enough training on how to identify and treat individuals who suffered from psychological, behavioral, and social disorders that were triggered by urban violence exposure (Ober & Granello, 2010). Their findings are consistent with researchers who argued that violence interventions targeted toward street violence are effective when the interventionists are cognizant of the issues the population faces (Bemak et al., 2005; Charkow, 2002; Figley, 1989). In their study, Guterman et al. (2010) interviewed 1,835 older Arab and Jewish adolescents in Grades 9-12. The sample consisted of 858 Arab and 977 Jewish participants. Selection varied between the two communities. For this study, socioeconomic status was not used as a variable because, in Israel, the Arab population was the “lowest socioeconomic as defined by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics” (p. 689). An adapted version of My Exposure to Violence Scale (Selner-O’Hagan, Kindlon, Buka, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1998) was used to assess long-term and short-term exposure to violence based upon direct victimization by directly witnessing a violent act. Next, the researchers posed a series of questions to the participants based on their most recent experience with direct or indirect exposure to violence (within the past 12 months) and asked participants to identify to whom they sought help (e.g., a parent, peer, community member, or professional).

The results for the Guterman et al. (2010) study show that a third (33.2%) of the Arab participants and one quarter (24.3%) of the Jewish participants reported seeking help from another individual to help them cope emotionally and psychologically. The

order in which help was sought went from turning first to their peers, 24.0% Arab participants vs. 16.9% Jewish participants, $\chi^2 b = 14.361$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$. Second, they sought help from a family member, 22.6% Arabs participants vs. 14.6% Jewish participants, $\chi^2 = 19.375$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$. Overall, the findings were consistent with previous case studies conducted in the US that suggest that adolescents impacted by community violence fail to seek help due to: (a) shame, (b) avoidance, (c) denial, and (d) downplaying of the traumatic event. Of the Arab participants, 50% reported that they failed to seek help because they did not think that anyone would understand how they felt. As previously mentioned, this particular finding is consistent with other studies that suggest that a disconnect exists between mental health professionals, social workers, therapists, and their clients, particularly when the therapist is trying to treat disorders specific to community violence exposure. Therefore, prior to implementing school-based interventions for students, urban school districts may want to look at providing teachers, administrators, and counselors with the cultural competence professional development training that may help them better understand the social and psychological needs of the population being served.

La Roche and Tawa (2011) conducted a qualitative methods study and found that older adolescent populations internalized CVE into anger and depression. Through group therapy sessions, they discovered that adolescents described the same feeling of numbness mentioned in the Denson et al. (2007) study. In addition, they purported urban youth suffer from social injustices, which also contributes to maladaptive behaviors. The purpose of the study was to examine the broader scope of the impact of urban violence. Consistent with other researchers (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Rosenthal, 2000; Voisin

et al. 2010), La Roche and Tawa (2011) believed that when it came to therapy, it was important to include adolescents in the therapy process. Using a three-step empowerment approach to group therapy, similar to that of Bemak et al. (2005), the researchers worked with a sample of six males from low-income, high-crime neighborhoods throughout the Boston area. Similar to Bemak et al. (2005), phase one of the Peace Promotion Model encouraged building relationships with participants. Phase two, exploring narratives, allowed the youth to share their stories. Its purpose was first to help participants' self-identify the root cause of their trauma; second, to establish positive self-identities, and third, to learn how to turn a negative experience into positive one. In the final phase, fostering empowerment and peace through community action, La Roche and Tawa (2011) encouraged participants to internalize their experiences, and morph their injustices into "a basis for social action" (p. 14).

When providing interventions, clinician need to understand the symptoms they intend to treat as well as understand the circumstances surrounding the participants' need for therapy. Trauma induced by community violence is unique, specifically when dealing with grief and loss counseling. For this reason, Ober, Granello, and Wheaton (2012) conducted an investigation where they examined clinicians in the mental health field. They argued that mental health professionals did not have sufficient training in trauma and grief counseling, and as a result, they were ineffective in treating clients. The sample used in the study was the largest sample on this topic to date. The questions examined related to the current status of licensed clinicians' training and experience in grief and loss counseling and how they self-perceived their level of competency in that area.

Participants consisted of a random sample of 369 mental health professionals from a Midwestern state. The sample was diverse in age, ethnicity, and gender. Three different instruments were used to measure the competencies levels of the grief counselors. First, the Death Counseling Survey (Charkow, 2002), which was a 58-item, 5-point Likert scale created by several grief counselors in the field of mental health services to assess levels of competence in “knowledge, self-awareness, and skills” (p. 90). For the questionnaire, the higher the clinicians scored, the more competent they were. Responses ranged from “1 (this describes me) to 5 (this describes me very well)” (p. 152). The Cronbach alpha for the study ranged between .79 to .94. Next, the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (Faschinbauer, DeVaul, & Zisook, 1987) was used to assess the emotional effects of death before and after the event. Statistics showed that, on average, clinicians’ scores reflected a “less intense response to loss both at the time of death and currently” (p. 153). Their scores assessed direct experience with grief: past behavior, $M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.82$ and present feelings: $M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.74$. It also showed that mental health professionals who lost a loved one were more effective in grief counseling than those who did not. Third, the Grief Counseling Experience and Training Survey was used (Ober, 2007), which uses a 12-point Likert scale measuring experience and training in grief counseling. Responses to the survey ranged between “1 (not true at all) to 5 (totally true)” (Ober et al., 2012, p. 152).

Of the participants in the Ober et al. (2012) study, 54% did not receive formal grief training. A slight increase within that same population reported that they received at least one training that combined grief counseling into a workshop. In addition, several theories of grief were introduced: stage theory, task, and meaning making. Although close

to 60% considered themselves relatively familiar with the theories, 40% of the respondents were unaware of any one theory. Using the Death Counseling Survey, the Grief Counseling Experience and Training Survey, and the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief, Ober et al. (2013) found mental health professionals scored highest on their self-assessment of competency, $M = 4.41$, $SD = .043$, but lowest on conceptual skills and knowledge, $M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.91$. Ultimately, the study concluded that the majority of counselors were not adequately trained on how to treat patients for grief counseling. Researchers concluded that the most effective therapists were those who had direct experience in the area of grief and loss, resulting from their own experience.

Theory application. This research study applies Maslow's (1954) human motivation theory as a theoretical framework to explain student disengagement and low academic performance of traumatized urban youth who have been impacted by community violence exposure. Despite, critics' arguments that the hierarchy of needs theory is dated, there are a number of scholars who have used the theory to validate their research on human motivation, human behaviors, and cognitive functioning. For instance, Goldberg (1967) applied the self-esteem needs stage and the self-actualization stage of Maslow's (1954) theory on two groups of psychiatric patients living within a residential facility for the mentally disabled. The participants consisted of 51 patients who were diagnosed with severe mentally and psychotic disorders. In addition, the participants were mandated for hospitalization for a period of 12 months or more. Randomly, patients were selected to be housed in either the rehabilitation ward or the control group. Patients who were assigned to the rehabilitation facility received work based on individual interests and capabilities. Their work duties entailed direct contact with nurses, doctors,

and other patients. Meanwhile, the participants of the control group's work duties were limited to janitorial services within the ward.

To measure job satisfaction, two interviews were conducted within a 2-week span. The interview questions were adapted from Maslow's (1954) definition of self-esteem and sense of belonging. In addition, Goldberg (1967) posed questions from the Management Position Questionnaire (Porter, 1964). The validity of the 35 responses provided by the participants was established by three judges who aligned them with six subareas of needs described in a model developed by Mosteller and Bush (1954) with a "reliability of .01" (p. 254.) Goldberg (1967) found Maslow's (1954) theory of human motivation was somewhat accurate. Specifically, he found that there was a positive correlation between self-gratification and positive results for the patients who worked in the rehabilitation ward, when compared to the patients who were a part of the control group.

Goebel and Brown (1981) applied Maslow's (1970) theory on human motivation using age as a variable. The researchers argued that motivational theory was associated with individual experiences that could predict behavioral change. Participants consisted of three groups of 111 European Americans ranging in age from 9 to 80. The first group were children, Grades 4-10, who attended schools within the same district. The second group were young adults to middle-aged participants who were employed in business or non-institutional organizations with lower-class to middle-class incomes. The final group of participants were socially active members of the same community, and they were older in age. To measure the five basic needs of Maslow's (1954) theory, researchers Goebel and Brown (1981) used the Life Motivation Scale, which was based on a Likert scale of

0-4. Answers varied based on the level of importance. In terms of the physiology needs, the researchers found that Maslow's (1954) theory ranked highest among the younger participants. The data shows that as the participants' ages increased, the desire for self-identity and self-esteem increased, as well, peaking at the highest for male adolescents. In addition, as the participants' ages increased, the need for safety and security increased. Regardless of age, the need for love did not diminish.

In comparison, researchers Bowen and Bowen (1999) conducted an empirical study using Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs of physiology and safety to examine the impact of crime and neighborhood violence on academic performance and student behavior. To collect data about students' perceptions of school, family, friends, peers, and their community, the researchers used the School Success Profile, a self-report questionnaire. Data were collected for 4 months from a two-stratified sample design of 1,828 middle and high school students from suburban, urban, and rural districts. The demographics of the sample consisted of 52.6% females, 48.4% males, 64.7% European Americans, 13.4% African Americans, 9.3% Latinos, 4.0% Asians, and 8.6% who did not identify with any of the categories.

Through multiple regression analysis, Bowen and Bowen (1999) found that regardless of the demographics, the older adolescent population reported exposure to violence at a higher rate when compared to the younger sample. Noteworthy is when categorized by ethnicity, the data showed that the African American participants from the urban community self-reported exposure to community violence at a higher level than any other ethnic group identified within the population. For the European American suburban population, there was a positive correlation between the increase in student

absenteeism, the increase of threat and danger, and the decrease in safety. In other words, as the threat of danger increased, the rate of absenteeism increased. In contrast, data shows that despite higher self-reports of exposure to criminal and violent activity and lack of safety, student absenteeism was not a dependent variable for the urban population, but it was a dependent variable for a decrease in academic performance. Last, Bowen and Bowen (1999) found that regardless of the demographic of violence and neighborhood conflict increased in the community, students' academic performances decreased. The children were disengaged from school and were preoccupied with concerns of safety.

Maslow's critics. Despite, a number of humanistic psychologists who agree with Maslow's (1954) human motivation theory and its explanation of human behaviors, there are scholars who oppose the theory, claiming that the ideas that drive its existence no longer apply to modern-day society norms (Buss, 1979; Dillon, 2008; Pearson & Podeschi, 1999; Wertz, 1998). For instance, author James Dillon (2008) argued that Maslow's (1954) theory lacked an emphasis on "personal experiences" and "individual autonomy" (p. 233), as opposed to personal character, despite his claim for the need to resurrect humanistic psychology. He purported that human motivational theory was ambiguous in the sense that Maslow (1954) failed to explain how he defined human nature. Specifically, from a historical point of view, the term human nature has several meanings depending on the era and the philosopher. To show a chronological timeline of how the term was used over the centuries, Dillon (2008) cited literature from philosophers as early as Aristotle, who declared human beings were different from all other species because they had the ability to reason, compared to other philosophers who attributed human nature to a higher being or supernatural source. Buss (1979) agreed with

Dillon (2008) that Maslow's theory had fundamental flaws. He argued that the theory advocated freedom of self and liberalism, yet, the final phase of self-actualization suggests a social class of the elite. Therefore, the theory contradicted its primary concept that suggested that individuals fulfilled their life's purpose when they transcended from the constraints and abnormalities of society.

Socialist and post-modernist scholars, such as Pearson and Podeschi (1999), claimed that Maslow's (1954) theory and specific elements of humanistic psychology needed to be adapted to modern society. In particular, the authors argued that between 1989 and 1999, other theories such as "critical theory, feminist theory, Afro-centrism, and postmodernism" (p. 42) had a stronger impact in the fields of education and social sciences to explain individual behavioral patterns. Similar to Dillon (1999), Pearson and Podeschi (1999) argued that Maslow's (1954) theory promoted separatism because individuals were placed into class systems such as Marxism, capitalism, and Darwinism (p. 45). Ultimately, all three authors' discontent for the theory was based on its advocacy of individuals to detach themselves from society, and resist societal norms and culture in order to better develop themselves. They believed the idea was in conflict with modern societal beliefs (Pearson & Podeschi, 1999). Meanwhile, other critics of Maslow argued there was not enough data and scholarly research to validate the theory of human motivation as it applied to human behaviors (Wertz, 1998).

The argument surrounding the isolation and individualistic approach to Maslow's (1954) theory may be valid when applying it to multiple groups. However, for the purpose of this study, the theory is being applied to a specific population that is impacted by continuous threats of violence within the participants' homes, communities, and

school environments. The main argument of Maslow's (1954) human motivation theory is that before individuals can reach full potential, they need: (a) shelter and food, (b) safety and security, (c) love, and (d) self-esteem. In fact, Maslow (1954) claimed that individuals' need for safety is the sole factor of their existence. In urban communities, students have self-reported issues with mental distress, disengagement in academics, and school activities due to the fear of imminent danger (Denson et al., 2007; Horowitz et al., 2005; Saltzman, 2001). Therefore, it is logical to believe that overexposure to street violence hinders urban youths' cognitive ability to function in a school setting. In particular, urban school-age children who live in low socioeconomic neighborhoods are under duress due to their experiences with community violence such as direct victimization, indirect victimization, and third-party victimization. That said, school personnel in urban districts should have a system that addresses the immediate socioemotional needs of students who are impacted by street violence. Human motivation is based on immediate gratification (Maslow, 1945). A single act or multiple acts of violence and death leave a psychological imprint on an individual's psyche, especially children (Maslow, 1970; Ratner & Chiodo, 2006).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to identify key areas of research that provide evidence to support the notion that community violence presents significant challenges for the cognitive, psychological, and emotional functioning of youth, especially children who live in high crime areas. Data suggests that females report higher rates of psychological and emotional distress to urban violence when compared to males. However, males report having directly experienced more accounts of street violence.

Overall, public schools are not providing effective interventions that address the specific needs of the population being served, which is due to a lack of cultural understanding of the issues the students face while in the community. Specifically, urban public schools can benefit from listening to ways in which students who have been effected by community violence believe school personnel can play a more direct role in helping them become more actively engaged, leading to academic success.

