ABSTRACT

Title: FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONG EARLY
                                ADOLESCENTS EXPOSED TO COMMUNITY
                                VIOLENCE: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES,
                                AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL
                                TEACHERS IN PREDOMINANTLY AFRICAN
                                AMERICAN URBAN COMMUNITIES

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Community violence places youth at risk for adverse developmental consequences such as poor school achievement, aggression, and self-destructive behaviors. Although an increasing number of studies have investigated the strategies that parents use to protect their children from negative effects of violence exposure, there is a dearth of research that focuses on the challenges faced by teachers in violent communities. Recognizing the potential for teachers to have a major influence on early adolescents' development, this study addressed a major gap in the literature by examining: 1) the challenges thatteachers face in low-income neighborhoods with high community violence; 2) the strategies thatteachers use to foster resilience in the ir students; and 3) the supports that teachers need to more effectively teach and guide youth within violent communities.

This qualitative study adopted an ecological/risk and resilience framework. Teachers' voices provided important information about the challenges of teaching in violent neighborhoods and the protective factors within various ecological contexts that

help teachers foster youth resilience and maintain their own teaching effectiveness. The investigator recruited 20 teachers from three middle schools with predominantly African American students located in neighborhoods with high violence levels in Maryland.

A modified grounded theory approach was used for data analysis. Results revealed that community violence was the central phenomenon affecting teachers in the three schools. Three emergent concepts framed teachers' depiction of their challenges, strategies, and support needs: 1) guidance; 2) structure; and 3) self preservation. Specifically, teachers in violent communities confronted challenges providing youth with guidance and structure, while preserving their own mental health. They employed guidance-related strategies to foster youth resilience; addressed structure in their classrooms, school, and community; and engaged in behaviors to preserve their personal mental health. Finally, teachers expressed needs for support to effectively guide youth; improve school and community structure; and access mental health-related services. The study concludes by discussing implications of the findings for programs and policies, including the need to improve teacher training, school leadership, school security, peer mediation and counseling services, parent education, and community involvement in anti-violence initiatives. Suggestions for future research are also discussed.

FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENTS EXPOSED TO
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NEEDS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS IN PREDOMINANTLY AFRICAN
AMERICAN URBAN COMMUNITIES

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Government's *Healthy People 2010*, a framework to establish national

health prevention goals, reported that community violence is a pervasive threat to the

health and well-being of our nation's young people (*Healthy People 2010*, 2000). More

than 33% of American children and adolescents state that they have been direct victims

of community violence and more than 75% report indirect exposure to such violence

(National Center for Children Exposed to Violence [NCCEV], 2003). Children and

adolescents in low-income, urban areas are especially likely to experience violence and

its related stressors (*Healthy People 2010*, 2000). Schools have the potential to be major

protective factors for children and youth who confront community violence. Research

indicates that despite a school's location in an area disproportionately affected by poverty

and violence, a school can offer guidance and coping strategies that play an instrumental

role in children's healthy development (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992;

Garmezy, 1993; O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone, & Muyeed, 2002; Rutter, 1995).

Teachers in low-income urban communities confront increasing levels of

community violence, including gunshots, drug dealers near the school, and gang-related

activity (Garbarino et al., 1992; O'Donnell et al., 2002). In one of the defining

publications on community violence, Garbarino et al. (1992) reported that teachers and

school staff in violent areas often experience feelings of grief and loss that compromise

their ability to remain available to the children and parents who need their help.

Haggerty, Sherrod, Garmezy, and Rutter (1994) noted that the risk status of students

cannot be disentangled from the risk status of school staff. In urban schools where

poverty, family stress, and violence place many children at risk for adverse outcomes, the

school staff may be called upon to exert extraordinary effort to address children's needs. However, staff in impoverished schools often lack even the basic resources needed for teaching (Garbarino et al., 1992). In school environments where teacher morale is low, communication between teachers and administrators is absent, and there are few structures to involve teachers in planning and decision-making, teachers may feel powerless to help youth deal with complex problems such as community violence. Current research has not adequately examined the multiple risk factors that challenge teachers working in violent communities. There is a clear need to explore how teachers are reacting to this serious public health problem (Garbarino et al., 1992; Stuber, Nader, & Pynoos, 1997).

Over the past 20 years, there has been an increase in research on resiliency and the protective factors that buffer children from the negative effects of community violence. Garmezy (1993) noted that a family with one caring adult or an external support such as a teacher can facilitate the development of more optimal cognitive and social skills in poor children. The recent focus on factors that contribute to resilience marks a shift from the past focus on negative consequences of cumulated risk to one that examines factors that enhance competence for youth exposed to community violence (Garmezy, 1993).

Research clearly demonstrates that community violence places youth at risk for developmental consequences such as poor school achievement, aggression, and self-destructive behaviors. Likewise, such violence has been associated with depression and feelings of powerlessness among parents (Garbarino et al.,1992; Garmezy, 1993; Osofsky, 1995; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993). However, research shows that

parents actively strategize to protect their children from exposure to violence. Mothers

use competence-building strategies to ensure the safety of their children in violent

neighborhoods (Burton & Jarrett, 2000; Jarrett, 1997a, 1997b, 1998; Jarrett & Jefferson

2004; Mohr, Fantuzzo, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001). Fathers also use various strategies to

protect their children from the adverse effects of violence exposure (Ahmeduzzaman &

Roopnarine, 1996; Fagan & Stevenson, 2002; Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2003; 2004).

In the seminal work, *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore,

Ouston, and Smith (1979) acknowledged that school-age and adolescent children spend

as much of their waking life at school as at home during a formative period of their

development. As a result, teachers share parents' potential to play a vital role in

enhancing children's resilience. However, there is currently a paucity of research

exploring how teachers buffer early adolescents from the impact of community violence.

Little is known about how exposure to community violence influences teachers' ability to

effectively teach and mentor early adolescents. To address these shortcomings in the

current literature, this study will explore three main research questions: 1) What are the

challenges faced by teachers who work in schools that are located in violent

communities? 2) What strategies do teachers use to buffer early adolescents from

violence-related risks in their schools and communities? and 3) What supports would

enable teachers to be more effective in helping early adolescents avoid and/or cope with

negative outcomes associated with violence exposure?

Adopting a qualitative approach, the overall goal of this study is to contextualize

teacher experiences in order to increase current knowledge of their challenges, the

strategies they employ to foster early adolescent resiliency, and the supports they need to

more effectively protect early adolescents from adverse effects of community violence. As with all research, there are limitations to a study of this nature. The theoretical framework and research design that follows demonstrate that findings will be bound within a specific context. That is, the research design focuses on teachers in urban areas where community violence is problematic for early adolescents, families, and school personnel. While no qualitative researcher professes that findings have statistical generalizability, it is expected that study outcomes will have implications for school policies and programs aimed at improving resilience in other urban, low-income communities with high rates of community violence. This characteristic is known in qualitative research as having transferability to other settings or populations (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

The review of the literature that follows is divided into subsections. It begins with a delineation of the ecological/risk and resilience theoretical framework. This is an appropriate model for studying individual, family, school, community, and cultural influences on both early adolescents and their teachers. The second section focuses on research describing the prevalence and effects of community violence. The literature review concludes by describing the areas neglected in previous studies of early adolescent resilience, noting the dearth of research on teachers' strategies for buffering early adolescents from community violence.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework: Ecological/Risk and Resilience

The theoretical model most appropriate for grounding this research combines ecological theory with a risk and resiliency framework. The ecological model highlights the interaction between individuals and their environments. The resiliency framework focuses on risk and protective processes for an individual. For clarity, the ecological and resiliency models will be described as distinctive theoretical frameworks prior to presenting a combined model.

The Ecological Model

A central argument of the ecological approach, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 1970s, is that an individual develops within the context of his or her relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This development is the composite of individual genetic endowment, immediate family influences, and other components of the environment (Klein & White, 1996). According to the ecological model, the individual is embedded in four subsystems that can be understood through the diagram below (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development

Microsystem: Children and youth in families

Mesosystem: Linkages between family, peers, school, and other relational contexts

Exosystem: Community contexts within which families function. In some cases, youth may never see them (e.g., work environments and social networks). Other contexts are visible (e.g., community violence).

Macrosystem: Larger societal factors that affect individuals (e.g., American culture)

To some extent, events operate across ecological borders. Therefore, the following delineation of relationships at each level of the ecological model is isomorphic, meaning that for each component of the system, there is a corresponding component at one of the other levels. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The innermost circle represents the *microsystem* of the individual. Within the microsystem are the individual's interactions within his or her immediate settings. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the *mesosystem* incorporates linkages between settings such as the family, peers, teachers and other school personnel, and perhaps the juvenile justice system. For example, an adolescent's ability to excel in school may depend more on the interconnections between the school and the home than on adequate teaching methods. Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that the breakdown of connections between family, school, peer group, and neighborhood underlies the decline in achievement test scores for school-age children.

Beyond the mesosystem, the next circle is the *exosystem* representing external environments that the individual may or may not ever experience; yet events that occur in these environments affect, or are affected by, what happens in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Lynch and Cicchetti (2002), features of the community are part of the exosystem such as availability of services and employment, access to formal and informal support, socioeconomic climate, and community violence. Parental or teacher social networks are part of the exosystem, having the potential to influence interactions with adolescents even though they may not be directly experienced by youth. Finally, the *macrosystem* represents larger societal contexts not experienced in the immediate environment. Macrosystem influences differ for various socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, and other subcultural groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, in

the United States, macrosystem influences include American culture and the social policies and programs that affect American families, such as racial prejudice and discrimination, the media, and antipoverty programs.

Fraser (2004) provided a clear delineation of key components of ecological theory. To put it simply, a child lives in a family and a family lives in a neighborhood. As children grow, they attend schools, and become active participants in their community. The family, the school, the neighborhood, the media, and popular culture exert major influences on children and youth, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse. Ecological theory posits that children develop through their interactions with parents, siblings, peers, teachers, coaches, and religious leaders. In impoverished neighborhoods with high rates of violence, gang leaders, drug dealers, and other undesirable individuals may also be present in the lives of children and youth. Each of the systems with which the child or adolescent interacts has rules, roles, and power that influence the behavior and resource use of the individual.

The school is one of the first environments that influence children's ability to negotiate the world outside their home. Teachers are in a unique position with the potential to act as parent proxies when school age children and adolescents are away from home. Bronfenbrenner (1986) defined *family and school* as a mesosystem model important for researchers to examine. He noted that while family processes are more powerful in changing child behavior than classroom experiences, schools may have a definite influence, especially in homes lacking intergenerational communication or shared decision-making. Yet despite numerous studies examining the impact of families

on children's school performance, there has been little examination of how teachers influence children's coping with environmental stressors such as community violence.

With regard to stresses related to inner-city life, Bronfenbrenner (1986) noted that community violence and poverty are important areas for research. He reported that persons living in urban areas are at higher risk for psychiatric disorder than their counterparts in other neighborhoods, even when controlling for socioeconomic status and single-parent households. Adolescent risk behaviors are also influenced by neighborhood ecology. In a longitudinal study, delinquent behavior rates for boys declined after the families moved out of the city of London (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This finding illustrates the potential power of factors outside an individual's microsystem.