Chapter 3 is presented based on conducting a transcendental phenomenological qualitative study. It provides (a) an overview of the research setting, (b) the criteria used to select the participants, (c) the instruments used in this study, and (d) the data analysis process implemented.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Urban violence is a national epidemic (Rosenthal, 2000). Data suggests 85% of urban youth are exposed to some type of community violence by age 9 (Lambert et al., 2010). However, the issue with urban violence is not specific to countries in the US. Between 2005 and 2015, there has been an emergence of literature that has examined community violence and its psychological impact on youth from adolescents who lived in war-prone countries such as Israel, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, South Africa, and Kuwait (Garbarino, 1995; McAloney et al., 2009; Shields et al., 2013). Data concluded that these youths experienced PTSD-like symptoms, similar to the behavioral, mental, and social symptoms exhibited by war veterans (Guterman et al., 2010). Researchers argued that urban youth in the US live in war-zone territories where the rate of crime and status of families living in poverty are similar to the aforementioned countries. Additionally, they argued that urban adolescents suffer from social, behavioral, and psychological disorders associated with PTSD (Neugebauer et al., 2014; Shields et al., 2013; Voisin et al., 2010). In some cases, researchers purported that unaddressed trauma results in student disengagement, low academic performance, and social disconnect (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Hammond, 1991; Rosenthal, 2000). Data suggest that in addition to PTSD induced by community violence, there are additional factors such as systemic racism (Martin & Baxter, 2001), poverty (Taylor-Lovelace, 2003), and the lack of familial

involvement (Jung-Sook & Bowens, 2006) that contribute to youths' low academic performance.

As demonstrated in the previous two chapters, researchers have established three key findings on the topic of urban violence and its impact on adolescents: (a) urban youth are exposed to community violence at a high rate when compared to youth living in rural and suburban communities (CDC, 2010; FBI Crime Report, 2012; Denson et al., 2007; Thompson & Rippey-Massat, 2005); (b) data suggests that students who attend urban public schools in high-crime neighborhoods are more likely to be disengaged from school and underperform academically with low graduation rates, and low test scores (NCES, 2009; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2009; and (c) there is a lack of school-based interventions that address the phenomenon of community violence and its impact on students' performance and cognitive functioning (Horowitz et al., 2005; La Roche & Tawa, 2011; Saltzman et al., 2001).

There is a substantial amount of research and data that support the finding that: (a) community violence is prevalent within urban neighborhoods, (b) a number of urban youth suffer from unaddressed grief induced by CVE, and (c) there is a correlation between CVE and student disengagement. Nevertheless, a gap in the literature exists on the impact of urban violence for older adolescents, specifically high school students between the ages of 15-19. Research is needed to examine schools' responses that prove effective with helping students develop positive coping strategies to address the psychological trauma induced by CVE and to increase student engagement. This study focuses on the qualitative transcendental phenomenological method created by Edmund Husserl (1931) and redefined by Carl Moustakas (1994) to better understand the lived

experiences of high school students who experience indirect victimization due to street violence.

Phenomenology is based on the “human science perspective” (Giorgi, 1994 p. 70). In theory, it tries to find meaning and essence in how an individual perceives a lived experience (Husserl, 1964). Moreover, phenomenology is meant to describe the essence of an experience through an individual’s perspective which cannot always be quantified (Giorgi, 1994). An essential component of descriptive transcendental phenomenology is intentionality (Husserl, 1931). Intentionality is the “internal experience of being conscious of something” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28), or the internal process of knowing or believing that something exists based on one’s experience within his/her environment. This includes self-desires, self-motivation, and previous experiences that shape the way one thinks, what is real vs. what someone believes is real based on his/her experience (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the conceptual framework of transcendental phenomenology is the best approach to better understand the perspectives of urban high school students who have experienced indirect victimization by street violence and managed to *get through* despite the adversity and challenges they faced.

The interview questions used were:

1. In what ways did your experience with community violence impact you in high school?
2. How did the school respond to your experience?
3. In what ways should schools respond?
4. How did you respond to the school’s response?
5. How did you get through?

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory was used as the theoretical framework to support the claim that the psychological impact of exposure to street violence hinders students' ability to cognitively function in a school setting when their psychological, emotional, and physical need to feel safe is not met (Saltzman et al., 2001). Based on the data collected from the participants, recommendations are made in Chapter 5 on the ways in which school personnel can play a more direct role to help address students' needs that may prove effective in helping to increase student engagement.

Research Context

Located in upstate central New York, the city of Syracuse is a small metropolis with a total population of 145,170 residents. At the time of this study, 52.3% of city residents were female with 30% of the population being 19 years of age or younger (McLean & Worden, 2011). Although, the majority of residents are of European descent (64.3%), nearly one third of the population is African American (27.8%) (McLean & Worden, 2011). In 2011, the census tract for Syracuse showed that 52.4 % of the African American population lived in poverty when compared to the citywide average of 25% (McLean & Worden, 2011). In 2013, the average household income of city residents was \$31,459 with one third of the population living below the federal poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). At the time of this study, the city of Syracuse ranked number one in the country for the highest concentration of poverty among African Americans (65.2%) and Latinos (62.2%) (Jargowsky, 2015). Also, Syracuse ranks fifth in the nation for the highest non-Hispanic, White concentration of poverty (21.5%) (Jargowsky, 2015). These statistics align with the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) student data which show that districtwide, 85% of its students are classified as economically disadvantaged (New

York State Report Card, 2015). That number is much higher for schools located on the west side, north side, and south side of Syracuse. Additionally, although African Americans and Latinos are one of the ethnic minorities of city residents, they make up 73% of the SCSD's student body (New York State Report Card, 2015). According to Eisenstadt in 2013, there were approximately 27 separate gangs representing over 1,472 gang members who operated within city limits.

From 2000-2015, the city of Syracuse witnessed an increase of non-gang related homicides. There were 11-24 citywide homicides annually (The John F. Finn Institute for Public Safety, Inc., 2013) resulting in over 278 homicides throughout the city with the majority of homicides occurring between the years of 2008-2013 (Institute for Public Safety, Inc., 2013). The rate of violent acts was 94% higher than the average city its size and 18% higher when compared to larger cities (Institute for Public Safety, Inc., 2013). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the average student who attended the SCSD was exposed to violence at a comparable or higher rate than youth living in larger cities. From 2000 to 2007, the city averaged roughly 11 homicides per year (F. Fowler, personal communication, March 15, 2015). Between the years of 2008 to 2013, the city of Syracuse experienced between 11-24 homicides annually (F. Fowler, personal communication, March 15, 2015). Between the years of 2009 to 2014, the SCSD continuously failed to meet the New York State's adequate yearly progress (AYP), only graduating 52% of its high school seniors; just under 4,000 students graduated out of a cohort of 7,648 (New York State Report Card, 2013).

Research Participants

Semi-structured interviews. The first stage of data collection consists of purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013). This technique was useful for helping to generate a pool of participants who represented the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2013; Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995). The participants for the study consisted of SCSD graduate students who earned their diploma between the years of 2008-2014 and experienced indirect victimization relating to street violence based on one of the following categories: (a) experiencing the death of a close friend, relative, or close community member due to gun shot, stabbing, or physical attack or (b) having witnessed a homicide due to gun shot, stabbing, or physical attack. Recent statistics show that between the years of 2008-2014, there were a total of 131 citywide homicides (F. Fowler, personal communication, May 9, 2015). As of 2013, the SCSD had graduated roughly 3,969 students. The graduation number was an aggregated amount that included June and August, fifth- and sixth-year graduates (New York State Report Card, 2014).

Recruitment. The two databases provided by Mothers Against Gun Violence (MAGV) and the Trauma Response Team (TRT) included the names, dates, and ages of every homicide victim in the city of Syracuse between the years 2002-2015. Also, they contained specific services provided to the families. First, public records of the SCSD graduates from 2008-2014, as a point of reference, was used to generate a potential sample. Second, the TRT had what it referred to as a TEAM A.N.G.E.L Board (Avoid, Negative, Garbage, Enjoy, Life). The board displayed over 100 obituaries of citywide homicide victims. The obituaries included the birth and death date of the victim, any special accomplishments, and the names of living or deceased relatives, family members,

and siblings. In some cases, if the homicide victim was of school age, the name of the school was listed. The information provided in the obituary was cross-referenced against the list of names for potential participants. Third, the director of TRT and the co-founder of MAGV wrote letters of support (Appendices A and B) agreeing to help recruit potential participants who they believed fit the criteria.

Both organizations maintain records of the names of close friends and immediate relatives of homicide victims. Next, the directors asked the individuals who expressed interest in participating in the study to contact the researcher by phone or email. Then, a meeting was established between the researcher and the participant. During initial contact, the participants were administered a brief prescreening questionnaire. If the individual met the criteria, an interview was scheduled. In the case that an individual did not fit the criteria, the snowball effect (Creswell, 2013) was implemented, whereby the individuals were asked if they were willing to provide the name(s) of individuals they believed would be willing to participate in the study. The researcher provided the individuals with her contact information for the interested parties.

Selection. On average, sample sizes in phenomenological qualitative studies are between six and 25 participants (Creswell, 2013, 2014). For this study, the sample consisted of seven to nine individuals who were 18 years of age or older, graduates of the SCSD in the years 2008-2014, and who had experienced indirect relating to street violence while attending high school in one or both categories: (a) experiencing the death of a close friend, relative, or close community member due to gun shot, stabbing, or physical attack or (b) having witnessed a homicide due to gun shot, stabbing, or physical attack.

Consent. Each participant signed an informed consent (Appendix C), which explained (a) the purpose of the study, (b) how the information for the study was being collected, (c) how the information would be used, (d) the role of each participant, and (e) the ability for the individual to withdraw from participating in the study at any time without recourse (Fowler, 2014; Stringer, 2014).

Confidentiality. To maintain confidentiality when reporting the findings, each participant was provided with a pseudonym based on their gender (e.g., Allison, Ana, Robert, Emmanuel). The informed consent provided the participants with the names of community agencies and community-based programs that offered free mental health counseling (Appendix D). At the end of the study and for their participation, the participants received a \$20 gift certificate to be used at a local shopping mall. It was estimated that the duration of each interview would last between 30-45 minutes.

Data shows females self-report higher rates of psychological and emotional distress to urban violence when compared to males (Voisin et al., 2010). Based on the perspectives of both genders, the researcher looked for emerging themes between interviewees (Stringer, 2014) to identify commonalities and differences in how they internally and externally processed the traumatic event. In addition, a natural setting was established (Creswell, 2014) to ensure the participants felt comfortable sharing their stories (Smith et al. 1995). At the time of the study, the SCSD was divided into four quadrants (e.g., east side, south side, north side, and west side). Within each quadrant, there were between four to five gangs and sub-affiliations (McLean & Worden, 2011). Therefore, the participants had the opportunity to select one of the five local library branches in a familiar neighborhood where they felt comfortable. All of the library

branches were located on a direct bus line. The central library branch was within walking distance from the main public bus hub. To accommodate the participants who used public transportation, a round trip bus pass was provided.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews. Phenomenological studies are intended to help society better understand lived experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Stringer, 2014). For that reason, there was one mode of data collection used for the transcendental phenomenological research study. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This form of interviewing allowed the interviewer to develop a set of three to five questions where a series of themes could be uncovered (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). Moreover, by conducting semi-structured interviews, the validity of individuals' responses can increase as a result of the same set of questions being posed to each participant (Smith et al., 1995).

Next, a sequence of questions asked the participants to describe: (a) in what ways did their experience with community violence impacted them in high school, (b) how did the school respond, (c) in what ways should schools respond, and (d) how did you respond to the school's response. Semi-structured interviews increase validity in the sense that the questions are sequenced based on potential emerging themes, allowing the researcher to put into context the phenomena being examined through participants' perspective, yet, there is flexibility for additional emerging themes to be explored (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Moreover, by providing participants with the same set of questions, there may be a variation in responses, but it is easier to code the information into potential themes, which is an important component in data analysis for

phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). For additional validity, the interviews were audiotaped to ensure that the perspective and words of the participants were captured accurately (Stringer, 2014). Each recording was transcribed by a professional transcription service. Both the audiotapes and transcripts are stored in a secured location at the researcher's home.

Procedures Used in Data Analysis

Initial coding. Initial coding is a form of analysis that allows the researcher to categorize data based on similarities and differences in participants' responses (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher used initial coding to determine if there were any nuances in the participants' responses. Moreover, to stay within the phenomenological framework of Moustakas (1994), initial coding was implemented as a way for the researcher to remain neutral in the analysis process, meaning the data reflected the participants' responses only.

In vivo coding. Moustakas (1994) provided specific steps in the data analysis process of phenomenological studies. *Epoche* is the process of conducting an interview without any preconceived notions or ideas about what the data will reveal (Moustakas, 1994). *Phenomenological reduction* (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003; Moustakas, 1994) has three major components that requires the researcher to: (a) categorize information into similar themes, (b) place the same value on each statement so that each statement has equal value, and (c) cluster independent themes. Using this method, the researcher used the data obtained from the transcribed interviews and identified common words or phrases that provided a more in-depth understanding or "essence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 82) of the phenomena experienced by the participants. In vivo coding or "verbatim coding"

(Saldaña, 2013, p. 91) was used as a method to ensure the voice, story, and thought processes of each participant was captured (Saldaña, 2013). According to protocol, each statement was coded, and statements and words used by the participants were categorized (Moustakas, 1994). Quotations were used to specify reoccurring words used by each participant (Saldaña, 2013). Next, the researcher analyzed the participants' responses by structuring the themes based on individual descriptions of the phenomena experienced (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher addressed the component of *reflexivity* or the process in which the researcher was transparent with the reader about her position on the topic based on her own lived experiences (Creswell, 2013, 2014). For this reason, the researcher described her own experiences from 2000 to 2015 with direct and indirect victimization relating to street violence.

Process. There were four phases to collecting the data. Phase I consisted of searching public records that named all SCSD graduates between the years of 2008-2014. The lists of graduate names were identified using an online media source. Between the years of 2008-2014, there were over 3,000 students who graduated from five SCSD high schools. Annually, the SCSD high school principals submit a list of potential June graduates to a local newspaper, which is then republished online.

Phase II consisted of cross referencing the last names of the 2008-2014 SCSD graduated students and the last names of the homicide victims who were murdered during the same timeframe. The Team A.N.G.E.L. memorial board was used to cross reference the last names of homicide victims, their families, and individuals who may have fit the sample criteria to participate in the study. Phase III consisted of contacting the directors of the Trauma Response Team and Mother's Against Gun Violence. Each director was

asked to help with recruiting potential participants. The directors were provided with sample criteria for potential participants of the study. In order to participate in the study, the potential candidate had to: (a) be 18 years of age or older, (b) be a graduate from the SCSD between the years of 2008-2014, and (c) have experienced the loss of a friend, family member, or acquaintance due to homicide (e.g., gun shot, stabbing, or physical assault). In addition, for their review, both directors were provided with a copy of the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix E). Since 1996, both directors of TRT and MAGV have worked in high-crime neighborhoods with marginalized populations throughout the city of Syracuse in multiple capacities such as community outreach, candle light vigils, Stop the Violence campaigns, and conducting interventions between rival gangs. Therefore, they had an established relationship with the children and families within the urban community.

After, St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the research (Appendix F), the directors of TRT and MAGV were contacted. Within 24 hours, they provided the names of nine potential participants who they believed fit the sample criteria. The directors contacted the individuals who had been identified on the list and informed them of the study. At that time, verbal permission was given by potential participants to allow initial contact with the researcher. There were four prior steps to conducting the interviews. First, the potential participants were individually contacted by phone. During the conversations, they were introduced to the study, and its purpose was explained in full detail. Second, the participants confirmed their interest in participating in the study. Third, after confirming their willingness to participate, three prescreening questions were asked. The prescreening questions were:

(a) Did you earn a high school diploma from the SCSD? (b) In what year did you graduate? and (c) While attending high school, did you experience the loss of a friend, family member, or acquaintance due to street violence? All nine participants answered yes to each question. Last, face-to-face individual interviews were scheduled. During the phone prescreening, the participants were informed that the interview would last between 30 to 45 minutes. Also, the participants were informed that a \$20 gift card would be issued as a token of the researcher's appreciation. Phase III consisted of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Two participants were former students, and one participant knew the researcher from the community. There was no prior relationship between the other four participants and the researcher.

All of the participants represented a marginalized population. Although the participants shared a collective experience, traditional methods and interviewing strategies did not work. As a direct result, to make the participants feel comfortable, a connection needed to be made between the participant and the researcher. Therefore, prior to addressing the interview protocol, such as the introduction letter and informed consent, the participants were asked questions about their neighborhood, the names of their parents, their siblings, and their future aspirations. The participants were very responsive to the line of questioning. In return, there was a transference of information that allowed both parties to become familiar with one another.

There were five stages to the interviews. First, each participant was provided with a Letter of Introduction (Appendix G). The contents of each document thereafter was explained in detail. Second, the participant was provided with an Informed Consent. The contents of the document were read aloud. Emphasis was placed on the purpose of the

study, its benefits, and the individual's right to withdraw from participation in the study at any time. Third, the interview questions were read aloud and explained to ensure that the participant understood their meaning. Next, the participants were provided with a list of mental health agencies in the Syracuse area that offered mental counseling at little to no cost. Last, before the participants were asked to sign and date the informed consent, they had the opportunity to ask questions. Also, the participants were asked if they would be available for follow-up questions if needed. Verbal permission was granted by each participant.

The interviews were conducted and audiotaped in a reserved private room at a local library. The library selected was located in a neutral neighborhood. The average interview session lasted between 28 to 44 minutes. As the participants responded to each question, items of interests or important quotes were jotted down on a piece of paper by the researcher and tagged as *note to self*. After the participants answered the four questions, the notes to self were revisited for clarification at which point the participants were asked to qualify their answers. At the end of the interviews, the participants were given a \$20 gift card. Two out of nine interviewees did not arrive to be interviewed. Therefore, seven individuals from the sample size of nine participated.

Profile of participants. For confidentiality, the participants were asked to select a pseudonym. The pseudonyms chosen were Ameenah, Kenya, Ksyn, Omar, Maya, Rico, and Thomas. Three out of seven of the participants identified themselves as males, while the other four participants identified themselves as females. One out of seven of the participants identified his/herself as bi-racial (African American and European

American). Six participants identified themselves as either African American or Black. Six participants graduated from School A, while one student graduated from School B. Six participants were raised in a single-female household, however, both Kenya and Maya stated that their father or step father was active in their lives. Rico was the only participant who was raised in a two-parent household. While attending high school, three participants' household incomes were classified as working class. The other four participants' household incomes were classified as low-income. Each participant had between one and five siblings who grew up and lived in the same household. All seven participants were born in the United States.

Summary

In conclusion, the research design was created to conduct a transcendental qualitative phenomenological study that examined high school students' perspectives on schools' responses. Its intent was to gather a better understanding of ways in which schools can promote student engagement for students who have been indirectly victimized by street violence. Chapter 4 provides the reader with an in-depth analysis of the data and the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction and Perspective

Chapter 3 provided a brief history of transcendental phenomenology and reasons why the methodology was selected for the study. The chapter also described how the methodology was used to collect and analyze. For example, in Chapter 3 the reader was provided a brief analysis of the criteria used to select the sample, the profile of participants, and methods used during the interview process. Interviews were semi-structured, audiotaped, and transcribed. In order to participate in the study, participants must have graduated from the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) between the years of 2008-2014 and experienced the loss of a friend, relative, or community member due to homicide while attending high school. Pseudonyms were selected to ensure confidentiality in participants' responses.

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to report the findings and themes that emerged from the data. The chapter uncovers, from the perspective of the participants, ways in which schools should respond to urban violence, self-identified ways in which they were able to get through the event and graduate from high school after losing a classmate, friend, close community member, or relative due to street violence, and ways in which schools should respond to students who are similarly situated.

Research problem. The data presented in Chapter 1 established that: (a) violence is prevalent in urban neighborhoods, (b) urban youth are exposed to community violence at a disproportionate rate when compared to any other peer groups, (c) students who

attend public schools in high-crime, urban neighborhoods are underperforming, and (d) the impact of CVE can cause social, mental, and behavioral disorders. Therefore, it is logical to believe that there are a number of urban youth who suffer from unaddressed trauma induced by street violence that can hinder their psychological development. In addition, data suggests unaddressed trauma may negatively impact students' ability to cognitively function in a school setting, which may cause them to underperform academically (Bemak et al., 2005). That said, there is a need for additional research to identify, from the student's perspective, the ways schools can play a more direct role to address students' socioemotional needs while supporting academic engagement.

Research Questions

The study examined the perceptions of seven Syracuse City School District students who graduated between the years 2008-2014. The participants experienced some type of trauma related to street violence while attending high school. The following criteria was used to select the sample: (a) the loss of a classmate, friend, acquaintance, or relative as the result of street violence such as a gunshot, a stabbing, or a physical assault and (b) a graduate of the SCSD between the years 2008-2014. The four research questions posed were:

1. How does experience with community violence impact high school students?
2. How do schools support the needs of high school students impacted by community violence?

3. How do high school youth describe their school's response to community violence and does the response satisfy the needs of students exposed to community violence?
4. From the perspectives of students exposed to community violence, how should schools respond to students exposed to community violence?

The interviews were semi-structured with a set of four supplemental questions that were developed after the first interview (Appendix E). Participants demographics are displayed in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1. Participant Demographics.

Findings and Analysis

The following section contains themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. There were three cycles of coding used to analyze the information: (a) initial coding – the beginning cycle of data analysis was used for the purpose of gathering data and generalizing the information prior to categorizing and assigning specific codes (Saldaña, 2013); (b) descriptive coding – the second cycle of coding was used to help to categorize the data and identify emerging themes for further analysis; and (c) in vivo coding – the third cycle of coding was used as an enhancing mechanism to provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences (Saldaña, 2013). The themes and subthemes are illustrated in Figures 4.2 through 4.5.

Question 1. There were 4 themes that emerged from the data as participants' responded to Question 1. The respondents internalized and described the impact

community violence had on their socioemotional and psychological well-being during high school.

Grief. Throughout the interviews, participants expressed feelings associated with sadness and grief when recalling one or more experiences associated with community violence. Their description was similar to case studies conducted on individuals who experienced some form of bereavement (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Thompson & Rippey-Massat, 2005; Voisin et al., 2010). Although it may be considered normal for an individual who has suffered the loss of a friend, family member, or loved one to experience a decrease in normal activity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), each participant stated that his/her sadness and decreased desire to participate in normal activities lasted for an extended period of time.

For example, Kenya, a 2014 graduate of School A, stated that the pain and grief associated with the loss of her best friend lasted for several months. Seven months after his death, she stated “[I] started to get over my grief.” She stated that at the time, “I didn’t even realize . . . I was dealing with grief.” During the interview, Kenya described talking to herself as a way to calm herself when she reflected upon her senior year, “It’s like I just got to the point where I was tired of being upset and being confused.” Thinking aloud, she stated, “I say to myself, ‘you weren’t living your senior year for you and him you were living it for him.’” Kenya recalled feeling turmoil as the death of her best friend caused dissention between two groups of friends. From her perspective, the collective experience they shared was too painful. Kenya stated that her friend was, “the glue that kept us together,” but it no longer existed. Equally, Omar, a 2014 graduate of school B, recalled feeling “empty, confused, dark, and sad” after losing a family member and close

friend due to street violence. Omar's cousin was shot to death during his freshman year, and his best friend was stabbed to death during his senior year. "I lost two people while I was in high school," he stated. Omar described his reaction to losing his cousin by stating, "my mouth just dropped, I [was] in misbelief [disbelief]" Omar stated that the loss of his best friend impacted him more than the death of his cousin, because he was on the phone with his friend 15 minutes before he was murdered. After going to the homicide scene, he went into shock,

I ain't believe it . . . so I just laid there [in bed] until the next morning [until I] figured out what's going on. I woke up in the morning. I saw all the Rest In Peace postings [on social media]. I'm like wow. One of my friends is gone. I ain't ever lose a friend in my life.

Omar stated that he withdrew from his peers for an extended period of time, "I didn't say nothing to nobody . . . up until his funeral, I didn't talk."

Disengagement. The participants stated that they were uninterested in participating in social activities with friends, family, or peers. Although they described a lack of energy during the day, they suffered from sleep deprivation. As a direct result, they were disengaged from school. The most common words used to describe the impact of community violence on their high school experience were: (a) darkness, (b) loneliness, (c) sadness, (d) confused, (e) disappointed, and (f) alone.

For example, when Omar described his reaction to his experiences, he stated, "when people pass on, I just go into this one dark room in my head and stay there. I don't leave or nothing. I just be there." He continued on to explain that the experiences caused him to socially and psychologically disconnect, thus, hindering his ability to be

academically engaged. Omar stated that for a week, “I kept my mouth-shut [I] walked with my head down with my hoodie on. I started slacking more. My first one (death of his cousin), I was like ‘forget school. I don’t even care.’” He continued, “I just shut down. Everything kicked in . . . it was harder for me to, like, focus and cope with school work and friends.”

Similarly, Thomas, a 2014 graduate of School A, experienced the loss of his friend during his senior year. The two boys were also classmates. Thomas used the words “shocked and sad” to describe how he felt when he found that his friend has been murdered. He described the reoccurring thoughts of losing his friend. Thomas stated,

I couldn’t focus at all . . . it was the only thing I could think about. I couldn’t focus on school too much . . . to try and focus on doing work . . . most of the time that’s not what you’re thinking about. You’re reminiscing like in the back of your head [about] old memories that you had or just your last encounter with the person . . . school would be the last thing going on in your mind.

Equally, Kenya, recognized that the death of her best friend made her feel socially disconnected and overwhelmed with feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, and despair. She described her mental state as non-existent,

you just got up and did the same daily routine every day, and there was no enjoyment or nothing to look forward to.” Kenya, stated “it hurts too much. I felt too much pain. I kept that repetitive image out of my mind or that repetitive feeling in my mind because it hurt too much I just really felt hurt and confused. I am still dealing with my own grief.

The participants who experienced the death of more than one friend, relative, or acquaintance, often used the term lost to describe their current state of mind.

Traumatized. All of the participants were devastated over losing their friend, relative, or classmate due to street violence. Data suggests exposure to violence can cause psychological and emotional distress (Bergen-Cico et al., 2014). In fact, over exposure to violence can cause an increase in psychological distress (Berman et al., 1996; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993). Five participants experienced the death of at least two close friends while attending high school. In the cases of Ameenah, Maya, and Rico, each recalled losing a childhood friend or class mate every year while attending high school, which significantly impacted their academic performance. As a direct result, they were emotionally, socially, and cognitively detached from school.

For example, Maya, a 2014 graduate of School A, recalled losing a classmate during her sophomore year. She considered him a friend, “It’s like, we can’t go to the same class no more . . . we can’t go to lunch together no more . . . it’s like a burden on you. What’s the point of going to school anymore . . . what am I continuing for?” Another participant, Rico, a 2011 graduate of School A, recalled at least one childhood friend being shot and killed every year that he attended high school. Rico described the impact that level of trauma had on his academic performance, “It made me not focused. It [violence] deterred me from what I was really focused on.”

Isolation. While grieving, a number of the participants described feeling isolated and detached from society, which is common among individuals who have experienced

some form of trauma related to violence (Guterman et al., 2010). For example, Ameenah, a 2008 graduate of School A, felt detached from her teachers and peers, referring to herself as an outcast, she believed that individuals who have experienced trauma as it relates to gun violence and stabbings “feel like they don’t fit in.” Ameenah used the term lost to best describe her emotional state after the deaths by homicide of multiple childhood friends and acquaintances due to street violence. She recalled at least eight individuals. Ameenah stated “[now] I feel like I’ve achieved a lot being that I went through so much, but I still feel lost sometimes.” Equally, Omar, described his psychological and emotional state after losing loved ones to street violence. He stated, “[I went into a] dark room in my head. I wouldn’t even talk to my mom. I would sit in my room and lock myself in my room, like I’m in a dark space.”

Suppression of memories. Three participants had experienced the deaths of at least three friends or classmates due to homicide while attending high school. As a result, they found it difficult to recall specifics memories attached to the traumatic events. For example, Rico named four friends who died due to gun violence each year of high school. He stated, “I don’t really talk about my problems; my issues. I’m more of a person who self-medicates.” Ksyn, a 2010 graduate of School A, internalized her traumatic experiences stating that the only way she was able to move forward with her life was to, “block it out.” Ameenah was unable to recall certain memories when speaking about one of her classmate’s homicide, “It was so long ago . . . I been through so much I can’t remember.” Ameenah continued on, “stuff like this affects student’s learning abilities as well as their ability to pay attention in class.”