In communities affected by violence, children and youth, their families, and other individuals with whom they interact are affected by environmental dangers and may adopt practices or policies that differ from those in communities without similar safety concerns. This process, known as adaptation, influences an individual's or family system's responses to external stressors in the environment (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). The strategies that adults employ to protect themselves from risk and to foster youth resilience in violent communities are successful to the extent that they increase the likelihood of achieving system goals. Therefore, adaptation may be necessary if children, youth, and teachers are to achieve positive outcomes in high-risk environments (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993).

Osofsky (1995) noted that previous research studies on chronic community violence lacks information about individual, family, school and other social ecological factors on children's behavior and adjustment. An investigation of the challenges,

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strategies, and support needs of teachers in violent communities may provide important

insights about individuals and institutions that contribute to adolescent resiliency.

<div align="center">*Resiliency*</div>

History of Resilience Framework

Ecological theory provides insight into the effects of individual, family,

community, and larger societal level systems on personal development. Within each of

these levels, there are risk factors that may negatively influence development and there

are protective factors that may foster resiliency. Pioneering research during the 1960s by

well-known resiliency researchers, including Garmezy and Rutter (1983), attempted to

demonstrate the existence of a relationship between stressful life events and illness in

children. Stress and coping was the umbrella term chosen by the research group to study

this relationship. Over time, research projects on stress and coping demonstrated that

individual factors and family, peer, and community supports and risks came together to

influence positive or negative outcomes. For example, in a comparison study of children

in inner London with children on the Isle of Wight, children from the city were twice as

likely to experience psychiatric disorder. Analyses suggested that the higher rate of

family difficulties associated with city life explained the difference (Rutter, 1994). *Stress*

and coping morphed into *a risk and resilience* framework as these researchers

acknowledged the importance of studying *how* individuals actively cope with stress

stemming from adversity, and the complexities of the relationships between multiple

stressors and multiple outcomes (Haggerty et al., 1994). As a broader umbrella, risk and

resilience became a more useful framework for research.

Historically, research on risk and resilience focused on infants and young children. Over time, the focus expanded to include adolescents and issues that placed them at risk, such as family conflict, inadequate parenting, and environmental stressors. More recently, researchers have also examined how multiple systems within the individual and environment interact dynamically to influence the behavior of adults. A resiliency framework offers a systematic approach to investigating the experiences of middle school students and their teachers in violent communities.

While the concept of resiliency has been added to the ecological lexicon, current research often focuses on the negative consequences of exposure to risk factors. Garmezy (1994) noted that data are desperately needed to counter the dramatic and often politicized focus solely on problems encountered by early adolescents and families dealing with poverty, community violence, gangs and drugs. In other words, research is needed to identify processes that might foster hope; with support, some children and youth can and do cope effectively with adversity (Garmezy, 1994).

Defining Resilience: Risk and Protective Factors

According to Garmezy (1993), resilience is not invulnerability, but rather, the ability to bounce back under adversity. Similarly, Walsh (1998) noted that resilience is often erroneously equated with "invulnerability" or "self-sufficiency"; yet, it is forged through interdependence with others. An individual's resilience is greater when s/he has access to at least one caring adult, such as a parent, caregiver, or another supportive person (Garmezy, 1993; Jarrett, 1995; Nettles, Mucherah, & Jones, 2000; Walsh, 1998). Resilience is an appropriate framework for studying risk factors, protective factors, and related outcomes.

Models of resilience include a delineation of risk and protective factors (Garmezy, 1993; Garmezy & Rutter, 1983; Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert, and Stephens, 2001). Risk factors are stressors that increase the probability of negative outcomes, while protective factors are the specific circumstances and behaviors that enable positive outcomes despite stressful conditions. Rutter (1987) defined four protective processes that may foster resilience, including: 1) reduce negative outcomes associated with specific risk factors; 2) reduce the likelihood of negative chains of events associated with adversity; 3) establish and maintain self-esteem and self-efficacy; and 4) provide new opportunities for success at turning points in life.

According to Gore and Eckenrode (1994), protective factors may be classified into two groups: 1) personal factors and 2) environmental resources. Some personal factors are biological, such as health status and temperament, while others are linked to experiences in the social environment, such as self-esteem or self-worth. Environmental resources include family income or school support. The personal factors that an individual brings to his or her environment are influenced by the objective features of that environment. For example, an adolescent or teacher in a middle school located in a poor community plagued by violence will undoubtedly experience a different social environment than a student or teacher in a more affluent public school system. In contrast to those living and/or working in violent communities, students and teachers in higher income communities are more likely to have access to better educational resources and lesslikely to harbor fears about day-to-day physical safety.

Resilience Fostered by Schools

Resilience models suggest that students can cope more effectively with risks such as community violence if their experiences in school are sensitive to their needs (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Garmezy, 1993; Haggerty et al., 1994). Three potential protective factors in schools are: 1) school attachment relationships; 2) structure and control; and 3) a developmental approach to the curriculum that supports coping and self-esteem (Garbarino et al., 1992). Becker and Luthar (2002) discussed school attachment as a social-emotional factor that influences early adolescent achievement in school. For middle school students ages 10-14, academic and school attachment become increasingly significant as they look for role models and support from nonparental adults. Adolescents who experience feelings of acceptance by their teachers and school are more committed to learning and academic goals than students without such experiences (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Reinke & Herman, 2002; Wentzel, 2002). These attachments lead early adolescents to show strong cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement in the classroom. The protective factor of school attachment relationships is vital to early adolescent retention in the school. Classroom observations in disadvantaged middle schools, as compared to their more affluent counterparts, have revealed lower teacher expectations, greater emphasis on rote learning, and more frequent interruptions for behavior management (Becker & Luthar, 2002). Early adolescents who later dropped out of school were more likely to have had academic experiences that were negative and alienating than those who successfully completed school (Becker & Luthar, 2002).

Structure and control in the classroom is based on a much larger conceptual framework than solely behavior management. Structure is defined as the provision of a

context conducive to learning, and incorporates established daily routines (Wentzel, 2002). Research on teachers who combine structure with guidance and autonomy in elementary school classrooms reveals positive motivational outcomes for children (Wentzel, 2002).

Control is defined as consistent supervision and the enforcement of rules in the classroom (Wentzel, 2002). According to Reinke and Herman (2002), "Interventions directed at providing positive, caring, consistent classroom/school climates and effective instruction may be the life vest that keeps at-risk students from sinking into the downward trajectory of academic failure, antisocial behavior, school rebellion, and school dropout" (p. 553). Poor monitoring in schools places youth at risk for problem behaviors, including violence. In contrast, teachers who monitor the classroom and establish clear behavioral rules and expectations may prevent the development of antisocial behaviors in youth (Reinke & Herman, 2002). It is important to note that the literature available on structure and control in classrooms is mainly based on early childhood; few studies explore these concepts specifically as protective factors for early adolescents in schools.

School attachment relationships, structure, and control will not produce significant changes in the school experiences of disadvantaged students without similar attention to their developmental needs (Becker & Luthar, 2002). A developmental approach to the curriculum recognizes that schools can effectively improve student academic outcomes only if the basic needs of disadvantaged students, such as adequate family income, good nutrition, and appropriate health care are addressed. From a developmental perspective, coping and adaptation involve multi-determined processes

extending over time (Walsh, 1998). When a condition such as poverty or alcoholism in a family is severe or persistent, or when multiple stressors generate cumulative effects, they are more likely to affect an individual's functioning and self-esteem. A developmental approach contributes to resilience and helps teachers assess the factors that interfere with or facilitate children's capacity to develop, learn, and feel successful in a school setting (Garbarino et al., 1992). Thus, students' achievement is influenced by a continuum of risk and protective factors within the students themselves, the school, and the community (Becker and Luthar, 2002).

The role of schools and teachers is a recurrent concept in the literature examining the development of cognitive and social skills in disadvantaged children. Impoverished schools can maintain a positive school climate where teachers, principals, and parents work together and children are kept safe from violence in the community (Garmezy, 1993). In *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, Rutter et al. (1979) demonstrated thatstudents' behavior was better in schools where teachers were readily available for students with concerns than in schools where teachers were inaccessible. This study illustrated the important role of teachers in influencing the behavioral and academic outcomes of economically disadvantaged students. Teachers have the potential to provide early adolescents with social capital links such as social support, safety, and opportunities in the greater community. Like parents, teachers are interpreters of community processes and pass on information to youth.

Ecological/Risk and Resilience Model

Few researchers have specified use of a combined ecological/risk and resilience theoretical framework to organize their research. However, Bronfenbrenner (1986) refers

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his readers to important literature on resiliency while researchers using a resiliency framework frequently cite Bronfenbrenner's work on human ecology as an important theory to complement research on resiliency (Garbarino et al., 1992; Gore and Eckenrode, 1994; Rutter, 1995).

According to the ecological model, development is influenced by individual, family, community, and societal level systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Within each of these levels, there are risk and protective factors associated with development. The efficacy of adopting an ecological/risk and resilience model is suggested by the importance of both the individual's immediate environment and the larger cultural context in defining risk and protective factors. Murry et al. (2001) used an ecological risk/protection conceptual framework specifically to organize research on African American families. Challenges and strengths encountered by single-mother African American families were examined from the micro to the macro level systems. The researchers' intent was to clarify links between risk and protective factors at the individual, family, and community levels.

The current study also employed a model thatintegrates ecological and resilience frameworks. The combined model challenges researchers to examine relationships between risk and protective factors that influence the resilience of both teachers and their students within specific ecological contexts. Both individual and environmental level systems are important in defining factors that contribute to resiliency. In other words, the risks associated with environmental hardships (e.g., overcrowded classrooms, neighborhood violence, poverty) may be counteracted by protective factors in the individual, home, school, community, or larger culture. Teachers are unique among

individuals who influence early adolescents and their families in communities plagued by violence because of the opportunity they are afforded to affect change in individuals and their families.

<div align="center">Community Violence</div>

The community-level risk factor explored in the current study of middle school teachers in particular urban communities is violence. Community violence is defined as exposure to acts of interpersonal violence committed by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim. Acts that fit under this umbrella term include the sound of bullet shots, the use of weapons, burglary, sexual assault, and muggings. Among adolescents, community violence is further defined by the presence of teen gangs, drugs and racial divisions (NCCEV, 2003). According to Osofsky (1995) chronic community violence is defined as frequent and continual exposure to the use of guns, knives, drugs, and random violence in one's neighborhood or community. These definitions are appropriate to understand how exposure to community violence affects early adolescents who attend middle school and the teachers who are, to some extent, their proxy parents during the school day.

Community violence has been found to be more pervasive in lower-income urban areas than in other geographical areas of the country (NCCEV, 2003). According to research reported by NCCEV on children and adolescents, the U.S. has the highest rates of child and adolescent homicide and suicide deaths among industrialized countries. Firearm-related deaths among U.S. children aged 15 and under were nearly 12 times higher than among children in 25 other industrialized nations. Guns have caused the death of 12 youth under age 20 each day in this country (NCCEV, 2003).