Pessimism. Garbarino (1995) argued that people's social environment and lived experiences shape their *social map* meaning individual experiences that occur in people's lives determine what they perceive to be a normal part of society. He stated, "the child proceeds with the drawing of this map in response to experiences that arise from the social systems of the family, school, neighborhood, church, community, society, and culture" (p. 23). To reemphasize, social maps are the result of one's experience. In some cases, children's constant negative response from adults shape their perspectives of the world and others (Bergen-Cico et al., 2014; Cooley et al., 1995; Garbarino, 1995). For example, Omar had a poignant response when he described reasons why he avoided talking about the murder of his cousin and best friend to other individuals, "Like, I don't bother to tell people my problems, because 20% of them don't care, and the other 80% don't even acknowledge." Omar stated, "I feel like everybody really just care about themselves. If it's not their issue, they don't want no parts of it, and they're not going to acknowledge it."

Numbness. Research suggests over exposure to violence and living in socially toxic environments can cause one to normalize abnormal behaviors (Denson et al., 2007; Garbarino, 1995; Horowitz et al., 2005). The participants who experienced multiple traumatic events described their emotional state as numb. For example, Maya, expressed that she no longer cried after losing a friend or family member to street violence. In the beginning of the interview, she named three childhood friends and two classmates who were murdered during her 4 years of high school. After describing the nature of each death she said, "As a whole, it was hard, but then, like, as I got older, it got numb." When asked to describe what she meant by numb, Maya said,

Like I got used to it [homicides] so the more people that died, I just got used to it. So now, today, it's like when people die, I don't attend funerals. I don't do nothing with nobody. I just let it go. Like I don't cry. It's just I'm so used to it now. I experienced that [violence] at a very young age ever since I was seven with losing my uncle. It just don't even matter no more.

Research suggests 85% of urban adolescents are exposed to violence by the age of 9 (Epstein-Ngo et al., 2013; Lambert et al., 2010). Therefore, Maya's response was normal for an individual who has experienced multiple traumatic events.

Similarly, Ksyn stated that after a while, she became non-responsive when she heard about a homicide taking place in the community, "that was the norm." Another participant, Rico, recalled losing one childhood friend every year he attended high school and one cousin. When describing the impact each death had on his socioemotional development he stated, "I was kind of numb for a while. I really didn't know how to feel." Rico continued to describe the environment he grew up in. For him, street violence was an ongoing problem within his community. Therefore, he felt emotionless about homicide and violence, "I'm still seeing close ones and loved one fall victim to these streets. [It's] the same thing." Omar concluded his response to the question by stating, "Death; it's like nothing. I go through it every day."

In Question 1, four themes emerged, which described the emotional and psychological impact street violence had on the participants. The themes were: (a) grief, (b) disengagement, (c) traumatized, and (d) numbness. Three subthemes emerged within the participants' description of being traumatized, which were isolation, suppression of

memories, and pessimism. Each subtheme represented the psychosocial outcome and ways in which participants internalized the traumatic event.

In this section, data show three themes: (a) grief, (b) traumatized, and (c) numbness emerges. Within the category of traumatized, the results yielded three subthemes, which were isolation, suppression of memories, and pessimism. The participants used the term isolation to describe feeling detached from their social environment. The term suppression of memories was used by participants to describe a sensory overload of traumatic experiences. These were the participants who had experienced the loss of two or more friends, classmates, or relatives due to street violence. The participants suppressed the memories as a coping mechanism to block out the mental anguish associated with the traumatic event. Pessimism was used by one participant to describe his negative worldview.

Figure 4.2. Question 1: Themes and Subthemes.

Question 2. Three themes emerged from the interviews when the participants were asked to describe their school's response to community violence. Specifically, participants were asked to describe how the school addressed students' psychological, social, and emotional needs. In one case, three of the participants who attended the same school and graduated in the same class, perceived the school's response differently. The participants' responses are explored later on in this section.

Schoolwide shut down. Two participants believed that their school addressed the socioemotional needs of its students. Kenya and Thomas attended School A, and they

were enrolled in Program B. From their perspective, the school's response to the needs of its students was comforting.

Counseling. For example, Kenya stated:

I would say that I was glad I was in School A when that happened and the whole school just shut down . . . we had, like, tons of counselors. The whole library was shut down for people who wanted to come in and vent . . . the school was very, very strong, and very cooperative with us.

Thomas expressed the same level of comfort when he described the way school staff interacted with students, showing that they were concerned about the well-being of their students. From his perspective, the teachers' actions and words demonstrated they wanted to help. Thomas stated,

Teachers [were] talking to us not only on a teacher's level, but on a friend level . . . they understood, so they didn't, like, really force you to stay in class and expect you to . . . still do the work.

Thomas felt that the school staff provided an opportunity for the students to properly grieve the loss of their classmates. He stated that teachers encouraged students to "write out whatever we were feeling [and] write letters to our friend that passed . . . most of the letters were letters we were writing to the family to help comfort his family." Thomas qualified his response by stating, "When kids were actually in class, sometimes kids would just break down crying. The teacher would come, like, come over and, like, give them a hug and let them know they were there, stuff like that."

On the other hand, Rico recalled counseling being offered to students, but he did not utilize the services. He felt that no prior relationship had been established. Therefore,

he did not find the services useful. For example, Rico stated, “they would bring in some type of trauma-response counselors . . . nobody I knew.”

Lack of empathy. Five participants felt as though the school did not provide adequate support to the students. Specifically, school personnel failed to offer any emotional support. From the participants’ perspective, the lack of school response suggested that the school did not care about its students. For example, Omar, did not recall the school responding to either of his experiences. Both victims were murdered over the weekend. When he returned to school on Monday, there was no school response. Omar stated,

Nobody responded to it . . . nobody made a big deal about X. I really didn’t get comforted that whole day. Nobody asked me what was wrong with me except my cousin . . . she’s the only person that came and gave me a hug and asked me if I was okay.

Omar continued to describe the school response during his senior year. When he returned to school on Monday, during the third block, his guidance counselor removed him from class to speak with him. The first question he remembered her asking was “Why [is] everybody so sad?” Omar recalled sitting in the guidance counselor’s office with several other students talking about the incident. Then the students were released and told to return to their last block. Omar stated that when he returned to the last block, he was sent out of the classroom. His Spanish teacher accused him of being disrespectful because he refused to participate. Omar stated, “My teacher was completely negligent of what was going on. She didn’t even acknowledge that I had just lost [my best friend] . . . she acted like she didn’t you know, care.” Ameenah recalled losing a good friend and classmate

during her sophomore year. Ameenah stated, “I don’t recall them [the school] doing too much of anything . . . it was business as usual.” She described individual relationships between teachers and individual students being positive. Ameenah stated that when a homicide took place in the community, the teachers who had relationships with students were aware. As a result, the teachers “would ask them [students] are they okay and ask questions, but as far as administrators and counselors, I don’t recall them doing too much of anything.” Equally, Ksyn recalled the homicide of a classmate during her freshman year. The incident occurred over the weekend at a house party. When she returned to school on Monday, she stated,

I don’t remember the school responding at all. I don’t even think they acknowledge it I felt very hurt because, you know, someone my age who was physically at my school every day, someone I see on a regular basis, just passed over stupidity and gun violence, and honestly, in high school there is really no one to talk to about your feelings and what your feeling inside.

On the other hand, Maya, experienced two different school responses. There was a schoolwide response to a student’s death during her senior year. However, Maya did not recall the school responding to the deaths of two other students who were murdered during her sophomore and senior year. Maya, felt that the school’s response was unfair. She stated “. . . they don’t help you . . . they don’t say, ‘Hey what’s going on with you today?’ They don’t care.” Maya qualified her response by stating that *they* included, “teachers, administrators, principal, everybody.” Maya, was referring to the school’s response to a popular student who was murdered in the fall of her senior year.

The only response was for X. I feel like with certain students, depending on how well you knew the staff, they'll act like they care, like I'd probably say that School A cared for X, but also like him being in school like him getting in trouble, they didn't care. Him being there physically, they didn't care; but it's like when he passed, they felt like . . . it was a big tragic [tragedy] for everybody I think the only reason they did what they did for X, the whole moment of silence, was because X had an impact on at least 99% of the school, so everybody came to school with their heads down; half the school didn't come . . . that was the only person that I can remember that they did anything for.

Overall, Maya felt as though the school personnel did not care about their students. She stated, "You don't have a very strong support system in school, so that's why I honestly think everybody, besides your family, you turn to the streets because you think they give you the love that you're looking for." Maya's line of logic followed Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory. Specifically, Maslow (1954) argued that when people's environment is not emotionally and socially nurturing to their love needs, they will innately seek out other means to fill that void.

Cultural disconnect. A number of participants felt that there was a cultural disconnect between the staff and the students. From the participants' perspective, school staff did not relate to their students. For example, Rico stated,

The people that come and talk to these kids, they don't live the everyday life of a child growing up in the inner city, so they don't really understand what is going on . . . they just see the outcomes.

Ameenah was enrolled in Program B. None of her classmates lived in her neighborhood. From her perspective, the school administrators, teachers, and peers labeled her as a gang member because of the neighborhood she lived in. Ameenah stated, “It’s like the way, you know, I just feel like I was labeled, I wasn’t given a chance.” She did not recall identifying with any of her classmates. As a result, when an incident, such as a homicide occurred in the city, she would skip class to have lunch to talk with peers who lived in her neighborhood. From her perspective, Ameenah believed her school experience in itself was traumatizing. She described feeling devalued as a student due to the continuous lack of school response. “I always been interested in education, my education, and being successful, but it [the way she was treated by school staff] made me not want to be surrounded by the people who couldn’t relate to what I was going through.”

Figure 4.3. Question 2: Themes and Subthemes.

Question 3. The participants were asked to identify, from their perspectives, ways in which schools should respond to students. There were 4 themes that emerged: (a) connect with students and build relationships, (b) provide comfort, (c) provide group talk sessions, and (d) be aware and cognizant of what occurs within the community.

Connect with students and build relationships. All seven participants believed that connecting with students and building relationships was essential in helping students stay engaged. For example, Ameenah stated,

They [school personnel] should take the time to talk to the students to get to know the students and see what’s going on with them because stuff like this [violence] affects students’ learning abilities as well as their ability to pay attention in class.

Rico stated, "Talking to them [students] is one thing, but you gotta really understand where they're coming from to listen to what they are saying."

Similarly, Ksyn recalled building a relationship with the dean of students from the college she attended. Since graduating from high school, Ksyn has experienced the loss of more than five childhood friends due to street violence. During that time, Ksyn stated that her dean of students provided her with something her high school teachers and administrators never did, "I feel that she reached out more. As soon as she heard this incident happened, she reached out . . . and when you were in high school, you didn't have that." Kenya argued that even at the elementary level, school staff should be more involved with the lives of their students,

I feel like the teachers should start getting more close with the students. Find out what's going on [in] their life, what their life situation is . . . the little kids won't express it the same way we will [high school students], but they have their way of expressing I do believe that the schools should be more involved in the student's [lives].

Maya attributed building relationships with visibility by school administrators. For example, Maya felt like her principal was removed from the students' reality.

He really didn't do anything. He was non-active with us I think administrators should be active with their kids. Don't just sit in your office and do paperwork all day. Go out and meet your kids, go out and see what your kids are dealing with . . . a lot of people [students] go through a lot of stuff every day, especially kids where I grew up . . . even White kids and Puerto Rican kids.

Empower students. Three participants described the importance of school personnel supporting students by talking to them, encouraging them to stay positive, and instilling a sense of hope. From the participants' perspective, it people's actions that demonstrate that they care.

Figure 4.4. Question 3: Themes and Subthemes.

For example, Ameenah stated that she sought solace in developing relationships with school personnel who she believed had her best interest at heart. She stated, "[They] always gave me those encouraging words and would steer me down the right path." The school personnel she was referring to were two teachers and a community liaison who worked within the school. Omar, identified his math teacher as a positive force in his life. He believed the teacher encouraged him to graduate and stay focused on school.

He'd be like 'I understand,' but talking to me. He's going to give me words of wisdom [and] advice how to manage . . . he's been doing that my whole high school [career] that's why I can go to Mr. X even to this day.

Similarly, Kenya described the need for teachers to empower students by encouraging them to do better in school, "Don't just tell them you're going to be there after school . . . tell them you want them there, then they're going to come."

Provide comfort. The term comfort emerged over 15 times during the interviews. From their perspective, comfort was associated with addressing the students' socioemotional needs. Specifically, school staff provided a mechanism for students to openly grieve and express how they felt over the death of their friend(s).

Nurture. Maya felt that one way for school personnel to demonstrate that they cared about their students was to talk to them. For example, “Be like, ‘hey, we’re here for you if you guys need to talk we’re here for you’ . . . little things like that, it just shows that you actually care or have some appreciation for it [students].”

Maya felt that all staff should be charged with providing students with comfort, I think the entire school should participate not just one person or just the principal . . . for granted, you don’t want to do it, but take the kindness of your heart to do it for other kids. You [school] would want the same attention or same sympathy for you; if the same tragic situation happened to you, you would want comfort, you would want closure . . . I think everybody should just do it just to show that you care or you have a heart.

Similarly, Thomas stated, “Most schools should be . . . comforting more than trying to pressure the students to work.” Thomas qualified his response by stating, “Having somebody available to speak to or be spoken to just stuff like that . . . just ask and reach out to them, try to help them.”

Don’t judge. Ameenah stated that there were three identified school personnel she gravitated to in high school. Two of the adults lived in her neighborhood, so she felt that they could identify with her pain and, “knew what I was going through.” The other adult was her science teacher. Ameenah recalled the conversations she and her science teacher had stating, “I’m pretty sure that Mrs. X never experienced it [street violence], but . . . she never judged me, she always told me there’s a way of doing things, and there’s a way out.” Equally, Omar described bonding with his math teacher for the same reason. The math teacher did not judge him, and Omar felt respected. He stated, “Mr. X, he

understood me, never really hassled me about nothing. He accepted me for me and a lot of teachers don't do that.”

Lessen the workload. Participants believed that teachers could show compassion toward students by lessening their workload. For example, Omar stated,

They [teachers] should really just give people space if they know somebody has lost somebody. Don't slam them with work . . . that's going to make them panic [make them] even more stressed out. Just let them breathe, let them think, let them focus [process the death].

Another participant identified needing space and less schoolwork as comfort. Thomas stated, “I think school should be the same way, comforting more than trying to pressure the student to work and focus on school because it's not that easy.” One participant gave an example of a teacher's response to her and another classmate's grief. Kenya stated,

She was, like, don't do this essay, but if you do it, I'll give you credit, but if you don't do it, don't worry about it. I'm not going to hold it against you . . . she knew we weren't going to pass with a good grade.

Provide group talk sessions. All four female participants felt it was better to process their grief in a group setting. They thought it was better for students to come together collectively to talk about their loss. For example, Maya suggested that schools should allot time for students who knew the victim to, “go down to the auditorium, go down to the cafeteria, or even the main entrance just to come together.” Equally, Ksyn suggested, “I feel we need some type of group or program that needs to be inside of

schools that specifically handles and deals with violence like shootings, stabbings, and killings leading to homicides.” Kenya stated,

There should be a professional like that in school for us to go to that is free that we could just sit in there and talk and be like this is how I felt, these are the recurring situations that’s going on in my head It [talking] gives relief as this person cares because they’re making time every day or every week to listen to me.

In essence, the female participants wanted schools to reach out to students and allow them the opportunity to openly grieve with other students who shared in their collective experience.

Be aware and cognizant of what occurs within the community. All seven of the participants believed that school personnel needed to become more aware of the type of neighborhoods that students live in. The participants believed that if school personnel were cognizant of the street violence that takes places in their neighborhoods, they would better understand their students. For example, Maya stated, “Schools should be more open to street violence and know that a lot of kids that they are teaching come from street violence. They grew up around it. They’re around it 24/7.”

Kenya believed that school personnel would be more effective in responding to the needs of students who had been impacted by street violence if they understood the social environment the students came from,

I feel like for high schools the counselors, the teachers, they should realize that in today’s generation, there’s so many things that impact us as kids . . . with the

violence and peer pressure, different family situations, economic situations, I feel like the counselors . . . should be there.

Equally, Kenya appreciated the fact that her principal was well informed about incidents that were occurring in the community, which helped Kenya identify her as a positive force within the school, “She [principal] kept me whole . . . she had a little more power than the teachers. She kind of like gave information to those teachers who couldn’t understand.”

Question 4. The participants were asked to describe how they responded to the school’s response. The following 3 themes emerged: (a) disengaged, (b) engaged, and (c) devalued.

Disengaged. The responses of the participants varied in this section. Five participants recalled being completely disengaged from school after describing the lack of empathy from school personnel. They believed that neither the teachers nor administrators had an invested interest in their well-being evidenced by their lack of response. Therefore, they described feeling disconnected from the school community.

For example, Ameenah became very emotional as she described her experience in high school.

“I withdrew myself from my surroundings” she stated. I could have graduated with a Regents diploma, but I didn’t because of everything going on around me in my outside life. It affected my school work so I would do the bare minimum just to pass just so I could hurry up and get out . . . it was like I didn’t want to be there no more.

Omar described the same disengagement from school. “I didn’t really respond, I seen that my grades were dropping, and I was like ‘oh well,’ I don’t really care at this point.” As demonstrated later within this chapter, Omar stated that he did not become engaged in school until he reflected on what he believed his deceased friend would want. In the same way, Rico did not feel connected to school personnel. He stated, “I didn’t really respond . . . there was nothing the school I felt could do for me.” Thomas and Kenya were the only two participants who recalled a positive school response. However, when describing her response to school personnel, Kenya stated,

I felt welcomed you know, but at the same time I was shut-down I felt like even though they gave it to us [time to grieve], they couldn’t understand my pain where I was coming from . . . when you have that type of pain in your mind in a recurring situation sometimes those resources just aren’t enough.

Engaged. Thomas and Kenya recalled school personnel genuinely trying to console and comfort the students. From their perspective, they felt a part of the school culture because the school’s response demonstrated it cared by offering students individual counseling, group talk sessions, and allowing students to memorialize and openly grieve. For example, on-site counseling was offered to students for the entire school year, students were allowed to decorate the halls with pictures of their classmate, and the senior class was allowed to nominate the deceased for Prom King. As a direct result, Thomas and Kenya believed that School A’s response gave students the opportunity to build relationships with each other and school personnel. For example, Thomas stated,

Seeing that most of the students that were there were, like, all close not only to him, but me, too, like, we all bonded together . . . [we were] there for each other to, like, let each other know that it's okay.

Devalued. Maya attended School A during the same years as Thomas and Kenya, but she did not share the same feelings as her peers. Specifically, Maya had negative feelings toward the school personnel because of the way in which they memorialized the death of one classmate compared to other classmates who had been murdered a few years prior. Therefore, the lack of school response made her resentful toward the school administration. Maya stated,

That morning, they had a moment of silence for about three minutes. It was like the whole school was silent . . . it was just unreal . . . like you [school staff] did all of this for him, but for everybody else that somebody experienced death . . . y'all don't take acknowledge for Why don't you [school staff] acknowledge the other kids and say "anybody that knew this person, do y'all want to come sit and have a group chat?" . . . They don't do none of that, so I don't think they really care about what happens . . . it's like other kids passed . . . they don't get the same respect as student X. And I think it's so unfair.

Maya believed that the school's response was insensitive, and she suggested that the school valued student X's life over other students. Maya stated,

Like you [teachers and administrators] respect other kids more than other kids, which should not be fair, because we all attended the same school. We all got the same education. We all did the same classes. So what makes him [student X] different from everybody else?

Although Maya felt as though school personnel handled the death of student X unfairly, compared to their response to other students who were murdered, Maya was appreciative as well. For example, she stated, “the school gave comfort to us that day, so I liked it.” Maya continued, “I think that after student X, they [administrators] should continue to do it Don’t do something once when you’re not going to do it for other people.”

Figure 4.5. Question 4: Themes.

Supplemental question. The participants were asked how they got through their experience. They described four themes that helped them focus on graduating from high school: (a) support system, (b) self-determined, (c) stay active, and (d) this is what they would want. Based on their responses, getting through was a combination of at least one or more of the four themes.

Support system. In the following order, the participants identified three main support systems that helped them process trauma induced by street violence: (a) home, (b) community, and (c) school.

Home. All seven of the participants stated that their families were instrumental in helping them graduate from high school after they experienced the traumatic event. For example, Ameenah stated, “I had a good support system at home I would talk to my older brother or to people in the community.” She stated that talking to other people she had relationships with helped to relieve the stress from her traumatic experiences. Similarly, Ksyn felt that her mother was a positive force in her life and reinforced discipline, which helped her to stay focused on school. “My mom is very strict. She

didn't play. She was pretty much like [enforcing] go to school and get good grades.”

Ksyn continued to describe that the discipline from her mother made her want to do better.

On the other hand, Omar found solace among his pseudo-family. He described a close brotherly bond with 10 other males who lived in his neighborhood. “How did I manage? Just being with my brothers . . . we all went through the same things, shared the same loss, the same pain; being around them, that's how I coped.” Equally, Rico recalled the support he received from his family after experiencing four traumatic events while attending high school. Rico stated, “I had a very strong upbringing. I was raised knowing right from wrong,” which he believed helped him to remain focused on graduating from high school.

Community. Maya grew up in a single-female household. She stated that her strongest support system was not only her mother, but “uncle and grandparents” and a close community member. Maya attributed her school success to her relationship with her uncle and close community member. In essence, she identified the community member as a positive male figure in her life.

He helped me when I needed someone to talk to, when I don't feel comfortable talking to somebody else . . . or if I need help with a little bit of money for school [college]; so I look to him as a father figure.

School. There were three participants who identified at least one adult from school that they connected with. From their perspective, the individual cared about them because of the individual's actions. For example, Ameenah described her relationship with her chemistry teacher. As previously mentioned, Ameenah felt that her teacher did not cast

judgement on her life. In the same way, Omar, identified his math teacher and guidance counselor. He had developed a sense of respect for both of them, because he felt they reached out and tried to connect with him. Omar spoke highly of his math teacher, because the teacher treated him with respect. From his perspective, there was no other school personnel that he identified with. Omar stated,

They [school staff] value their jobs. It's all about a paycheck. They going to do their job at the end of the day no matter what you're going through . . . at the end of the day it's about their money.

Similarly, Kenya identified three school personnel who impacted her life in high school. For example, she stated, "The Vice principal, Mrs. A, [was] one of my support systems. My English teacher, Ms. B, and my mentor, Mrs. C." From her perspective, Kenya felt that the three women served as surrogate parents to her while in school, which helped her to remain academically engaged.

To this day, I still keep in contact with them and still love them as a resource and tell people [students] all the time . . . these people will help you . . . they weren't [just] my teachers. They were women, so they were like mothers to me in school since my mother couldn't be there.

Ameenah stated that her relationship with her chemistry teacher extended beyond graduation, "Still, to this day, reference letters and everything, I always call upon her. That's one person from high school I will never forget."

Self-determined. All participants referred to some form of perseverance as a motivating factor that helped them stay focused on graduating. For example, Rico stated, "I always had that bigger picture in my head. I knew I wanted better for myself . . . I just

persevered.” Kenya described getting through by making her own choices and living her life for her, not her friend. “I just got to the point where I was tired of being upset I built my own life I continued to make decisions that were meant for me.” Omar created his own mantra, which helped him get through and *manage* his pain. “Head up, chin down. Keep your head up, keep your chin down, be aware of everything, just pay attention, and know that life ain’t no game to play with.”

Stay active. A number of participants attributed staying active and involved in after-school activities as a contributing factor that helped them stay out of trouble. For example, Thomas stated,

I stayed positive by doing sports and stuff like that . . . I tried to stay busy rather than being like alone ’cause it’s like, the more you’re alone and not doing anything, the more pressure [is] on you.

Rico, described the need to stay active to help stay away from the negative activity his peers were involved in. Rico stated, “I was just always active growing up. I always stayed in extracurricular activities. I stayed in a sport every season. I just stayed busy.” He continued on to state, “I knew what distractions laid ahead of me [and] I knew if I wasn’t busy what kind of trouble I could possibly get into to.” Similarly, Ksyn stated, “I tried to find other things to do . . . like a sport or like dancing or something like that to keep me from certain situations where that [violence] can happen.”

This is what they would want. At least three of the participants described finding comfort in remembering the victim and living their life based on what the deceased would have wanted. Specifically, their desire to graduate had intrinsic value based on the memories of their friend. For example, Thomas stated that he pushed through high school

on the mere thought that, “This is what your friend would want, just what he’d be wanting to do to just finish.” Equally, Kenya shared the same sense of motivation, which was driven by what she believed her best friend would have wanted,

He would have been celebrating, continued on with his plans, so I felt like I had to do that I just came up with the idea that I have to just keep going on with my life plan because that’s what he would have did I continue to make decisions that were meant for me because that’s what he would have wanted.

Equally, Omar described *getting through* high school by remembering that his friend would have wanted him to be successful and graduate. Therefore, he realized that he had to manage his pain and get through, “I know that if the shoe were on the other foot, he wouldn’t have just gave up on everything, so I just couldn’t give up on everything.”

Similarly, Maya attributed getting through high school by doing what she believed her friends would have wanted,

When a person really close to you pass, it’s like what am I continuing for, and then you think about it and you have all these people in your ear . . . telling you, “Oh you should do it for this person, you should do it for that person, and you should continue to do it because he would do it You do it because you think it would make that person happy and proud of you.”

Summary of Results

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to report the findings and themes that emerged from the data. The chapter uncovered from the perspective of the students who were indirectly victimized by violence and ways in which schools should respond to community violence. The participants self-identified ways in which they were able to get

through and graduate from high school after experiencing a traumatic event that was induced by street violence, and from their perspective, ways in which schools should respond to similarly situated students. The participants were asked the following four questions: (a) In what ways did your experience with community violence impact you in high school? (b) How did the school respond to your experience? (c) In what ways should schools respond? and (d) How did you respond to the school's response? Last, the participants were asked, How did you get through?

Each finding yielded two to four themes and two to three subthemes. Figures 4.2-4.5 provide the reader with a visual for Questions 1 through 4, the emerging themes and subthemes. Equally, the figures displayed the number of participants who identified each theme and subtheme. The findings suggest that from the participants' perspectives, schools need to be more responsive when addressing the needs of students who have been indirectly victimized by street violence. The terms such as darkness, loneliness, sadness, confused, disappointed, and alone were used to describe the psychological imprint street violence had on their ability to cognitively function in a school setting.

Three merging themes from Question 1 were: (a) grief, (b) traumatized, and (c) numbness. From the participants' perspectives, the impact of street violence caused them to become socially withdrawn from school. In cases where the participants had experienced more than one traumatic event, they described becoming emotionally numb. The participants who fell into that category also described feeling isolated from school personnel and other classmates. The group also described their world view as pessimistic when referring to school personnel and the school personnel's ability to show compassion toward their students. In two instances, the participants had reached the point where they

suppressed the memories of losing friends because the psychological trauma associated with memories was too severe.

The findings for Questions 2 suggest, as a whole, schools were not actively responding to students who were impacted by street violence. There was one school that initiated a schoolwide shutdown after one student was murdered. Otherwise, the six students who attended that school during various years concluded the same thing—that the school's response was not typical. On the other hand, all seven participants stated that some form of counseling was provided for students to grieve; however, there was no consensus on the level of effectiveness. Specifically, from the participants' perspectives, there was no prior relationship established between the two parties. Therefore, the participants did not feel as though the counselors had an invested interest in their well-being. In fact, five participants recalled a lack of empathy and cultural disconnect between the students and school personnel.

The results yielded from Question 3 suggest that the participants found value in connecting and building relationships with students and staff. They believed that the relationships would help empower students and encourage them to stay academically engaged. Another theme that emerged was providing comfort. Participants described comfort in three additional categories: (a) nurturing, (b) don't judge, and (c) lessen workload. The female participants overwhelmingly described the need for students to grieve in group sessions. They believed that students would find comfort in talking with students who shared in a collective experience. All of the participants encouraged schools to be aware and cognizant of what occurs in the community. In Question 4, three themes emerged. The participants who did not feel that they had a relationship with school

personnel described their response to the school's response as disengaged and devalued. Only two participants stated that they responded positively to their school response.

The final, and supplemental, question, which was posed to participants developed after the first interview was conducted. The question asked was, "How did you through?" Three themes emerged: (a) support system, (b) stay active, and (c) this is what they would want. The support systems were described as family members or close community members who played an active role in the participants' lives. In one case, the participants recalled having a brotherly relationship with 10 other males who lived in his neighborhood. The participants also described community members helping them get through school and school staff as support. Partaking in extra-curricular activities was identified as one strategy that helped the participants get through high school. The idea of staying active was internalized as a way to help the participants stay out of trouble and off the streets.