Effects of Community Violence on Children and Adolescents

Previous research, much of it quantitative in nature, reveals a number of deleterious effects of chronic community violence on children (Cooley-Quille, Boyd, Frantz, & Walsh, 2001; Garbarino et al., 1992; Osofsky, 1995). Correlational studies indicate a clear association between violence exposure and mental and physical health symptoms, including post-traumatic stress symptoms (Cooley-Quille et al., 2001; Osofsky, 1995); headaches, asthma, allergies, and ulcers (Aisenberg & Mennen, 2000); and depression (Ceballo, Ramirez, Hearn, & Maltese, 2003; O'Donnell et al., 2002). In contrast to children who are not exposed to community violence, children with violence exposure display greater difficulty paying attention, are less likely to explore, and experience more sleep disturbances, nightmares and anxiety (Osofsky et al., 1993). Research suggests that violence exposure may cause children and adolescents to become uncaring toward others and desensitized to future violence (Farrell & Bruce, 1997). Finally, problems associated with community violence in and around our schools may precipitate academic difficulties among the nation's children and adolescents (Mazza & Overstreet, 2000).

Differential Responses to Community Violence by Age of Child

In focusing on youth responses to community violence, it is important to consider age and developmental level. The literature often fails to differentiate between child and adolescent responses to violence (Rosenthal, 2000; Rosenthal & Wilson, 2003). According to Garbarino et al. (1992), preschool children under age five exposed to community violence tend to behave passively, react with internalizing symptoms (e.g., fear, anxiety, withdrawal), externalizing symptoms (e.g., anger, aggression), and/or

regressive symptoms (e.g., enuresis, decreased verbalization). Additionally, preschoolers

often demonstrate memory of traumatic events through their behavior and play rather

than with words (Mazza & Overstreet, 2000). According to Osofsky et al. (1993),

school-age children may display aggression and "act tough" to deal with fears linked to

community violence. In this case, violence exposure weakens children's disinclination to

behave aggressively (Farrell & Bruce, 1997). Alternatively, some school age children

may respond to violence with internalizing behaviors, becoming inhibited or constricted

in their activities, exploration, and thinking (Osofsky et al., 1993).

Similar to preschoolers and school age children, adolescents display both

internalizing and externalizing behaviors in response to community violence (Cooley-

Quille et al., 2001). As a result of their growing independence, adolescents have higher

levels of exposure to robbery and assault than do younger children (Rosenthal, 2000).

Furthermore, because of changes in cognitive and social development, adolescents may

experience greater trauma than children exposed to community violence (Rosenthal,

2000). Adolescents may respond to victimization or violence exposure with aggression

and self-destructive behaviors, such as substance abuse, delinquency, promiscuity, and

life-threatening reenactments (Garbarino et al., 1992). According to Cooley-Quille et al.

(2001), internalizing problems associated with adolescent violence exposure include

anxiety, fears, depression, and general distress. Adolescents who internalize violence-

related stress have distracting thoughts that can lead to cognitive deficits and low

academic achievement. Research further illustrates that externalizing symptoms may vary

by gender (Cooley-Quille et al., 2001). In addition to high-risk behaviors (e.g., alcohol

and drug use), female adolescents exposed to violence report more posttraumatic stress

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symptoms and depressive symptoms than do males. For male adolescents, witnessing violence is linked to the same high-risk behaviors displayed by females but is also significantly related to carrying a weapon, fighting, and having trouble in school.

African American youth are more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to reside in communities where violence is a problem (Kuther & Wallace, 2003). Kuther and Wallace (2003) provided a review focusing specifically on these African American youth and the concept of covictimization, the witnessing of a violent act perpetrated on another person. According to these researchers, adolescent responses to the witnessing of violence included flashbacks, abuse of drugs and alcohol, suicidal thoughts, poor school achievement, poor school attendance, and high rates of school drop out. High levels of aggression and violent revenge seeking are not unusual. Rather than relying on conventional authority figures such as the police, adolescents use violent behavior as a form of "street justice." In fact, witnessing community violence has been found to impair sociomoral development and lead youth to exhibit behavior focused on personal survival (Kuther and Wallace, 2003).

Related Research on Community Violence

Chronic community violence is recognized among researchers as a problem that affects too many children and families in this country. Quantitative research which reveals correlational findings about the relationship between violence exposure and behavior problems in preschool and school age children dominates the existing literature on community violence (Sweatt, Harding, Knight-Lynn, Rasheed, and Carter, 2002). However, two noteworthy quantitative studies illustrate the impact of violence exposure on adolescents. Cooley-Quille et al. (2001) investigated inner-city high school students

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in a high crime community. Ninety percent of the students in the school were African American. Several self-report instruments were administered. The Children's Report of Exposure to Violence was used to determine high- and low-exposure groups. The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children, the Children's Depression Inventory, the Fear Survey Schedule for Children-Revised, and the Life Experiences Survey were used to assess anxiety, depressive symptoms, fears, and stressful life events, respectively. The Family Environment Scale was used to assess social and environmental characteristics of the family. Additionally, a psychiatric semi-structured interview was conducted with each student. Findings revealed that youth with higher levels of community violence exposure reported more fear, anxiety, internalizing behaviors, and negative life experiences than youth with lower levels of exposure.

Cooley-Quille et al. (2001) also incorporated a psychophysiological measure which required youth to view a montage of media violence images. Findings revealed that youth with higher levels of violence exposure demonstrated lower baseline heart rates than those with low exposure on the measure. This finding suggests that desensitization may occur in adolescents exposed to high levels of violence. Interestingly, high-exposure adolescents reported more fears of injury, the unknown, and danger. The study demonstrated that community violence exposure was predictive of anxiety, aggression, and fears at home and in school. Recommendations for parental support and clinical interventions were provided, but no recommendations were given for teachers or other school personnel.

O'Donnell et al. (2002) also examined the relationship between community violence and various behaviors of youth at home and in school. The authors examined

parent, school, and peer support as protective factors for multidimensional resilience in urban youth exposed to community violence. They define multidimensional resilience to include dimensions of mental health, social competence, and personal development. The dimensions of mental health were assessed with measures of depression, anxiety, and somatization. The dimensions of social competence, which relate to personal development, self-actualization, and success in meeting social expectations, were assessed with measures of school conduct and delinquency, substance use/abuse, self reliance, interpersonal relations, and future expectations.

A sample of 1,855 students of mixed gender and ethnicity in sixth, eighth, and tenth grades completed a survey at two points in time two years apart. The measure used was the Social and Health Assessment (SAHA) with risk indices, resilience indices, and protective factor indices. Structural equation modeling was used to specify the relationships among the dimensions of resilience and the protective factor indices as they related to three groups: youth who were victimized by violence, youth who had witnessed community violence, and a no-exposure control group.

Sample characteristics revealed that children who had been victimized by or witnessed violence were more likely to be male, African American, receive free lunch at school, and have repeated a grade than those who had not been exposed to violence. The victimized group was more likely than the witnessing group or the no-exposure group to have low future expectations, use alcohol and other drugs, engage in delinquent behavior and school misconduct, and exhibit symptoms of depression, anxiety and somatization.

O'Donnell et al. (2002) found that school support was a stronger predictor of resilience in the no-exposure group than in the witnessing and victimized groups in the

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domains of interpersonal relations, self reliance, and future expectations. The authors raised the notion that school personnel may view non-exposed youth more favorably than violence-exposed youth, and interact more extensively with this group. In response, violence-exposed youth may feel alienated from teachers and other school staff and turn to peers for support.

For the witnessing and victimized groups, school support was associated with resilience in all dimensions except depression and somatization. Additionally, school support was a robust predictor of resilience for the victimized group in areas of school conduct and substance use/abuse, with victimized adolescents who experienced high levels of school support having lower levels of school misconduct and substance abuse. This finding reveals the school setting to be influential in adolescent socialization. The authors demonstrated the need to understand the vulnerability of youth exposed to violence, particularly victimized youth, whose feelings of inadequacy may lead to lowered levels of resilience. They surmise that children who experience stress related to violence exposure may feel inadequate in the classroom and in turn, develop depressive symptoms and somatic complaints. These youth may display scholastic difficulties and socioemotional problems for which school support could be an important protective factor.

Although there is a limited body of qualitative research on community violence and adolescent youth, the following study explored the effects of violence exposure on youth and incorporates recommendations from the perspectives of adolescents. Sweatt et al. (2002) conducted a qualitative grounded theory study with 20 adolescent residents of a subsidized urban high-rise community. The sample included 11 males and 9 females

aged 12 to 17. Participants self-identified as African American (n=11), Asian (n=4),

Latin American (n=3), and Ethiopian (n=2). This study took place within the "Rap

Group," an adolescent discussion group. Youth were asked about whether they knew

someone who had experienced a violent act, had witnessed a violent act, had been a

victim, and/or had ever perpetrated a violent act. They were also asked to verbally list

and prioritize what they thought were the most serious dangers today, what precautions

they took to protect themselves, and what they thought adults should be doing to help

them feel safe.

Participants in this qualitative study revealed fears of death by gunfire, gangs,

drugs, and being molested or sexually assaulted as prevalent dangers facing them each

day. One 12-year-old African American male reported, "There are times when I'm afraid

to go outside for days because I hear the shots down the street and I be hearing about

some little kid getting killed. No way I want that to be me" (Sweatt et al., 2002).

Participants recommended that adults openly discuss life's dangers with them. They

perceived the adults in their lives to be unavailable to protect them and unaware of the

degree of violence that youth encounter. These findings demonstrate the need for further

research on adult strategies to foster resilience among violence-exposed youth.

The Need for Adult Involvement: Parental and Teacher Support Strategies

Garbarino (2001) noted that adults are crucial resources for children and youth

who live in urban areas with high levels of violence. That is, children need adults to

model moral reasoning both inside and outside the home. If the adults in children's lives

are emotionally inaccessible, panicked, and unsupportive, children may lose a future

orientation and respond with violence, depression, and anti-social behavior. In such

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communities, teachers and other adult representatives of the community can help children redefine the world in moral and structural terms.

Garbarino (2001) stated that youth exposed to chronic community violence may experience moral truncation or blocked moral development. Youth need adults to demonstrate higher order thinking. For example, in a high crime area, youth may reason that it would not be a good idea to make money by carrying drugs because they may get caught and incarcerated. An adult can provide them with morally advanced reasoning, pointing out that drugs harm people (Garbarino et al., 1992). Kuther and Wallace (2003) also addressed adolescent moral development in their review of the implications of community violence exposure on the development of African American youth. The authors concluded that adolescents should not choose their own strategies for moral behavior without a network of adult social support that models meaningful connections to community and provides guidance for ethical development.

Parental Strategies

The current literature underscores the need for additional research examining how adults are helping early adolescents to cope with community violence. Previous investigators of parental strategies, particularly mother's strategies, provide a foundation for such research. Jarrett (1997a) identified effective family and parenting strategies that contribute to successful child development in African American high-risk communities where crime, joblessness, welfare dependency, school dropout, and out-of-wedlock childbearing were prevalent. The author stated that the dominant theories addressing impairment in social mobility for impoverished neighborhoods, including neighborhood resource theory and collective socialization theory, were formulated without qualitative

insights and therefore, could not be used to explain the wide variability in child development outcomes in these environments.