Chapter 5 addresses whether or not the purpose of the study was met and identifies the relationship of the findings by connecting it to the literature. Based on the data, Chapter 5 also addresses the limitations of the study. Recommendations are made for future research, policy development, and better-informed practices.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

A number of school-age children suffer from grief and loss due to homicide (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009). Data shows, on average, urban youth are exposed to some type of violence by the age of 9 (Lambert et al., 2010). Researchers argue that the impact of street violence impedes on students' academic performance (Bemak et al., 2005), cognitive functioning, psychological development (Rosenthal, 2000), and socioemotional well-being (Denson et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2012). In addition, research suggests that the impact of CVE can cause behavioral, mental, and social disorders (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Rosenthal, 2000), which have been found as contributing factors to student disengagement. For this reason, the increase in community violence exposure continues to be a topic of concern among public school educators (Nadel et al., 1996; Saltzman et al., 2001). Due to the increase in street violence in urban communities, educators and researchers believe that a number of urban youth suffer from unaddressed trauma induced by street violence, which may adversely impact student engagement.

The purpose of collecting data was threefold. The first purpose was to identify individuals ages 18 and older who had been indirectly victimized by urban violence while attending high school, but despite the traumatic experience, they completed their studies and graduated. Second, the purpose was to identify from the individuals' perspectives strategies, individuals, or resources that helped them graduate from high school. Third,

was to uncover from the participants' perspectives ways in which schools' responses to community violence and potentially effective school interventions could be implemented to promote student engagement for similarly situated students. All three goals were met.

For example, the findings in Chapter 4 align with research that shows indirect victimization, as it relates to street violence, can impact the socioemotional well-being and cognitive development of students (Ratner & Chiodo, 2006). Additionally, the findings in Chapter 4 align with literature that suggest low academic performance occurs when there is no outlet for students to address the psychological, behavioral, and socioemotional distress associated with a traumatic event (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Epstein-Ngo et al., 2013; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998; Voisin, 2007). Last, the research identified from the students' perspectives the schools' responses that the students believed would potentially enhance the school experience for similarly situated students. There is a need for additional research to identify school-based interventions that may prove to be effective in helping students address traumatic experiences related to urban violence and to encourage student engagement.

Implications and Findings

For over 20 years, research has been conducted on the impact of urban violence on students' academic functioning. Specifically, researchers wanted to know the implications on CVE and its effect on students' cognitive, emotional, and psychological development (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Richters, 1990; Rosenthal, 2000). However, there is less research being conducted on indirect victimization and its impact on academic functioning from the standpoint and perspective of students. Moreover, there is less research that examines the success stories of students

who have graduated from high school, despite the challenges and barriers they faced. The current study provided former high school students with the ability to have a voice and openly discuss the challenges they faced while attending school and being an indirect victim of street violence, and the study provided a way for the students to voice in what ways school personnel could play a more direct role in the success of similarly situated students. The demographics of the sample in the study was similar to previous case studies conducted on urban violence. For example, 85% of the participants grew up in single-female-parent households, 71% of the sample identified their household income as low, and 100% of the sample attended school located in a high-crime neighborhood. In fact, School A hosts 18 different identified gang members as students (T. Jennings-Bey, personal communications, October 11, 2015). Therefore, consistent with previous research, youth who live in urban communities are exposed to violence at a higher rate when compared to youth who live in suburban and rural communities (McAloney et al., 2009). That said, the findings show that participants' response to Questions 1, 2, and 4 added to the layers of information previously discussed by other scholars.

Positionality. One component of conducting a transcendental phenomenological study is *epoche* (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994). This requires the phenomenologist to bracket their biases. The most essential component is one must acknowledge that previous life experiences impact the way in which they, think, feel, and react to situations. That said, the researcher of this study experienced direct and indirect victimization related to street violence. For example, while attending high school, the researcher experienced the loss of a close friend and classmate due to gun violence. Several years later, the researcher experienced the loss of a childhood friend who was

murdered by her boyfriend. The following year, the researcher suffered artificial gun wounds. Pellets were lodged in her torso after shots were fired inside at a party. During the researcher's senior year of college, the researcher suffered multiple stab wounds to her right hand, which resulted in three severed tendons. That said, it was imperative that the researcher set aside her own lived experiences while she analyzed the data to ensure accurate results. This will be further discussed in the limitations section of this chapter.

Individual response. Question 1 inquired about the impact street violence had on the individual socially, emotionally, psychologically, and cognitively. Moreover, the data show the impact of violence negatively impacting students' psychological and cognitive development. As a result, schools located in high-crime neighborhoods, such as School A and school B, are faced with the challenge of educating students who suffer from social, behavioral, and mental health disorders that affect their ability to cognitively function in a school setting.

The participants discussed the traumatic experience of losing a classmate, friend, or family member while attending high school. Similar to previous research, the entire sample described feelings and emotions associated with trauma, grief and loss, depression, and, in some cases, PTSD (Schwartz & Gorman-Hopmeyer, 2003). For example, the most common terms used to describe the socioemotional and psychological impact of violence were darkness, loneliness, sadness, confused, disappointed, and alone. Similar to Schwartz and Gorman-Hopmeyer's (2003) study on the impact of urban violence on academic functioning, this study data shows indirect victimization as it relates to street violence impacting students' ability to redirect and focus in a classroom setting for extended periods of time. Equally, the psychological distress associated with

street violence was prevalent as the participants described their thought processes during and after experiencing the traumatic event. In contrast to Lambert et al. (2010) study, data shows the participants' external behaviors displayed in the classroom were introverted. Specifically, instead of displaying external behaviors, such as aggression and disruption, the students become introverted, withdrawn, and detached from the classroom setting.

In the same way, data shows overexposure to community violence causes one to become psychologically desensitized. Specifically, the participants described their feelings as numb or they stated that they blocked it out, which referred to them becoming non-responsive after a traumatic event occurred. The findings are consistent with previous studies that suggest urban youth describe feelings of numbness or pathological adaptation (scientific term referring to desensitization) (Denson et al., 2013) to cope with the trauma of CVE. Also, the findings are consistent with research that suggests numbness is associated with normalizing abnormal behaviors, and it is used as a coping mechanism to suppress the trauma experienced (Bergen-Cico et al., 2014; Epstein-Ngo et al., 2013; Lambert et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2012). In contrast, the participants who experienced more than one traumatic event while attending high school described numbness as a strategy to manage the pain not cope with the pain. To reemphasize, the term coping was not used by the participants as a way to get through. Instead, they described numbness as a way to manage the pain. Therefore, it is logical to believe that the participants continue to experience unaddressed trauma as it relates to grief and loss. They are not coping with their loss, but they are managing ways to get through it.

In the same way, one cannot assume that a person must experience multiple acts of trauma before the aforementioned behaviors, feelings, and emotions are displayed. On

the contrary. Similar to the case study reported by Thompson and Rippey-Massat (2005), the research shows a single account of experiencing trauma causes psychological distress. For example, Kenya and Thomas recalled one traumatic event that occurred in their lifetime. However, they described the same level of psychological distress as the participants who had experienced multiple traumatic events. All of the participants described feeling socially disengaged, psychologically traumatized, and emotionally detached from the school setting. The most unique part of Kenya and Thomas' stories were that their feelings and emotions were identical to the other participants although they reported the most engaging response from their school.

School response. Question 2 examined how the schools responded to community violence. Specifically, the school personnel of the SCSD. The purpose was to examine from the participants' perspective what the school did to address their psychological and socioemotional needs. Overall, the findings for Question 2 are conclusive. As a whole, Schools A and B did not adequately address the needs of the students. Only in one year did the participants who attended School A describe the school's response as appropriate. To go deeper, the two students who attended School B described a year-long school response. They described school personnel, specifically, the teachers, as comforting and understanding. Kenya and Thomas were also students enrolled in School B, which was geared toward accelerated students. Their friend was enrolled in the same program. On the other hand, Maya, attended School A during the same time period, and she did not recall the same level of compassion extended to her and other students by school personnel. Maya internalized the school's inconsistent response *as valuing one student's life over another*.

The participants' psychological state of feeling unsafe speaks to the safety needs stage of Maslow's (1954) human motivation theory. Specifically, their response directly aligns with previous research that suggests students' perception of safety is an important factor when discussing their cognitive ability to perform well in school (Maslow, 1954; Ratner & Chiodo, 2006). From the participants' perspectives, addressing safety is not limited to physical safety, but it is the need for one to feel as though he/she is in an emotionally, mentally, and socially safe environment. When needs are not met, teachers and administrators are left with students who feel disconnected from school and school personnel. Therefore, students will continue to be disengaged and will not work at optimal performance.

Moreover, the findings show students need to feel that school personnel are emotionally invested. From their perspective, school personnel can demonstrate empathy by connecting with students and making an attempt to build relationships. School administrators must be cognizant of the importance of relationship building between school personnel and students, especially when it comes to counseling urban youth. The data shows grief and loss counseling was ineffective with the specified population due to the fact that—from the participants' perspective—there was a major cultural disconnect. Similar to the findings of Horowitz et al. (2005), the data show students do not utilize the counseling services offered by the school because there is no prior relationship established. The findings suggest that before practitioners can implement counseling, they must understand the challenges the client faces. Counselors must establish trust.

Potentially effective interventions. The most poignant part of this study was the responses provided for Question 3. The participants were asked to identify ways in which

schools should respond to street violence. Specifically, they were asked how school should personnel respond to the students' psychological and socioemotional needs after a homicide takes place in the community. Similar to other urban neighborhoods, the greatest number of homicide victims are between that ages of 15-19. Therefore, it is logical to believe older adolescents are more likely to experience the loss of a friend, family member, or close community member while attending high school. The data implies that it is imperative for high school personnel, such as administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and other support staff, take an in-depth look at ways in which they can play a direct role in providing appropriate counseling to address the needs of the students. This is discussed in further detail in the recommendation section of this chapter.

The most enlightening piece of data collected was in question 3. The participants were able to provide better insight on ways in which school personnel could play a more direct role in students' success. For example, the data show that students believe school personnel must build relationships with their students. From their perspectives, it is an essential component to effect interventions in the sense that students would feel comfortable discussing their feelings with an adult they believe has an invested interest in their success. One participant qualifies their answer by specifying the school principal's role. Specifically, they believe that school administrators need to be visible in the building and openly communicate with the student body since they hold the most authority in the building. Therefore, it is the building leader's responsibility to roll out a schoolwide response that addresses the students' needs when a crisis, such as a homicide, occurs in the community.

The next emerging theme was to provide comfort. The research shows the participants associated comfort with emotional safety and love. From the participants' perspective, comfort also included increasing students' self-esteem by empowering them through words of encouragement and showing empathy. In other words, school personnel should make an attempt to understand students' emotional state after a traumatic event has occurred. Similar to literary works by Bemak et al., (2005) and Berman et al., (1996), the findings imply urban public high schools need to create an intervention model specifically designed to provide urban youth who are impacted by street violence with effective counseling that is rooted in self-empowerment.

Within the same theme, it is noteworthy that additional subthemes emerged such as nurture, and don't judge. Participants qualified their explanation of nurture as their desire for school personnel to initiate some form of dialogue between students once they have learned that a homicide has occurred within the community. Equally, the participants' response of don't judge implies that students want school personnel to accept them for who they are and not judge them based on the environment they come from. The findings suggest students desire a sense of belonging. This line of logic directly connects to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory. Specifically, stage two is the safety needs, stage three is the love needs, and stage four is the self-esteem needs. Hence, Maslow (1954) argued that one's desire to reach his/her optimal potential is contingent upon the ability to feel as though he/she is in a physically and emotionally safe environment. Once the safety desire has been met, the individual can seek out love, which may be sought externally, however, the self-esteem stage brings intrinsic value,

thus bringing the individual into the final stage of enlightenment, self-actualization (Maslow, 1954).

Similar to Neugebauer et al. (2014), Saltzman et al. (2001), and Voisin et al. (2010), the findings show there is a slight variance in gender responses to street violence and ways in which males and females process grief and loss. Unanimously, female participants described effective interventions in the form of group talk sessions. Specifically, they wanted to have an outlet that provided the opportunity to sit with other students and openly express their feelings. On the other hand, the males described needing space. The male participants wanted school personnel to acknowledge their loss (e.g., ask if they are okay or ask if they want to talk), but from their perspective, sharing in group sessions might cause a world of emotions to come out. Therefore, they preferred individual counseling and eventually transitioning into a group setting.

The last theme, be aware and cognizant of what occurs in the community, connects to the cultural disconnect participants felt existed between the school personnel and the students. The data show from the participants' perspectives school personnel can be proactive and timely in their response to urban violence if they are connected to the community. Again, this implies that building relationships is essential to helping urban youth overcome the psychological, emotional, and social barriers associated with the impact of urban violence on student engagement and academic performance.

Theory application and students getting through. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Maslow's (1954) human motivation theory was applied as a theoretical framework to explain student disengagement and low academic performance of traumatized youth who have been indirectly victimized by street violence. Critics have argued that Maslow's

(1954) human motivation theory is outdated, stating that the ideas that drive its existence are not applicable to modern-day societal norms (Buss, 1979; Dillon, 2008; Pearson & Podeschi, 1999; Wertz, 1977). For example, Dillon (2008) argued that Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory lacks emphasis on individual experiences. However, for the purpose of the current study, Maslow's (1954) human motivation holds true to form. It is the basic tenet to explain, in a four stage process, ways in which one can reach their maximum potential. The intent of the study was to examine individual behavioral patterns based on a collective experience. Therefore, the research shows the four stages identified in Maslow's (1954) human motivation theory that lead to self-actualization, which are applicable to the aforementioned population. For example, the data validates Maslow's (1954) idea that people's perception of safety is the single most important factor in their ability to cognitively function in any setting. Moreover, the idea is that individuals are unable to reach their optimal potential and work performance unless the following four needs are met: (a) physiological, (b) safety, (c) love, and (d) self-esteem, holds true.

For the purpose of this study, there is an emphasis on the safety needs stage as a major component that causes students to become disengaged. Unconsciously, the participants described each stage of the Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory. On one hand, when the need was not met, it was perceived as a hindrance, barrier, or challenge that impacted their academic performance. On the other hand, when the need was addressed, their desire to academically perform increased. Hence, the students graduated from high school despite the traumatic challenges and barriers they faced while attending school.

With that said, a major component to analyzing the data was to uncover from students' perspectives the support systems that helped them get through. The four stages of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory were used as an initial foundation to categorize emerging themes. The physiological need stands alone. The study did not factor socioeconomic status or household income as a variable to student success. Although the majority of the sample grew up in single-parent households, the data does not show that living in a single-parent household was a contributing factor to student disengagement. There was no information to suggest that while attending high school, the participants were homeless or deprived of food, water, and shelter to survive. Therefore, the physiological needs of the participants' responses had no bearing on their success.

On the other hand, the second stage of Maslow's (1954) theory, the safety needs results were multi-dimensional. Similar to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory, the data show one's perception of safety supersedes all other needs. However, safety is not exclusive to physical space. It includes one's perception that he/she is in a socially, emotionally, and psychologically safe environment. Safe, meaning free from fear, danger, and chaos. Hence, the findings imply trauma induced by urban violence causes a psychological, emotional, and social fear to exist among adolescents that can hinder their cognitive ability to perform in a school setting.

The data also show an organized schools' response in the form of a school-wide shut down that may have helped students process their trauma. Equal to Maslow's (1954) human motivation theory, the findings show one singular traumatic experience can cause a lasting psychological imprint, as seen in the cases of two of the participants. The moment an individual experiences fear or danger, the psychological imprint is damaging.

For this reason, the younger in age an individual experiences pain associated with fear, relates to their worldview being filled with thoughts of hopelessness and despair including death (Maslow, 1954). This idea held true for five of the participants who experienced death at early ages or experienced multiple deaths throughout their lifetime. The data shows the lack of the schools' responses, coupled with experiencing ongoing violence and trauma, causes individuals to have a pessimistic worldview, and they become emotionally frozen and cannot push through the pain.

The school personnel did not provide the majority of the participants with a sense of safety. Instead, the participants described the love provided to them by their family, which addressed the emotional, social, and psychologically safety needed to manage the trauma. Maslow (1954) argued that individuals need to experience a transference of love in relationships in order to feel complete. The research show familial support is a strong factor in the psychological rescue of students who have experienced trauma relating to street violence. For example, all but one of the participants named their mother as a guiding force who helped them psychological get through high school. Then, responses varied between grandparents, sibling, and, in one case, an uncle. Noteworthy, too, is that family is not exclusive to blood relatives. In one instance, the participant described a group of friends, or a brotherhood, as family who helped manage the pain of losing his close friend. In another case, one participant described a close community member as a father figure. In another instance, the participant identified three female school personnel as her mothers. Hence, the term family is associated with individuals who provide some level of psychological comfort to the individual.

Consequently, the need for love is the continuum for an individual to reach the final stage of self-enlightenment. Maslow (1954) argued that acceptance or a sense of belonging within specific groups helps individuals define their self-identity and develop a sense of self-worth. Therefore, human motivation is contingent upon self-respect and respect from others. Here in lies the stage of self-esteem. Most individuals in society desire a high sense of respect for themselves (Maslow, 1934). Maslow (1945) claimed that an individual's productivity and contribution will have a positive impact on society when he/she regards his/herself with high self-appreciation and self-worth. However, when the sense of self-empowerment does not exist, one begins to feel a sense of inferiority. For example, the participants stated they felt devalued by the lack of school response to address their socioemotional needs.

The research shows, from the participants' perspective, that school personnel did not play a direct role in their success. Two of the participants who attributed the schools' response as a mitigating factor that helped them get through high school, was actually their relationships developed with the teachers and administrators that helped them better process the traumatic event. The most revealing pieces of data show the safety needs, love needs, and self-esteem needs (Maslow, 1954) were the main contributing factors to academic success and student engagement.

Limitations

Although the sample reflected SCSD high school students who graduated between the years of 2008-2014, the participants' responses to the second question, "How did the school respond to your experience?" reflected two out five schools' responses within the district. In addition, only seven out of nine individuals participated in the study. The last

two days of the interviews, two participants did not keep their appointments. At the beginning of the interviews, the participants agreed to answer follow-up questions for further clarification and to ensure validity of data reported. However, one male participant could not be reached after his interview.

For validity purposes, the positionality of the researcher is important when reporting data. One must acknowledge that his/her life experiences, what he/she sees, hears, and thinks shape his/her world perception. Before conducting research, one must be honest with him/herself about his/her positionality on the subject being explored. For example, the researcher experienced direct and indirect victimization relating to street violence; the researcher had multiple bullet fragments lodged in her torso after an individual shot inside a gun while a party. Also, the researcher was stabbed in the hand during her last semester of undergraduate studies, experienced the loss of two friends due to gun violence, and experienced the loss of over eight former students to resulting from gun violence.

In phenomenological studies, the process of epoche or bracketing (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994) suggests one casts aside preconceived notions, biases, and prejudgment. Moustakas (1994) argued that one's past can negatively impact his/her ability to reach a new level of consciousness to receive new information. A part of practicing the process of epoche is to acknowledge existing bias and address it as it emerges within the consciousness. Moustakas (1994) suggests reflective-meditation, the art form of writing or verbalizing biases as they emerge. This process was demonstrated by the researcher by writing in a daily journal. For example, at times, the subject matter being analyzed was overwhelmingly depressing. Feelings of anger, anxiety, or sadness

would arise in the researcher. The process of epoche requires the researcher to acknowledge that such feelings and emotions exist and to self-identify the causal effect for those emotions to rise. The key to understanding the process is through transparency and honesty with one's self.

Recommendations

There are three areas of recommendation addressed in this section (a) further research, (b) policy development, and (c) practice. Each recommendation is based on the findings of this study, the gaps in the literature, and the potential effective practices that could better engage urban adolescents who are impacted by street violence.

Further research. Additional research needs to be concentrated in the areas of grief and loss counseling for families and children in urban communities who are affected and exposed to street violence on a continuous basis, specifically at the high school level.

School-based interventions. Previous studies show that 90% of urban youth are exposed to some form of violence by age 9 (Epstein-Ngo et al., 2013; Lambert et al., 2010). Data show there is a significant number of urban youth who suffer from unaddressed psychological, social, and emotional disorders similar to PTSD observed in war veterans (Bemak et al., 2005; Denson et al., 2007; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Rosenthal, 2000; Thompson et al., 2012), which impacts their ability to cognitively function in a school setting (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009). Other research shows overexposure to street violence, coupled with unaddressed trauma, can lead to dissociative adaption (Bergen-Cico et al., 2014; Overstreet & Braun, 1999). Similar to the aforementioned studies, the findings in this study suggest that, over time, individuals become numb or immune to violent acts; they do not react (Voisin et al., 2010).

Therefore, it is logical to believe that there is a significant number of high school students who suffer from unaddressed, undetected, and undiagnosed symptoms of PTSD induced by street violence.

Urban public schools must should change their current evaluation and assessments of students. One way schools can address the issue is to administer, on a quarterly basis, a tool of measurement that specifically assesses PTSD, PTSS, and grief and loss relating to urban violence. There are a number of existing tools of measurement that can be adapted to fit the needs of urban youth, regardless of age. However, the Survey of Exposure to Violence (Richters & Saltzman, 1990) measures both direct victimization and direct witnessing of street violence, and it measures the level of frequency the incidents occurred within a specified period. To measure PTSD, one tool schools can use is an adapted version of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index (Frederick, 1985). This is a 20-item, 3-point Likert scale that measures symptoms of stress.

The findings show that the students do not feel teachers and administrators care about their well-being based on the lack of empathy demonstrated by the school personnel after a homicide took place in the community. To address the issue, school-based crisis-intervention teams should be established. On a weekly basis, the team should meet to discuss emergent issues that take place within the neighborhoods. Also, the team should comprise a representative from the local police department, a member of the building leadership, one classroom teacher per content area or grade level, at least two parents, and two or more community leaders who have a working relationship with the specified population. The purpose of the team would be multidimensional. First, it would

help the school better respond to students' psychosocial needs when a homicide occurs within the community. Second, it would create a sense of urgency for school personnel to better understand the chaotic environment their students live in. Third, it would build a social network bridging the gap between home, school, and community.

The crisis intervention team would be charged with creating a plan of action to address any fatal incident that takes place within the community that has the potential to impact students. An essential component to the crisis intervention team would be to send out community alerts, which would be similar to a phone tree. The community alert would be activated whenever there was a shooting or stabbing that takes place in the community. The alerts should be based on real-time, meaning that school personnel would receive an alert 24 hours a day. Community alerts would include the names of victims 18 years of age or older and the location of the incident. For all fatal incidents, the crisis intervention team members would report to school the next day by 7:20 a.m. to discuss a plan of action. The plan of action would include the following:

- Morning announcement that acknowledges the loss of life by reporting the family by name. Saying the family's name places value on the life that was lost and demonstrates empathy toward students.
- A brief moment of silence would allow students to process what occurred.
- The students would be informed that counseling is available.
- There should be two designated areas that allow students to mourn.

The data show that males and females grieve differently (Shields et al., 2013). Although males report higher experiences with direct victimization when compared to females (Voisin et al., 2010), females report higher rates of anxiety and PTSD

(Neugebauer et al., 2014). Therefore, creating gender-based interventions may prove potentially effective when helping students address grief and loss. Last, the data show that students find comfort in group therapy within peer groups (Bemak et al., 2005; La Roche & Tawa, 2011). Moreover, students find comfort when they connect with similarly situated youth who have shared a collective experience. It helps them to bond and support one another. Therefore, future school-based interventions should include elements in non-traditional therapy that could provide the youth with strategies to help them increase their self-image and self-identity, which in return increases self-esteem.

Policy development. Currently, there is no program designed to train school personnel on how to deal with urban youth. Institutions of higher learning that offer degrees in education should also offer a concentration in urban education; for example, a Master of Science degree in Urban Education. The courses would be geared around cultural competence, family dynamics, economics or lack thereof, urban violence, health care issues, and police issues such as police brutality. The aforementioned concerns are issues that urban youth face within their neighborhoods prior to coming to school. The courses would help urban public school educators better understand the psychosocial dynamics of urban youth that is often attributed to their behaviors.

Practice. The findings show that urban youth feel there is a cultural disconnect between school personnel and the student body. Overall, the participants did not respond favorably to the schools' response because there was no prior relationship or trust was not previously established. Suffice it to say, before practitioners can implement therapy, they must understand the challenges their clients face (Horowitz et al., 2005). Too often, programs are controlled by outside influences and individuals who do not see themselves

as a part of the community. As a direct result, districts contract and subcontract agencies to come into schools and provide a service that appears effective until it is implemented. Students' perceptions are their reality. Therefore, district funds should be allocated toward programs that students believe are most helpful to address their socioemotional and psychological needs relating to trauma induced by urban violence.

Similar to Berman et al. (1996), schools can measure the effectiveness of service providers by administering an adapted version of the Analysis of Social Support in School Transition (ASSIST) (Barone et al., 1987; Schmid et al., 1989) to students. This tool was specifically designed to assess individuals who students seek for social and emotional support after a traumatic event occurs. Also, it assesses the viable resources available at the school for the student to speak with about a traumatic event. Also, it assesses how often the student utilizes the services and resources available. Based on the students' responses, schools can measure program effectiveness and adjust the programs to better address the needs of the students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a significant amount of literature to suggest urban violence is a national public health concern. Research studies have linked the exposure of street violence to student disengagement (Bowen & Bowen, 1999) and low academic performance (Schwartz & Gorman-Hopmeyer, 2003; Thompson & Rippey-Massat, 2005). The high rates of neighborhood homicides, coupled with direct and indirect witnessing of community violence, causes emotional and cognitive detachment from school, thus, causing a decrease in academic performance (Zona & Milan, 2006). Currently, there is a gap in literature that examines indirect victimization relating to urban

violence and its impact on student engagement for high school students, although research suggests there is a higher rate of community violence exposure in older adolescents (Ratner & Chiodo, 2006).

Equally, there are mental health concerns related to community violence exposure in urban youth (Zona & Mila, 2011). Children who live in high-crime urban neighborhoods are regularly exposed to some type of street violence, which impacts their ability to cognitively, psychologically, and socially function properly (Overstreet & Braun, 2000). However, there are a number of urban youth who have overcome the challenges and barriers of being exposed to violence. They have since graduated from high school and are working on pursuing careers in mental health, nursing, criminal justice, and education. Their experiences and stories provided better insight to help educators develop support systems that will encourage school personnel to play a more direct role in helping urban students remain academically engaged throughout their formative educational years.

Conclusion

The dissertation consisted of five chapters: (a) Introduction, (b) Review of Literature, (c) Methodology, (d) Data Collection and Analysis, and (e) Discussion. The purpose of Chapter 1 was to provide the reader with a brief overview of the increasing problem of urban violence in the US and its impact on academic functioning and student engagement. Nationally, low academic performance, dismal test scores, low graduation rates, and an increase of community violence exposure is a trending theme among urban public educators (Ng-mak et al., 2004; Rosenthal, 2001). Moreover, research suggests overexposure to street violence can hinder the psychological development of urban

adolescents, which may result in their inability to cognitively and socially function in a school setting (Cooley et al., 1995; Richters, 1990; Richters & Saltzman, 1990; Richters et al., 1993). A number of urban students are living in low socioeconomic neighborhoods where poverty, lack of education, and exposure to violence is generational. That said, Chapter 1 established (a) violence is prevalent in urban neighborhoods, (b) urban youth are exposed to street violence at a disproportionate rate when compared to all other peer groups, (c) public schools located in high-crime urban neighborhoods are underperforming, and (d) the impact of community violence exposure can cause social, mental, and behavioral disorders in students. Therefore, it is logical for public school educators to believe that a number of their students suffer from unaddressed trauma induced by street violence, which may hinder their psychological development, adversely affect their ability to cognitively function, and prevent them from being academically productive.

Research supports the idea that one's mental capacity to function in society increases when he/she believes that he/she is in a psychologically, emotionally, socially, and physically safe environment (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Maslow, 1954; Selner-O'Hagan et al., 1998). As a direct result, urban schools are faced with the challenge of trying to educate students who are at a psychological disadvantage due to living in war-zone communities (Gillock & Reyes, 1999; Hammond, 1991; Lambert et al., 2010). How individuals navigate these circumstances is instructive for additional research in this area.

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory was used as a theoretical framework to explain the low academic performance of urban youth. The four stages of the theory include: (a) physiological needs, (b) safety needs, (c) love needs, and (d) self-esteem

needs. Maslow (1954) argued that each stage is a continuum to reach the final stage of self-enlightenment. Chapter 1, examined whether or not the theory was applicable to the success of urban students who experienced some form of indirect victimization relating to street violence.