To illustrate positive child development outcomes, Jarrett (1997a) reviewed qualitative data from empirical studies conducted by other researchers as well as her own empirical work with African American families in high-risk communities. The families identified the following four parenting strategies. First, parents employed *family protection strategies,* including daily life management techniques such as avoidance of dangerous areas, using the safe morning hours when drug dealers are asleep to run errands and take children outside, restricting relationships with neighbors, and supporting mainstream orientations ideologically. In one family, for example, the church was the social and moral world outside the home, not the geographically defined neighborhood. Social distance was another family protection method used to keep children safe, with parents keeping physical and ideological distance from all others. Second, families employed *child monitoring strategies* such as chaperoning and isolating children to segregate them from negative adult and peer influences. Parents created playgroups with "desirable" children and accompanied their children through the eighth grade on walks to school and recreational activities.

A third parental strategy used to promote positive child development was *parental resource-seeking*. Although parents may find high quality resources in low-income African American communities scarce, many parents spent substantial time and energy locating resources such as Head Start. Parents had expectations that Head Start would teach their children concrete skills such as how to write their names, numbers, and ABC's. Some parents sought resources outside the neighborhood, sending their children

to play with children in "nicer" neighborhoods. Finally, parents sought to support their

children's intellectual development with *in-home learning strategies* that help children in

school settings, such as reading to children before they go to bed, and praising good

report cards, honors, and satisfactory homework. These parenting strategies reinforce

school expectations, and keep children attached to school authority, classroom routines,

teacher directives, and conventional peers, helping to mediate the limitations of

impoverished inner-city schools.

In another qualitative study, Jarrett and Jefferson (2004) examined how poor

African American mothers managed community violence in a high-poverty community in

Chicago. The authors used an interpretive framework for their study, which focuses on

personal agency while recognizing the larger social and economic forces that contribute

to daily life. Eighteen single African American women residing in a public housing

project were asked specifically about the strategies they used to deal with community

violence and the benefits and costs to family and community life. Participants ranged in

age from 20 to 40 years and all had at least one preschool aged child. Four key themes

were found: 1) violence in the community; 2) the nature of community violence; 3)

responding to community violence; and 4) the benefits and costs of women's danger

management strategies. Women identified concerns for their safety within the

neighborhood. They attributed the danger to gang violence, abductions, drug dealers, and

robberies. Mothers were clear about the location of violence, with many stating that their

immediate building was safe despite the violence on nearby streets. Findings further

revealed that mothers could easily identify the perpetrators of violence as community

outsiders. Mothers also noted that the timing of violence was circumscribed. From

sunup to sundown, the respondents felt safer, while late evening was a particularly

dangerous time.

Interestingly, the danger management strategies expressed by participants in the

study challenged the notion that families living in economically disadvantaged

communities would be destabilized (Jarrett & Jefferson, 2004). Women monitored their

environment and avoided dangerous situations by employing self-imposed curfews and

cloistering their family members at home. The researchers noted the contributions of

qualitative research to our understanding of how poor African American women respond

to community violence, addressing issues that have been ignored in previous research.

A quantitative study exploring parental strategies examined the impact of parental

monitoring on children's psychological well-being in low-income, inner-city

neighborhoods. Ceballo et al. (2003) administered questionnaires to 163 elementary

school children regarding community violence, parental monitoring, depression, and

hopelessness. The sample consisted of 73 boys and 90 girls with a mean age of 10 years.

The majority of respondents were Hispanic (n=100), with additional representation from

White and African American children. Measures included the Survey of Exposure to

Community Violence, the Parental Monitoring Scale, the Children's Depression

Inventory, and the Hopelessness Scale for Children. Results of regression analyses

revealed that children whose parents engaged in more supervision were less likely to

experience personal victimization and witnessing of violence. Additionally, greater

parental monitoring was associated with fewer symptoms of depression and hopelessness.

The authors speculated that children viewed parental monitoring as a sign of concern,

which engendered parent-child communication. They concluded that high levels of

monitoring moderated the relationship between violence exposure and children's psychological well being.

Relationships with Teachers

Teachers, like parents, are strategists in the lives of children and adolescents. As stated earlier, there is a dearth of research on the strategies that teachers use to address the complex needs of early adolescents in violent communities. Therefore, it is not clear whether teachers display danger management strategies that parallel those displayed by parents described above (Jarrett & Jefferson, 2004). Research and other literature about community violence involving younger children provide evidence of the potential for teachers to influence child and adolescent behavior. Teachers can serve as the role models and confidants who influence children, but they may need help in coping with the ongoing stresses of their environment. For example, Garbarino et al. (1992) reported that Head Start teachers need help in understanding the relationship between exposure to chronic community violence and the resulting psychological, physical, and behavioral effects on children.

In a quantitative study described earlier, O'Donnnell et al. (2002) surveyed 1,855 sixth, eighth, and tenth grade classes to examine the effects of parent, school, and peer support on children's resilience in violent communities. School support was defined by three scales: attachment to school, teacher support, and academic motivation. The attachment to school scale included statements about likes and dislikes regarding school. Academic motivation was assessed with questions about paying attention in class, attending class, doing homework, and following school rules. Teacher support was assessed with a seven-item scale assessing students' feelings about how much teachers

were willing to help students, whether teachers provided individualized attention, and whether or not the students liked their teachers.

The authors demonstrated a multidimensional conceptualization of resilience, indicating differential effects of parent, school, and peer support among children who had been exposed to community violence and a no-exposure control group. Among youth directly victimized by violence, school support predicted greater protection against substance abuse and school misconduct than it did for both non-exposed youth and youth who had only witnessed violence. On the other hand, school support was less predictive of resilient outcomes for violence-exposed youth (both victimized and witnessing) than non-exposed youth in the domains of self reliance, interpersonal relations, and future expectations. These findings suggest that school can be influential in the socialization of youth, but violence-exposed youth may experience a less supportive environment than their non-exposed counterparts. Results of the study suggest the need for teachers to be available, empathetic, and attentive to students' needs, especially for youth exposed to community violence.

Ecological/Risk and Resilience: African American Families

The ecological/risk and resilience model is useful for organizing research on early adolescents that examines the risk and protective processes spanning the individual, family, and community levels. Because the current study took place in schools located in predominantly African American communities, it is important to place the research within a culturally relevant context. Murry et al. (2001) stated that use of problem-focused approaches perpetuates biased assumptions about African American families. They noted that researchers may misinterpret protective strategies (e.g., high control) as

maladaptive when, in reality, parents, teachers, and other community members in dangerous communities understand the grave consequences of failing to monitor their children's behavior. Therefore, the use of higher levels of control in combination with warmth, vigilance, and monitoring may be used to protect youth from involvement in antisocial activity and to foster their social competence (Murry et al., 2001).

While resiliency is a concept commonly explored in the social sciences, Miller (1999) posited that there is a need to expand conventional resiliency frameworks to include protective factors specific to African American adolescents. Such protective factors may include racial socialization, whereby parents incorporate messages about the unique social position of African Americans in the United States. According to Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph and Nickerson (2002), these messages may stress a mainstream experience, emphasizing importance of achievement, moral values, and positive self-image; a minority experience, emphasizing discrimination and acceptance of being Black; or a Black cultural experience, emphasizing Black history/traditions and the development of racial pride. According to Miller, racial socialization fosters racial identity, or the perception that one shares a common racial heritage with a particular group. Because of negative social stereotypes about African American adolescents, Miller believes families that provide strong racial socialization and promote racial identity can positively influence educational involvement and academic achievement.

Understanding the importance of examining contributors to resiliency in African American youth, Jarrett (1997b) related her ethnographic findings on low-income African American adolescents and their parents to Rutter's (1987) four protective processes for fostering adolescent resiliency. The author found that parents may adopt Rutter's first

protective process of *reducing the impact of risk* to adolescents by monitoring their time and space, and even encouraging them to withdraw from any friendships with local peers. Parents also attempted to use Rutter's second process of *reducing the likelihood of negative chain reactions associated with adversity* to protect their children.   For example, some parents strategically responded to risky situations such as a teen pregnancy by encouraging youth to stay in school. Other families helped with childcare and financial support to make continued education a possibility. For poor African American families, children of teen parents may be absorbed into a kinship network. A third protective process advanced by Rutter, and adopted by some African American parents, was to help adolescents *establish and maintain self-esteem and self-efficacy.* Jarrett found that parents provided positive encouragement and direct assistance to adolescents, even when teachers considered them to be a challenge in the classroom. Finally, some African American parents adopted the fourth of Rutter's strategies in *creating opportunities for success*. Despite limited resources for adolescent development, overcrowded schools, underfunded youth programs, unemployed adults, and other risks, parents established ties to resources through personal and institutional connections.

As illustrated, few researchers have adopted an ecological/risk and resilience theoretical framework, although the efficacy of such a model is suggested by the importance of examining how risk and protective factors at each ecological level influence early adolescent resiliency. This study contributes to the existing literature by examining the role that teachers play in fostering early adolescent resiliency in violent communities. By adopting a qualitative approach, the proposed study also addresses a

need for research giving insight into the experiences of teachers.

Statement of the Problem

In summary, research clearly demonstrates that community violence places early adolescents at risk for developmental consequences such as poor school achievement, aggression, and self destructive behaviors. There is currently a dearth of research on teachers in violent communities, despite their potential to have a major influence on early adolescents' development. As a group of adults that have a significant amount of contact with children and adolescents, teachers may employ specific strategies influenced by community context to buffer early adolescents from violence-related risks. It is also expected that they need support to cope with the effects of teaching in violent communities. This study addresses a major gap in the literature with its focus on three key issues: 1) the challenges faced by teachers in low-income neighborhoods with high community violence; 2) the strategies teachers use to foster resilience in the early adolescents they serve; and 3) the supports that teachers need to more effectively teach and guide early adolescents within communities affected by violence.

CHAPTER 3: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Overall Approach and Rationale

This research study explored the challenges faced by teachers in schools located in violent communities, the strategies they use to buffer early adolescents from risk, and the supports they need to help them more effectively address students' needs. Underlying this study design is an ecological/risk and resilience framework. One key assumption of this research is that teachers' own voices will contribute to a greater understanding of the factors that protect early adolescents from potential adverse effects of violence exposure.

Qualitative Research

The current study adopted a qualitative approach in examining how teachers attempt to foster resilience among early adolescents in violent urban communities. Specifically, the study explores the challenges faced by teachers in violent communities, the strategies they use to buffer early adolescents from violence-related risks, and the supports they need to more effectively protect early adolescents. Generally, a qualitative approach to data collection is a rigorous and time-consuming process that allows more new ways of thinking to emerge from the data than does quantitative methodology (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Maxwell, 1996). Qualitative methodology is very different from quantitative procedures. In qualitative research, the researcher is transparent about how his/her role and personal biography shape the study. According to Morrow and Smith (1995), qualitative researchers should not be "ventriloquists" for those being researched. They must include study participants as critical members of the research team, empowering them to become change agents in the community. Furthermore, qualitative research provides contextual insights often missing in

quantitative research. For the current study, teachers who are involved in the everyday lives of early adolescents provided rich contextual information about the problem of community violence and how they attempt to support violence-exposed youth.

The contextual and flexible nature of qualitative research methods allows the researcher to systematically consider how parental and teacher practices may contribute to resilience within a specific cultural setting. Qualitative researchers provide rich, detailed information that is not discernable through quantitative analyses. Just as Jarrett (1997b) used data from interviews to identify parenting practices that foster youth resiliency, it is important to examine how teachers of predominantly African American adolescents act to buffer students from violence-related stressors in urban neighborhoods characterized by high levels of community violence.

<div align="center">Site Selection</div>

This study used qualitative interviews and follow-up member checks with a select group of teachers in middle schools in predominantly African American communities in Prince George's County, Maryland, an adjoining county to Washington D.C. According to 1998 data from the Community Health Administration (CHA), 78% of firearm-related deaths in Prince George's County, or 115 of 148, were homicides (CHA, 2001). Additionally, data from CHA revealed that African Americans are a subgroup at greatest risk for firearm-related death. The African American firearm-related death rate in Maryland was 28 deaths per 100,000, 141 percent higher than the *Healthy People 2000* goal (CHA, 2001). Schools were targeted based on Prince George's County Police Collaborative Supervision and Focused Enforcement (CSAFE) Zones or "Hot Spots"

reports. These data revealed geographical areas with high crime levels (Maryland

Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention, 2004).

The Maryland Department of Legislative Services (2003) identified murder, rape

robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, property theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson as

violent crimes. The department reported that violent crime rates in the state of Maryland

are significantly higher than the national average. Between 1992 and 2001, Maryland's

average annual violent crime rate was 891 per 100,000, which is 43 percent above the

national average rate of 623 per 100,000. Additionally, there were significant differences

in the overall crime rate between jurisdictions. In 2001, Prince George's County had an

overall crime rate of 7,247 per 100,000, 46 percent higher than the statewide average of

4,960 per 100,000 in the population.

In 2004, Prince George's County police recorded an average of 12 slayings a

month, a homicide rate comparable to the rate in the mid-1990s. This rate represented a

12 percent increase over the same period in 2003. The police reported that the surge in

violent crime was occurring close to the Prince George's County/Washington D.C.

border where the schools targeted by this study are located (Stockwell, 2004). Swanson

(2004) also reported an increase in gun violence in the county. In a population of

818,526 county residents, there were 131 deaths from gun violence in 2001, the latest

data available (Swanson, 2004).

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (n.d.) formed the

Violent Crime Index using four violent crimes, including murder, forcible rape, robbery,

and aggravated assault. This index is used as the barometer for violent crime. Schools

located in "Hot Spots" with the highest number of crimes (according to the Violent Crime

Index) were targeted for the study (See Table 1). Schools in Hot Spot locations 6 and 7

were not approached because of their lower crime rates.

Table 1. Mean Violent Crime Rate of Hot Spots from Violent Crime Index for Second
Quarter 2003 to Second Quarter 2004

Hot Spot Location	Apr-Jun 2003	Jul-Sep 2003	Oct-Dec 2003	Jan-Mar 2004	Apr-Jun 2004	Mean Violent Crime
1	48	69	68	55	72	62.4
2	30	29	15	15	29	23.6
3	32	22	22	23	30	25.8
4	29	27	10	20	23	21.8
5	72	67	40	89	91	71.8
6	12	13	8	45	3	16.2
7	9	22	13	28	15	17.4

Negotiating Entry

Five middle schools were identified in Prince George's County "Hot Spots" as

potential study sites (Table 2). The names of the schools have been changed to ensure

individual and school confidentiality. In this study, the five schools were given the

following names: Oak Hills, Kendall Lake, Grandview, Danbrook, and Belcrest Middle

Schools (See Table 2). Four of the five middle schools are located in communities that

are predominantly African American. Belcrest Middle School in Hot Spot location 5 has

a predominantly Hispanic student body. In order to tell a consistent story, I chose to

approach the four schools with predominantly African American student populations.

Table 2. Sampling Frame for Study

HOT SPOT LOCATION	MIDDLE SCHOOL
1	Oak Hills
2	Kendall Lake
3	Grandview
4	Danbrook
5	Belcrest

I sent letters to principals at each of the schools requesting a telephone, email, or face-to-face conversation (See Appendix A). In the letter I stated that I would follow up to schedule meetings with principals. I also went to schools, met with administrative staff in the main offices, and requested a meeting with principals to discuss the study. I had the greatest difficulty scheduling meetings with the principals from Danbrook and Oak Hills Middle Schools. During my final attempts, I met the principal from Danbrook and the newly hired acting principal from Oak Hills who were both enthusiastic about the project. However, I received no expressed interest from teachers at Oak Hills. Therefore, Kendall Lake, Grandview, and Danbrook were the three schools from which teachers were interviewed.

In the three schools where interviews were conducted, students did not meet the state of Maryland's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards for the proportion of students achieving proficiency in reading and math. Kendall Lake Middle School is a Talented and Gifted (TAG) Magnet school. It is located near the intersection of several highways and across the street from a popular fast food restaurant. Of the 700 students, 85% are African American (N=598). The remaining students are 4% White, 4% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. In 2005, 64.7% of students receive free/reduced price meals. The first time that I visited the school, I met with the principal's secretary who informed me that during the previous week, a 17-year-old was shot and killed near the school. She stated, "We let out at 4:10 and it couldn't have been past five when it happened. Kids are scared."

Grandview Middle School is located behind a major sports complex in Prince George's County, Maryland. The school is districted to include several neighborhoods of

different socioeconomic statuses, which include a few apartment complexes known for violent activity. The school was in its third year at the time of teacher interviews. The school shares a parking lot and adjoining wall with an elementary school. Of the 1005 students at Grandview Middle School, 98% are African American (*N*=986). The percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch is 65.7%.

Danbrook Middle School relocated in 1995 to a former all girls' Catholic school building on the border of Washington D.C. and Prince George's County. Several of the neighborhoods of Danbrook Middle School are known for their violent activity. At Danbrook Middle School, 98% of the 962 students are African American (N=944). The percentage of students receiving free/reduced price meals is 64.7%.

Following approval from the Prince George's County Office of Research and Evaluation, the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board, and school principals, I approached teachers and began with a period of trust and rapport building, an important part of the prolonged engagement process to establish credibility among participants. I introduced myself and discussed my background as a doctoral student, a former therapist who worked with adolescents and families in communities affected by poverty and violence, and the wife of a public school teacher. I described the study, the possible uses of the information, and answered any initial questions.

My presence in each school extended over several visits during which I observed parents and other visitors, students, and school personnel as they entered and exited the main office. During this time, I wrote field notes, talked with school personnel, and set up interviews with interested teachers. When I received final approval to interview teachers, it was June and the end of the school year approached quickly. In one school, I

conducted all interviews before the end of the school year. In the other two of the three schools, several teachers completed interviews after the school year ended.

<div align="center">Arranging Interviews</div>

To fully understand the experiences of middle school teachers in violent communities, I recruited 20 teachers in three schools for individual interviews. Kvale (1996) suggested that fifteen plus or minus ten participants is generally acceptable among qualitative researchers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the number of interviews should be based on *redundancy* and cannot be determined before the study begins. That is, the size of *N* cannot be established by a formula, but rather is determined when no new information is received from newly sampled units. I reached saturation at 20 interviews, a point at which teachers did not appear to be generating significant new insights about key study concepts (LaRossa, 2005).

Teachers were approached to participate following a period of relationship building to establish rapport with school personnel. I spent several hours in the main office of each school between February and June 2005. Following this period, I approached teachers in person and/or with a letter identifying myself, the purpose of the study, and an opportunity to schedule an interview. I explained that I was a doctoral student, the wife of a public school teacher, and a former counselor of high-risk adolescents and their families. I asked teachers if they would be willing to participate in a one- to two-hour interview about their challenges, strategies, and support needs related to teaching in violent communities. Teachers were offered a small gift certificate in appreciation for their time and their willingness to share their experiences. This process contributed to a response rate of 100%.

Sample

Demographic information for participating teachers is included in Table 3. The average age of participants was 34 with teachers ranging in age from 24 to 62. Four of the 20 interviewed teachers lived in a neighborhood within the school district. Most of the other teachers lived in Prince George's County, and many lived near the school, but not in the community itself. The average number of years teaching in the school was 3.8. However, most teachers had prior experience teaching before coming to the target schools. The majority of the teachers who participated were African American (75%), with two European American participants, one Asian participant, and two biracial participants (African American/European American and African American/Latino). While most of the teachers were female (85%), one male teacher from each of the three schools participated in the study (15%).

Table 3. Demographic Information

Demographic Item	Research Sample (*N*=20)	
	Mean/Percent	Range
Age of participant in years	34.0	24-62
Number of years teaching in school	3.8	1-18
Gender		
Male	15%	
Female	85%	
Racial/Cultural Group		
African American	75%	
Latino	0	
European American	10%	
Asian	5%	
Biracial	10%	
Participants living in immediate school community	20%	

I captured a range of teachers in terms of subject areas. One school housed a Talented and Gifted (TAG) program along with a comprehensive ("comp") track. All

schools contained special education programs. I interviewed TAG teachers, "comp" teachers, special education teachers, and one guidance counselor. Participating teachers taught math, science, social studies, language arts, music (band, orchestra, and chorus), and computer application/keyboarding.

Although qualitative research is often criticized because of research assumptions that studies with smaller numbers of subjects lack generalizability, Kvale (1996) made the argument that each case contains an immense number of observations of single individuals. In other words, the focus on single cases makes it possible to investigate linkages between the individual and the situation and to gain understanding of the relationship between the context and behavior. I interviewed individual teachers about their particular challenges, strategies, and support needs in relationship to community violence. Teachers' experiences are reported using their own words, thus creating a 'story' that is rich and multidimensional.

Data-Gathering Methods

The general questions guiding interviews for this study revolved around three main areas: 1) the challenges for teachers in low-income neighborhoods with high community violence; 2) the strategies they used to foster resilience in the early adolescents they serve; and 3) the supports they needed to more effectively teach within communities affected by violence. From an ecological/risk and resilience framework, the questions addressed teachers' challenges while also focusing on strategies that teachers used to foster resilience and the supports they needed to do so. Therefore, my methodology incorporated a strength-based vision for improving student outcomes.

The interview protocol was designed to probe all levels of the ecological model.

Teachers were asked to discuss the effects of violence on students in their classroom. What behaviors did they see adolescents exhibiting following violent events? Did they see extreme reactions from students who have directly observed or been victimized by violence? And if so, what were they? Teachers also were asked about how they prepared students to deal with violence in their schools and communities. In the interviews, teachers were questioned about the challenges faced by parents whose children attended the school. Extending to the exosystemic level, teachers were asked about the larger community such as churches, businesses, and the police.