Chapter 2 identified key areas of research that provided evidence to support the idea that community violence presented significant challenges for the cognitive, psychological, and emotional functioning of urban adolescents, especially for youth who live in high-crime areas. The three main focus areas that were used to examine urban violence and its impact on academic performance were: (a) emotional distress, (b) student engagement, and (c) school- and community-based interventions. The research suggested females report higher rates of psychological and emotional distress due to street violence when compared to their male counterparts. However, males reported experiencing more direct accounts of street violence. In conclusion, Chapter 2 established that, overall, public schools are not providing effective interventions that address the psychological and socioemotional needs of the population being served.

Chapter 3 provided readers with a detailed account of the methodology process used to collect and analyze data for this study. Specifically, the research design focused on the qualitative transcendental phenomenological method created by Edmund Husserl (1931) and redefined by Carl Moustakas (1994) to better understand the lived experiences of high school students who experienced indirect victimization due to street violence. The process of selecting a sample consisted of the following four questions that were posed to the participants:

1. In what ways did your experience with community violence impact you in high school?
2. How did the school respond to your experience?
3. In what ways should schools respond? and
4. How did you respond to the school's response?

The context for the research was conducted in the city of Syracuse. At the time of this study, the city of Syracuse ranked number one for the highest concentrated poverty for African Americans and Latinos in the nation (Jargowsky, 2015). The city's public school district student data showed that district-wide, 73% of students are considered economically disadvantage based on their household income. Of the students in the Syracuse City School District, 63% are of African American descent, although African Americans are the ethnic minority in Syracuse city residents (New York State Report Card, 2015). At the time of this study, the city of Syracuse was home to over 27 separate gangs representing over 1,472 gang members who operated within the city limits (Eisenstadt, 2013). That said, The John Finn Institute for Public Safety, Inc. (2013) reported that the rate of violent acts was 94% higher than the average city its size and 18% higher when compared to larger cities. Therefore, it was reasonable to conclude that the average student who attended the SCSD was exposed to violence at a comparable or higher rate than youths living in larger cities. Noteworthy is that 18 out of 32 schools in the city of Syracuse are on the persistently failing schools list, graduating less than 52% of its high school seniors (New York State Report Card, 2013).

Phase one, the process of selecting a sample, consisted of searching public records that named all SCSD graduates between the years 2008-2014. The lists of graduate names

were identified using an online media source. Between the years 2008-2014, there were over 3,000 students who graduated from five SCSD high schools. Annually, the SCSD high school principals submit a list of potential June graduates to a local newspaper, which is then republished online.

Phase two consisted of cross referencing the last names of 2008-2014 SCSD graduated students and the last names of the homicide victims who were murdered during the same timeframe. A memorial board was used to cross reference the last names of homicide victims, their families, and individuals who might have fit the sample criteria to participate in the study. Phase three consisted of contacting the directors of the Trauma Response Team and Mothers Against Gun Violence to help with recruiting. Each director was asked to help with recruiting potential participants. In order to participate in the study, the candidate had to (a) be 18 years of age or older, (b) be a graduate from the SCSD between the years of 2008-2014, and (c) have experienced the loss of a friend, family member, or acquaintance due to homicide (e.g., gun shot, stabbing, or physical assault).

After, IRB approval to conduct research, the directors of TRT and MAGV were contacted. Within 24 hours, they provided the names of nine potential participants who they believed fit the sample criteria. Prior to conducting the interviews, there were four steps. First, potential participants were individually contacted by phone. Second, the participants confirmed their interest to participate in the study. Phase three occurred after confirming the participants' willingness to participate, and three prescreening questions were asked. The prescreening questions were (a) Did you earn a high school diploma from the SCSD? (b) In what year did you graduate? and (c) While attending high school,

did you experience the loss of a friend, family member, or acquaintance due to street violence? Face-to-face individual interviews were scheduled. Also, participants were informed that a \$20 gift card would be issued as a token of appreciation.

Phase four consisted of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Three out of seven participants knew the researcher. Two individuals were former students, and one participant knew the researcher from the community. There was no prior relationship between the other four participants and the researcher. The interviews were conducted and audiotaped in a reserved private room at a local library. The library selected was located in a neutral neighborhood. The average interview session lasted between 28 to 44 minutes. Two out of the nine interviewees did not keep their appointments to be interviewed. Ultimately, seven individuals from a sample size of nine participated.

In Chapter 4, the findings of the data were presented. The participants self-identified ways in which they were able to get through and graduate from high school after experiencing a traumatic event induced by street violence, and from their perspective, they offered ways in which schools could respond to similarly situated students. All of the four previously identified interview questions were presented. However, a supplement question was added that asked: "How did you get through?" The findings per question yielded two to four themes and two to three subthemes. The findings suggest that from the participants' perspective, schools need to be more responsive when addressing the needs of students who have been impacted by street violence. Terms such as darkness, loneliness, sadness, confused, disappointed, and alone were used to describe the socioemotional and psychological impact street violence had on their socioemotional well-being.

Three themes that emerged from Question 1 were: (a) grief, (b) traumatized, and (c) numbness. From the participants' perspective, the impact of street violence caused them to become socially withdrawn from school. There were four cases where the participants described experiencing the loss of one friend per year due to gun violence. The participants who fell into that category also described feeling isolated from school personnel and other classmates. In one case, the participant was pessimistic about school staff and their ability to show compassion toward their students. In two instances, the participants had reached the point where they suppressed the memories of losing friends because the pain was too severe.

The findings for Questions 2 suggested, overall, that the schools' responses were not adequate to the students who were impacted by street violence. Although all of the participants stated that the schools provided some form of grief counseling, there was no consensus on the level of effectiveness. The participants believed there was a disconnect between the school personnel and the students. Specifically, from the participants' perspective, there was no prior relationship established between the two parties. Therefore, the participants did not feel as though the counselors had an invested interest in their well-being.

The data from Question 3 suggests that the participants found value in building relationships between students and school personnel. They believed that the relationships would help empower students and encourage them to stay academically engaged. Another theme that emerged was providing comfort. Comfort was divided into three categories: (a) nurturing, (b) don't judge, and (c) lessen workload. Female participants overwhelmingly described the need for students to grieve in group sessions. They believed that students

would find comfort in talking with other students who shared in a collective experience. All of the participants encouraged schools to be aware and cognizant of what occurs in the community.

Equally, 3 themes emerged from Question 4: (a) engaged, (b) disengaged, and (c) devalued. The participants who did not feel that they had a relationship with the school staff described their response to the school's response as disengaged and devalued. Only two participants responded favorably to their school's response.

The final and supplemental question that was posed to the participants was developed after the first interview was conducted. The question asked was, "How did you get through?" The three emerging themes from the answers to that question were (a) support system, (b) stay active, and (c) this is what they would want. The support system the participants' described consisted of family members or close community members who played an active role in the participants' lives. The participants also described community members helping them get through school and school personnel helping them get through school. Participating in extra-curricular activities was identified as one strategy that helped the participants get through high school. The idea of staying active was internalized as a way to help the participants stay out of trouble and off the streets.

Chapter 5 analyzed the meaning of the data. That data showed that the participants' responses to indirect victimization significantly impacted their ability to cognitively function in a school setting. Emotionally and psychologically, the participants were detached from their social environment, which caused a decrease in academic performance. They expressed depressive-like symptoms associated with trauma and PTSD. The findings support previous research that suggest urban youth who live in war-

zone neighborhoods suffer unaddressed trauma, which is induced by street violence and can cause social, emotional, and behavior disorders similar to war veterans. All of the participants were traumatized by their experiences. In some cases, the participants reported suppressing memories associated with the traumatic event. In essence, the individuals perceived street violence as normal. Similar to previous case studies, individuals who are overexposed to urban violence become desensitized to traumatic events when they occur as a coping mechanism to manage the pain. This finding supports existing literature that suggest overexposure to urban violence can lead to dissociative adaptation or the normalizing of abnormal behavior as a coping mechanism. In addition, the data show there is a direct correlation between urban violence and its impact on student performance.

The lack of school response resulted in the participants feeling devalued, untrusting of school personnel, and, in some cases, isolated from their peers. The findings uncovered, from the participants' perspective, ways in which schools can play a more direct role in student success is by

- connecting and building relationships with students;
- comforting students by talking to them and acknowledging their loss;
- allowing students with the opportunity to grieve in an individual or group setting; and
- being cognizant and aware of incidents that occur in the community that impact students' lives (e.g., street violence).

How does this research demonstrate a commitment to social justice? There is no greater social justice than education. The research conducted in this study provided

another perspective which was that of the student. Educators must acknowledge that we do not have all the answers. We must acknowledge that our students know, firsthand, what can be done to best address their needs. That said, the study examined ways in which educators can play a more active role in helping urban students become academically engaged. Moreover, the results from the data were not specific to one particular ethnic group. As the literature shows, urban violence is a national epidemic. Therefore, the data obtained in this study can be applied to all groups of students who have experienced trauma induced by street violence.

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Appendix A



July 23, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I, Timothy Jennings-Bey, the director of Syracuse Trauma Response Team will help with the recruitment process for Ms. Salaam's research based on the information she has provided me. She has shared in detail the purpose of her research and her intent of implementing the findings. If you have any questions I can be reached at (315) 575-8631. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Timothy Jennings-Bey
Director, Syracuse Trauma Response Team

Appendix B



P.O. BOX 614 SYRACUSE, NY 13205

Date 7/26/2015

To Whom It May Concern:

This is in reference to Najah Salaam. I, Helen Hudson, co-founder of Mother's Against Gun Violence am willing to help recruit potential participants for Ms. Salaam's proposed study based on the criteria she outlined in her dissertation. Ms. Salaam has shared with me the purpose of her research and how she intends to implement the findings of her research.

Any questions or concerns I can be reached at 315-345-8674 or helenh518@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Helen Hudson
Co-Founder MAGV

Appendix C

St. John Fisher College

Informed Consent

Title of Study: **Indirect Victimization and Community Violence Exposure: An Examination of Urban Public School Graduates and ‘Getting Through’.**

Name(s) of Researcher(s): A. Najah Salaam

Faculty Supervisor: C. Michael Robinson, Ed.D. Phone for Further Information:
[REDACTED] (o) or [REDACTED] (c) or [REDACTED]

Purpose of Study:

To provide better insight to help educators develop support systems that will encourage school personnel to play a more direct role in helping urban students remain academically engaged throughout their formative educational years.

Place of Study: Syracuse, New York

Length of Study: 30 to 40 minutes

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks to this study. The benefits of this research is that you will be helping urban public school educators better understand how they can play a direct role in students’ success. This research will help to provide youth impacted by community violence with potentially effective school based interventions that address their well-being as well as to help increase student engagement.

If you do not wish to participate in the interview, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without consequences or penalty, at any time.

Method for protecting confidentiality: To maintain confidentiality each participant will be provided with a pseudonym based on their gender (e.g. “Allison”, “Ana”, “Robert”, “Emmanuel”). No participant’s name will be used in the study.

Participant’s Rights: As a participant you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and any risks and benefits, explained to you prior to your participation.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that would be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of your results of this study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in this study.

Print Name (Participant)	Signature (participant)	Date
Print Name (Researcher)	Signature (Investigator)	Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher Najah Salaam at [REDACTED] or by email [REDACTED]. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact Dr. C. Michael Robinson at [REDACTED] (o), [REDACTED] (c) or [REDACTED]. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding confidentiality, please call Jill Rathbun [REDACTED]. She will direct your call to a member of the IRB at St. John Fisher College.

Appendix D

Mental Health Resources

Agency/Program	Contact Information
Brownell Center	(315) 472-4471
Contact Community Services	24-hour mental health crisis hotline (315) 251-0600 2-1-1 CNY- Mental health hotlines and mental health counseling 24-hour Crisis Chat: contactsyracuse.org
National Suicide Prevention	(800) 273-TALK (8255) Toll-free hotline available to anyone in emotional distress.
Syracuse Community Health Center	(315) 476-7921; provides counseling and psychological services at a low cost or free depending on health insurance.
Trauma Response Team (United Way of CNY)	(315) 428-2211; provides grief and loss counseling specific to families and individuals who have been affected by homicide.

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Gender: M _____ F _____

Ethnicity: African American/Black _____ Latino _____

European-American/White _____ Asian _____ Alaskan/Pacific Islander _____

Other _____ (please specify).

Year of Graduation: _____

1. In what ways did your experience with community violence impact you in high school?
2. How did the school respond to your experience?
3. In what ways should schools respond?
4. How did you respond to the school's response?

Supplemental question:

How did you get through?

Appendix F
IRB Approval Letter



September 30, 2015

File No: 3483-091715-01

A. Najah Salaam
St. John Fisher College

Dear A. Najah Salaam:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your Expedited Review project, "Indirect Victimization and Community Violence-Exposure: An Examination of Urban Public School Graduates and "Getting Through".

Following federal guidelines, research related records should be maintained in a secure area for three years following the completion of the project at which time they may be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at irb@sjfc.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eileen Lynd-Balta".

Eileen Lynd-Balta, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

ELB:jdr

Appendix G

Letter of Introduction

Dear [insert name],

My name is Najah Salaam and I am a doctoral student with the St. John Fisher College Executive Leadership program. I am conducting research to better understand community violence and its impact on academic achievement for individuals who have graduated from the Syracuse City School District. Your name has been identified by the directors of Mother's Against Gun Violence and the Syracuse Trauma Response Team as: (a) being 18 years of age or older, (b) having graduated from the Syracuse City School District between 2008-2014, (c) experiencing some type of indirect victimization as it relates to community violence, and (d) volunteering to share your experience with me for the sole purpose of this research project.

If you are still willing to meet with me there are four questions that I will ask you based on your school experience. The questions are as follows:

1. In what ways did your experience with community violence impact you in high school?
2. How did the school respond to your experience?
3. In what ways should schools respond?
4. How did you respond to the school's response?

The interview will take between 30 to 45 minutes. Although I will not be taking notes during the interview our conversation will be audiotaped and then transcribed. To ensure confidentiality, your name will not be used in the final stage of the research. Instead, I will use a pseudonym such as "Johnny", "Elizabeth", or "Danielle" when writing about your experience.

Your decision to participate in this process is completely voluntary. At any time, you may choose not to participate. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me via email at [REDACTED] or by phone at [REDACTED]. I am available at your convenience to discuss any questions you may have.

Thank you very much for considering this opportunity!!

Sincerely,

Najah Salaam