In the schools where principals provided approval, I sampled the population of teachers eligible for this study with a letter to teachers assessing their availability and interest. I conducted interviews in three of the schools: Kendall Lake, Grandview, and Danbrook (See Appendix B). The principal at Kendall Lake Middle School facilitated teacher interviews in the conference room within the main office. In this school, I was introduced to teachers who walked in and out of the office several times a day. It was a challenge to protect the identities of those who wished to participate. In the other two schools, the letter assessing availability and interest resulted in a more confidential interview process as teachers contacted me and designated a time and place for interviews. Interviews with teachers from Grandview and Danbrook were conducted in the teachers' classrooms or at a local café. The amount of time for each interview ranged from approximately one to two hours. Most interviews lasted one to one and a half hours. I conducted four interviews in one day at Kendall Lake, but otherwise averaged two in one day.

Purposeful sampling is a strategy in which persons, settings, or events are selected

deliberately to provide information that could not be found elsewhere (Maxwell, 1996).

Given the experiences of teachers in the target schools, located within communities

affected by violence, purposeful sampling of teachers in three schools was used. This

approach was effective in finding participants who could answer the research questions,

which maximized collection of information about their challenges, strategies, and support

needs to the point of redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Snowball sampling, a method

in which respondents identify cases of interest, was also used in a few cases. Participants

identified other teachers who could provide rich data for this study (Creswell, 1998).

Qualitative Interview Design

The study used a qualitative interview protocol based on three categories:

challenges, strategies, and support needs. A copy of the protocol is presented in

Appendix C. According to Kvale (1996), there are seven stages of a well-designed

interview investigation: 1) thematizing, 2) designing, 3) interviewing, 4) transcribing, 5)

analyzing, 6) verifying, and 7) reporting. The current design took all seven stages into

account in order to adequately improve our understanding of the role teachers' play in

early adolescent development in communities affected by violence. In the *thematizing*

stage, I formulated the purpose of the study and the research questions. A thorough

review of the literature and exploration of relevant theories was conducted prior to

collecting study data. I completed the *designing* stage by planningthe study and

preparing an outline for the methodology.

During the *interviewing* process, I adopted a semi-structured interview protocol

(See Appendix C). That is, the protocol for the current study was neither strictly

structured with standardized questions nor completely open and nondirective. The

protocol was designed to help lead the interviewee to the concepts of interest. According to Kvale (1996), "The interviewer defines the situation, introduces the topics of the conversation, and through further questions steers the course of the interview" (p. 126). In preparation for data collection, I piloted the interview with two teachers who have experience working in areas affected by community violence. The pilot interviewees provided constructive feedback, which was integrated into the interview and was a helpful dress rehearsal for me. I also provided interviewees with a briefing that elucidated the study context. According to Creswell (1998), the best interviewer is a listener rather than a speaker and is respectful of the respondent's time. Designing and refining my interview protocol with probes that help guide the interviewee to tell his/her story was essential to gathering rich contextual information.

In the *transcribing* stage, I transformed data from oral speech to written text. This procedure enabled me to prepare the interview material from the recorded tapes for analysis. The transformation from oral to written mode involved judgment and was done carefully to reflect the interviewee's words verbatim. I hired two students to help with transcription; they used a transcriber and typed up interviews in Microsoft Word. In order to begin the open coding process, I read all transcripts thoroughly for accuracy and selected a random sample to verify by listening to the audio tape while reading transcriptions. Then, I imported the documents into N6, the most recent version of the QSR NUD*IST qualitative data analysis software (www.qsrinternational.com). I also created a secure filing system for paper files and tapes.

In the *analyzing* stage, I decided on appropriate methods for analysis. Data analysis procedures are described in the next section. *Verifying* enabled me to ascertain

the trustworthiness of data as discussed above. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is established through activities (described below) establishing trustworthiness such as prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks. Finally, in the *reporting* stage, the findings are communicated to others. The intent of reporting is to inform other researchers and the public of the importance and trustworthiness of the findings (Kvale, 1996). I ensured that ethics, described in the *Ethical and Political Considerations* section below, were taken into account in my presentation of the data in the dissertation report.

Establishing Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are equivalents in qualitative research for the quantitative concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. The four equivalents used in qualitative research that parallel the quantitative criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Qualitative research that conforms to these criteria is *trustworthy*, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). The authors provided recommendations for activities that make it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced. I used four techniques to establish the trustworthiness of the data: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks.

Prolonged Engagement

The process of prolonged engagement involves the investment of sufficient time to build trust and gain acceptance among the teachers and other school personnel with whom I interacted while conducting the study. In the section called *Negotiating Entry* below, I discuss initial rapport-building efforts to gain access to teachers. In order to

avoid distortions in data due to misunderstandings between respondents and me, it was important to establish rapport before the study began and maintain it throughout the investigation.

Triangulation

The current study employed triangulation to reduce the risk of bias. According to Maxwell (1996), the principle of triangulation involves collecting information from a range of individuals and settings, using various methods. In order to triangulate data, the research took place at three middle schools. Marshall and Rossman (1999) demonstrated that it is important to preserve holistic data from specific sites while also conducting more general, comparative analyses. As stated, the primary method of data collection was in-depth individual interviews. Interviews allowed the respondents to provide accounts of their challenges, to describe the strategies they use to help early adolescents deal with violence-related stressors, and to explain what support systems (if any) could help them to improve their work. Field notes were also recorded in a journal to ensure that information provided by participants outside of interviews was not lost. This journal was also used for researcher reflections and notes, with entries contributing to the development of concepts and identification of salient "stories" in the data (LaRossa, 2005). These various sources were used to triangulate the data, checking for redundancy across methods.

Peer Debriefing

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefing helps to establish credibility by exposing the inquirer to probing questions by a "devil's advocate." A peer debriefer is generally a trusted researcher whose role is to raise substantive,

methodological, ethical and any other relevant questions about the study at given points. Lincoln and Guba also noted that the debriefer should not be someone in authority over the researcher or junior to the researcher. As part of a qualitative research support group of my peers, I discussed methodological and ethical issues that emerged during my coding process. Additionally, graduate students conducting qualitative dissertation research and I met periodically to discuss our respective processes, to read sections of each other's writing, and to check our assumptions and hypotheses. During a peer debriefing meeting on November 4, 2005, I shared excerpts of the results section. Comments from three peers were substantive and thought provoking. For instance, a peer debriefer recommended I think about race and gender as I discuss community violence and its effect on early adolescents. I noted in my journal, "As expected, a section on issues specific to African American culture is needed (revisit Jarrett)…Also check Marshall and Rossman – race, class, and gender as crucial for understanding experience."

<center>*Member Checks*</center>

Qualitative research is an important method for inviting participants to give voice to their stories. Creswell (1998) defined member checks as solicitations of informants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. This process involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to participants so that they can judge their accuracy.

In the final phase of data collection, member checks were solicited with three respondents with whom I shared concepts revealed in the individual interviews. These respondents reviewed quotes and other information provided by participants in the study,

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and they "checked-in" to ensure that the process reflected their experiences. Based on comments made by members of the group about quotations they read by other teachers, it was clear that they found the results to be accurate and informational. The member check participants affirmed the concept of self preservation, in particular, commenting, "I used to break up fights and don't anymore. It's emotionally draining." Mrs. Bates and Ms. James agreed with each other, "You can't save everyone." "Yeah, at some point, you have to say to yourself, 'I can't save this child. If I can help, I will. But they got too much going on and I got my own to worry about. I can't adopt them under my wing.'"

According to Maxwell (1996), the principal investigator's bias may be revealed in two ways: selecting data that fits his or her preconceptions or existing theory, or selecting data that seem to stand out. The qualitative researcher is obligated to alter his or her stance if participants reveal strategies that differ from those that are expected. The methodology, therefore, in a qualitative study is a work in progress to be refined as the process unfolds. Beyond concept development, the member check meetings confirmed for me that saturation had been reached when participants stated that the excerpts on community violence, challenges, and strategies provided a true and comprehensive depiction of their school and teaching experience.

<center>Data Analysis Procedures</center>

A *modified* grounded theory approach was used for data analysis. Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop a theory about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In pure grounded theory, a researcher does not begin with any theoretical framework. Because this study used an ecological/risk and resilience framework as a foundation, a grounded theory was not

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purely derived from the study of the phenomenon. Maxwell (1996) used a coat closet metaphor to describe the use of existing theory in a grounded theory study. The ecological/risk and resilience framework provides places to "hang" the data that emerged in the current study. In other words, concepts related to teachers' challenges, strategies, and support needs in communities affected by violence are defined within the context of the ecological/risk and resilience framework. Grounded theory procedures for data analysis incorporate three main phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 1998).

Open Coding

My first step was to conduct open coding of the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data. In open coding, the researcher examines the text of memos, field notes and transcripts from interviews for salient categories of information. LaRossa (2005) stated that open coding is not just about grouping concepts together but also about arraying concepts. This process involves taking similar concepts and placing them under a higher level heading. In order to theoretically saturate each concept, I developed a codebook that reflected several readings of notes, transcriptions, and codes (See Appendix D). The codebook incorporated categories such as teaching and its subcodes of challenges, strategies and support needs. In order to organize the vast amount of data effectively, I developed other categories. These included school, violence, kids, parents, security, and community involvement. The categories became part of a tree node system in the QSR N6 program with many subcodes. For example,

subcodes for violence included witness, victim, gang, gunshots/weapons, lockdowns, drugs, defining the violence/violent community, grieving, and numbness.

According to van den Hoonaard (1997), this first approach to the data is systematic and time consuming. Based on theoretical insights developed through coding, the researcher generates sensitizing concepts. Sensitizing concepts are usually closely tied to participants' thoughts and words. Initial sensitizing concepts were dropped as more definite concepts emerge through the research process (Marsiglio, 2003). For example, in my field notes from 10/21/05 during open coding, I wrote,

> There is something with 'telling my story' as a way of helping kids realize what is good or bad to do in order to help you in the future. Teachers tell stories of their own suspensions, their own fights, their own bad grades in order to convince kids, "Don't do what I did" or "Think about your future now as I did not." I don't know what to call this theme. I see it a lot under strategies of give advice and counseling.

The N6 software program facilitated the open coding process. I read through all interviews and categorized paragraphs to fit within my concepts. New concepts emerged throughout open coding. In order to incorporate a new concept, I had to revisit text from interviews coded earlier in the process. This back-and-forth process helped me to feel immersed in the data and prepared to move on to axial coding.

Axial Coding

Based on establishing an initial set of categories in open coding, I began the process of axial coding. In axial coding, new connections are made between categories and subcategories defined in open coding. According to LaRossa (2005), the difference between open coding and axial coding is that in open coding, the researcher is essentially developing the categories while in axial coding, the relationship between or among categories is explicitly examined. Through this process, I identified the central

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phenomenon appearing in the data as community violence. That is, all the categories

defined in open coding revolved around the central idea of violence in the community.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined four features of relating categories: causal

conditions, context, intervening conditions, and consequences. The following example of

a story told by Ms. Chazz illustrates the four features:

> There has been [a threat of violence in the school], and I have at that particular
> time felt like, okay what am I gonna do, especially when you have a student, we
> had a student here in which some people off the streets were after him and it got
> kind of fearful especially Wednesday. He apparently did something and you have
> grown people, or seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds, coming after him ready to
> kill. And it got kind of fearful when they came up to the school cause we were
> informed after the fact that we had some visitors in the building with guns, so, at
> that point I was like oh, okay, so walking in the halls for a couple of days, I kind
> of stopped a little because you just don't know.

Causal conditions in data are associated with cues such as "when," "while,"

"since," "because," "due to," or "on account of." They are the events that lead to the

occurrence of the phenomenon. In the example, causal conditions were defined with the

sentence, "And it got kind of fearful when they came up to the school cause we were

informed after the fact that we had some visitors in the building with guns…"*Context*

refers to the specific location of events that pertain to a phenomenon. *Context* is

represented by when and how events occur, the number and type of incidents, duration,

location, and intensity. The context, in this case, was set by Ms. Chazz who noted that

the student "apparently did something and you have grown people, or seventeen and

eighteen-year-olds, coming after him ready to kill."

Intervening conditions represent broader structural context pertaining to a

phenomenon. Conditions of time, culture, economic status, history, and individual

biography must be managed through the axial coding process. In an earlier passage when

asked about challenges for families, Ms. Chazz described the neighborhoods where students live. She stated, "But it's pretty bad, especially when you have to work in the environment because you have to always be watchful of where you go." These are the intervening conditions that were weaved in during axial coding whether explicitly defined or not. Finally, *consequences* to people, places or things such as events or responsive interactions were revealed in axial coding. The consequence to Ms. Chazz in this case was to hesitate when walking in the halls for the next couple of days "because you just don't know." This four-featured process of axial coding enabled me to relate subcategories to a category and verify statements against the data.

Selective Coding

In the final phase, selective coding, data were interpreted to build a "story" that connects the categories defined through open and axial coding (Creswell, 1998). The conceptualization of a story line involves giving the central phenomenon a name. According to LaRossa (2005), the central phenomenon or core variable is the one variable generated during coding that is theoretically saturated and centrally relevant. In other words, it is the variable that pulls the others together to form an explanatory whole. Based on all coded categories, the variables for teacher challenges, strategies, and support needs for improving services to early adolescents were subsumed under the central category of community violence. Data were then divided into challenges, strategies and support needs.

During selective coding, the final phase of data analysis, I invited a select group of participants to review the findings. As a qualitative researcher, I was prepared to find how the data supported or negated my assumptions. In order to complete the analysis, I

needed to check-in with the participants whose stories I was going to tell. I brought them

a list of central concepts and excerpts of my results. I changed the names of schools and

used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of all participants in the study.

Personal Biography

Marshall and Rossman (1999) identified four assumptions about qualitative

research: 1) it fundamentally involves issues of power; 2) it is authored by a raced,

gendered, classed, and politically oriented individual; 3) race, class, and gender are

crucial for understanding experience; and 4) traditional research has silenced members of

oppressed and marginalized groups. My personal and practical purposes for designing

this study related to my previous career as a family therapist working in communities

affected by violence in Washington D.C. As a family therapist turned family researcher,

I saw the need to consider the ecological context of early adolescents, families, teachers,

and other community members in violent neighborhoods. I chose the theoretical

framework for the current study, ecological/risk and resilience, because I strongly believe

that early adolescent resilience is dependent upon support from family, key individuals

directly involved in supporting families, such as teachers and family counselors, and

other members of the community.

As a woman married to a publicschool teacher, I know that teachers have

information to offer school administrators, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers

who may not always acknowledge the importance of teachers' voices. I am also aware

that women dominate the teaching profession. Yet, in a patriarchal society, government

power structures, which instill policies, teacher training curricula, and testing

requirements, are dominated by men. As a feminist, I felt privileged to have the

opportunity to learn from teachers and to share their stories.

Ethical and Political Considerations

According to Bogden and Bilken (1998), two issues dominate ethics in research

with human subjects. First, subjects must enter research projects voluntarily,

understanding the nature of the study, the potential dangers, and the obligations involved.

Second, subjects must not be exposed to risks greater than the gains they might derive.

Participants in the current study were provided with a consent form that includes an

overview of the study and expectations of their time (See Appendix E). For example, the

overview informed them that the interview would last approximately an hour and a half.

They were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Pseudonyms were

attached to each teacher's name and were used to protect the anonymity of participants.

Additionally, schools were given pseudonyms, which will be used in any publications

resulting from the dissertation. Participants were promised that every reasonable attempt

would be made to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality. In appreciation of their

time, participants were provided with granola bars, fruit, and a drink during the

interviews and a $25 gift certificate for which they could choose either a retail or grocery

store (Target or Giant).

Special Considerations and Protections

I received permission from all of the participants to audiotape the interviews for

transcription. In addition, I took notes throughout the interview. This document was

then used with the audiotape to validate information during transcription. In reports

resulting from data collection, pseudonyms will be used instead of participants' names to

protect participant confidentiality. None of the interviewees required accommodations

for special needs such as physical or visual impairments.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, I share data from interviews conducted with teachers in three middle schools in communities affected by violence. The schools were chosen based on "Hot Spot" reports from county police, which indicated high levels of violent crime in the communities where the schools are located. A total of 20 teachers were interviewed.

Findings from my interviews are organized around an organizational framework for teachers' challenges, strategies, and support needs. Teacher defined dimensions of community violence, as the central phenomenon, are revealed in the first section. The following three sections address the three major research questions: 1) challenges encountered by teachers in schools located in violent communities; 2) strategies employed by teachers to enhance youth resilience in these settings; and 3) support needs of teachers in schools affected by violence.

The interview data on teacher challenges, strategies, and support needs yielded three major concepts in the final selective coding process: guidance, structure, and self preservation. In other words, the collective story teachers shared was one in which they experienced challenges in providing guidance to students and obtaining structural supports to facilitate students' learning and adjustment, as well as challenges to preserving their own mental health. Despite working in violent communities, teachers employed strategies to foster youth resilience by: providing guidance to students and their families; supplying structure in their classrooms and addressing structural constraints of their schools and communities; and engaging in behaviors that preserved their personal mental health. Finally, teachers expressed a need for supports that would enable them to: offer more effective student and family guidance, implement structural

solutions to enhance safety and security at the school and community levels; and access services to address their mental health needs.

Figure 2 provides an overview of the study findings. Community violence is identified as the central phenomenon for this investigation. Teacher challenges, strategies, and support needs are examined with respect to each of the general concepts that emerged from the data (guidance, structure, self preservation). Quotations from teachers provide supporting evidence for the results.

Figure 2. Organizational Framework for Teachers' Challenges, Strategies, and Support Needs: Guidance, Structure, and Self Preservation

Community Violence
"And that type of violence does spill over, it spills over into the neighborhood, and it spills from the neighborhood into the school" (Ms. Ramsey, Grandview Middle School)…   Defining the violence   Violence in the neighborhood   Violence in the schools

Guidance	**Structure**	**Self Preservation**
Teacher Challenges Aggressive behavior management Low academic motivation Parental apathy Negative parent behavior	**Teacher Challenges** Insufficient teacher time School policies compromising safety/security Lack of community resources	**Teacher Challenges** Fear Stress and somatic issues Desensitization
Teacher Strategies Listening, advice, and counseling Student empowerment Parent involvement	**Teacher Strategies** Structure, monitoring and control Participation in violence prevention training Reliance on strong school administrative support Community engagement	**Teacher Strategies** Venting to teachers and family Praying Limiting involvement with difficult students Separating work and personal life Seeking professional counseling
Teacher Support Needs Student counseling and crisis intervention Behavior management training Parent involvement and education	**Teacher Support Needs** Improved school safety/security Antiviolence programs (peer mediation) Effective school leadership Expanded community resources	**Teacher Support Needs** Access to professional counseling

Defining Community Violence

In order to gain greater understanding of the impact of community violence on middle school youth, I asked teachers to define how they experienced it in the target schools and neighborhoods. I encouraged them to talk about the effects of community violence on students in their classrooms, the impact of violence on families, and the community's response to violence. My questions included:

- Are there things you've experienced related to violence in the community?

- What is the area like where students live and hang out?

- Do you feel that the neighborhood is safe?

- Would you consider this to be a violent community?

Given this context, community violence was the central phenomenon from which teachers shared their experiences – the challenges, strategies, and support needs that related to teaching in a community where shootings were a frequent occurrence. Teachers reported that violence had become a fact of life for their middle school students in the target schools. According to one teacher, Mrs. Daniel, a 62-year- old African American teacher at Kendall Lake Middle School:

> I am seeing, most of the children talk about the violence in their communities as, oh yeah, we had a shooting last night, oh yeah, it's an everyday occurrence. It's nothing new. It's nothing to get upset about. One of our kids got shot three weeks ago in the back, it's no big deal.

Participating teachers in this study provided many definitions for community violence, incorporating their experience with crime in the neighborhoods surrounding the schools. Ms. Peterson, a 27-year-old African American language arts teacher at Kendall Lake described the social challenges for families living in the community:

It's kind of a rough neighborhood to grow up in. There's a lot of police activity, a lot of crime, so the kids are kind of struggling to grow up in this area, even if they have their families, it's like once they leave the door of their home it's like who knows what they'll see…this area's actually one of the higher crime areas in PG County—car thefts, assaults, things like that, drug activity, so it's not the best neighborhood to grow up in.

Some teachers described how adolescents contribute to the problem. According to Mrs. Walton, a 40-year-old African American math teacher from Grandview, and Mrs. Palmer, a 49-year-old African American reading and language arts teacher from Danbrook Middle School, retaliation was a frequent focus of the street violence. Mrs. Palmer stated that gun violence in the neighborhood often stemmed from minor conflicts, disagreements, or perceived slights among youth:

It's very difficult because you may have heard of something that occurred over the weekend…The street violence is behind, 'You know, you took my coat,' 'Your friends took it,' 'You picked on my little brother at a party,' it got out of hand and somebody came back and retaliated."

Ms. James, a 35-year-old African American music teacher from Danbrook Middle School, gave further evidence of the pervasiveness of community violence. She described a large number of students in her school who were wearing memorial t-shirts for friends and family members who were shot in the community.

Violence in the Neighborhoods

One fifth of the teachers interviewed for the current study were members of a neighborhood near their school. Most of the other teachers were residents of Prince George's County, the county where the schools were located. Each of these teachers reported an awareness of the violence that occurs near their school and indicated that community violence affected their job in the classroom.

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Grandview Middle School is a new school that has been open for three years. Ms. Ramsey, a 25-year-old African American social studies teacher, described recent changes to the neigbhorhood:

> Behind the school, it's, it looks really nice. The houses are new townhouses, but around the school, it's ghetto, low-income, it's definitely…adults living with their parents with their kids as a situation. The apartments right across the street used to be projects and so they 'remodeled' them, but…they still look like a jail cell to me with those bars around it."

Danbrook Middle School enrolls youth living in three neighborhoods known for violent activity. One street, in particular, is notorious for its violence. Mrs. Bates, a 30-year-old African American language arts teacher who lives in one of these neighborhoods near the school, stated:

> So the area is changing, but right now, it's still most of the people don't want to live in [this particular] area. Most of the people don't because it's still a low-income, violent prone area.

Ms. James, a 35-year-old African American teacher who lives in the neighborhood of Danbrook Middle School, shared her daily concerns about violent activity on the street:

> I am not responding very well. I just went to a funeral on Monday of another student's brother who got killed and I have been losing sleep over this. I have not been responding very well and I know I've got to learn how to deal with this differently.

Ms. James found her house through the "Teacher Next Door," a program in which teachers can bid on properties that are located near a school where they teach. While she had concerns about her own mental health, she stated that she provided students a "safe haven" by living in the neighborhood and noted that every now and then, students come and knock on her door to say hello.

Ms. Farmer, a 31-year-old African American reading and language arts teacher at Grandview middle school, noted the distrust in the community because of violent activity. She reported that in order to stay safe, people avoid going outside and rarely greet their neighbors. However, she also described some strengths in the neighborhoods, including activities for middle school youth:

> I don't believe this area is as bad as it could be. There have been murders around here within the past year, I know of at least one. Most of the time the kids hang out outside, you know, just outside with their friends. There are a couple of basketball courts that's around the neighborhood that they hang out at. There are two Boys and Girls Clubs…that get kids into activities throughout the year. They have football, cheerleading, baseball, basketball…I think that's about it. But you know, they get the kids involved in things…

The teachers and professional staff at Kendall Lake Middle School also described a number of potential dangers in their school neighborhood. Ms. Chazz, a 35-year-old African American guidance counselor at the school, described the neighborhood as a "rough environment where you find people shooting people, including students." She said she feared for the lives of her family members who lived in the community. Teachers attributed much of the violence to neighborhood gangs or crews and noted that gang violence often spills over into the school. Guidance counselor Ms. Chazz stated:

> We've had a police officer to come in to talk to students because…we had our different communities, the [two neighborhood crews] apparently as the students say had some beef with each other, and beef means having a problem, where it got to the point where it was coming up into the school.

Ms. Jennings, a 26-year-old African American computer application/keyboarding teacher at Kendall Lake, also reported that gang activity was out of control. She viewed the neighborhoods as decent with lawns nicely cut, but stated that there are people who flock to the corner in the afternoon, vandalize, and go to other "'hoods" to claim them.

One thing I can say is almost at one point every week or every other week somebody in the neighborhood was dying. A group of our kids had to go to a funeral, so we know it was definitely something going on during the day, or at nighttime when we're not around. From what I know in speaking with the kids, majority of the violence is gang-related.

While many teachers noted the existence of neighborhood protective factors such as recreation centers, churches, and responsive businesses, virtually all of the teachers interviewed were aware of the risks associated with violent crime in the neighborhoods surrounding their schools. They further noted that their middle school students had first-hand knowledge of area shootings and deaths, including some that involved members of the adolescents' families.

Violence in the Schools

The majority of teachers in this study reported that neighborhood and community violence affected the milieu of their schools and classrooms. Teachers reported that violence in the community filtered into the school setting, and disputes between students at school were often carried into the community. Teachers discussed safety risks to themselves and to their students. Ms. Holloway, a 26-year-old African American math and science special education teacher at Grandview, was faced with a student who made a verbal threat that he would shoot her:

He was about to hit me and I was like, "Well that's the icing on the cake, you know"….because the year before, he actually brought in a look-alike gun and was showing it off like it was a real gun, so when I went to administration and was like, "You never know what these kids are getting into." I was like, you know, "He's already told us that he's pushing drugs on the weekends and at night so how do I know that he won't bring a gun into this building," knowing that last year, "I could bring a look-alike and I won't get into trouble?" How do you know? I was like, "I don't want to be back in that room until something is done."

Ten days later, the student was transferred to another school. In another incident at Grandview, a student left school without anyone's knowledge and returned with two

butcher knives. He was searching the halls to find the teacher with whom he was angry.

According to Ms. Ramsey:

> …and we saw him on the cameras, like we had a code red, and we saw him on the cameras just walking up and down the hall looking in classes trying to find this guy because he was ready to stab him…

This student was later expelled.

Most of the teachers in all three middle schools responded that violence in or around their schools was a part of everyday life. Ms. West, a 54-year-old White science teacher and Talented and Gifted (TAG) program coordinator at Kendall Lake, reported that families whose children were accepted into the TAG program quickly recognized their children's potential risk of violence exposure:

> In fact, we lost a lot of our Talented and Gifted population because when their parents came into the building and they saw what was going on in our hallways last year, a lot of those sixth grade parents would not bring their kids here in the seventh grade. So we had students either going to other schools or going to private school, and we even had a lot of the parents who moved out of the county completely.

Some teachers reported that parents shared some of the blame for the violent activity within their schools. Mrs. Bates from Danbrook described parents who encouraged their children to fight or retaliate when others showed them "disrespect."

> Some people say to their children, "If you don't fight them and you don't beat their behinds, I'm gonna whoop your behind." And that's what's happening. That's how that situation happened where the parent came into the school and told the little girl to fight her daughter right there…And when she saw the little girl was getting the best of her daughter, she jumped in the fight. So she's beating up on this little kid.

Ms. Dunn, a 42-year-old African American language arts teacher from Danbrook told the story of a parent coming to threaten a teacher on the last day of school. The incident involved a parent who entered a class in session:

Out of the blue, on the last day of school, a parent came up and threatening, just trying to fight a teacher, right around the corner from me. She just walked up on her, and she had a class going on, she walked up on her, was outside the door calling her a bitch and everything.

Teachers reported that threats of violence might cause school administrators to lock down the school buildings in order to keep students and teachers out of harm's way. Ms. Ramsey described this process at Grandview, noting that a lockdown is known as a C-Day Schedule (as opposed to an A-Day or B-Day Schedule). This schedule was used when there was an intruder in the building or when there was someone "with a gun on the premises." According to Ms. Ramsey:

> We've had maybe three of those this year, but as we lock the door, no one's allowed to go out into the hallway, no one's allowed to do anything, you have to just stay in your class, no one can come in or out. And we don't monitor the halls at those times. I'm not going out there, if somebody has a gun, I don't want anything to do with that.

While teachers reported that these occurrences were infrequent, many reported that they were always on alert to identify potential threats of violence.

Challenges

The first major research question in this study addressed the challenges faced by middle school teachers who work in communities affected by violence. I asked teachers to describe the challenges they face in their classrooms and in working with students exposed to violent events. I also probed the challenges of working with the students' families. My questions included:

- What are the challenges for families whose children attend this school?

- How has neighborhood violence affected students in your classroom?

- How has violence affected your teaching?

- How effective do you consider the police to be?

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Teachers described challenges relating to their ability to provide students with guidance and adequate structural supports, as well as challenges related to preserving their own mental health.

ChallengesR elated to Guidance

Teachers in this study described a number of challenges that reduced their ability to provide students with guidance to help them learn and develop positive social and problem-solving skills. Specifically, teachers reported that they were challenged by having to manage 1) aggressive classroom behavior; 2) dealing with their students' low academic motivation; 3) parental apathy; and 4) negative parental behavior.

Aggressive Behavior Management

As in all American middle schools, teachers in this study reported age-related challenges stemming from adolescent hormonal changes and developmental experiences such as "a first crush" and students excluding peers or acting "just horrible to each other." However, teachers also reported that many youth in their classrooms were presenting inappropriate and potentially dangerous behaviors that they attributed to residence in violent communities. Teachers were challenged by having to manage these aggressive behaviors while also attempting to guide and instruct their students.

Beefin'. Teachers described "beefin" as the most common form of aggressive behavior that affected their classrooms and school climate. A "beef" is a term used in the community to describe a conflict that usually leads to physical violence in the form of fighting.

Ms. Ramsey from Grandview described the problem of a community beef and its potential for proliferation in and out of school:

And that type of violence does spill over, it spills over into the neighborhood, and it spills from the neighborhood into school, so we'll even have, like this year we had some kids from high school come up to the school to try to beat up one of our kids, and then it was like a big beef and it was so beyond the school…

Many teachers described how the problem of "beefin" encroached in their classrooms and had negative effects on students' learning and development of prosocial skills. Ms. Jennings from Kendall Lake described how "beefin" influenced her instructional time:

…It became a problem when students were in the same classroom in different neighborhoods that were beefin'. So if you had assigned seats next to the person that you were of course going against, it was a point where they didn't want to sit down. Then you're like, especially for teachers who had no clue what was going on, "Why are you not sitting down?" Then they don't want to say anything and then it's just, "oh now, you're being disrespectful because that's your assigned seat. You should be sitting down." And then eventually it all comes out, later or what have you, but you just took 20 minutes, 30 minutes of instructional time instead of just sitting down, getting over it, understand?

Several teachers echoed Ms. Jennings' frustration, describing how 'beefin'' compromised their teaching effectiveness and relationships with individual students.

Going hard. In communities affected by violence, the transition from elementary to middle school is marked by pressure to act tough or as it is better known, to "go hard." In these communities, "going hard" is a term used to describe behavior that looks violent. Early adolescents who "go hard" are confrontational and threaten to act violently when challenged by others. Ms. Jennings from Kendall Lake described this behavior at her school:

They want to prove they're hard even though they may not live in the neighborhood, they want to prove that they're hard by picking on somebody, or just hitting somebody out of the blue just to prove a point.

Ms. James from Danbrook indicated that going hard was an attitude that one adopts to make others fearful and to protect oneself from perceived danger. She claimed that experiencing violence firsthand contributes to students "going hard."

Well this incident happened where he was in the apartment, he witnessed his friend murdered. He got grazed by a bullet. Yeah, he got grazed by a bullet and I've just seen a change in him where he's just become kind of stoned-faced and not really communicative, you know…

Some teachers differentiated between students who actually "go hard" and those who adopted "fake thug" behavior. As a member of the community who attended Danbrook when he was a middle school student, Mr. Harris discounted attempts by some of his students to "go hard" as "fake thug" behavior:

I see a lot of my students acting out, acting as if they're violent or acting as if they're, in our community we call it, "going hard." So they act as if they "go hard," but it's not true...

A few teachers reported that students may adopt thug-like behavior as a survival strategy; they noted that whether real or not, the behavior reduces students' receptivity to guidance from teachers.

Mr. Bailey, a 28-year-old White music, band and orchestra teacher at Kendall Lake Middle School described students who go hard as taking a "turn to the dark side." He described one student who was getting A's and really "walking on the line." According to Mr. Bailey, his mother was addicted to crack cocaine. His sister dropped out of school and was pregnant with her second child. Because of his home situation, Mr. Bailey had made efforts outside the classroom to work with this student:

…It's sad, but it's almost like he turned to the dark side, it started to get to him, he started to treat me different, he started to walk around the halls different, started associating with people he shouldn't be associating with. I saw the progression, it was kind of devastating. You almost have this kid, and we've probably lost him now…

Not long before our interview, this student was shot but survived with a punctured lung.

Bullying. Students who "go hard" may display bullying behavior, but there is a distinction between "going hard" and bullying, based on the stories I heard from teachers.

"Going hard" is an attitude. Whether or not teachers viewed it as real or fake thug behavior, it was described as a way that students, and particularly male students, carry themselves to imply the threat of violent behavior. Bullying, on the other hand, is a concrete behavior that may include both verbal and physical violence. Bullying involves behavior directed toward a victim; it may include verbal ridicule, known as "jonin,'" and physically abusive behavior. According to Ms. Holloway from Grandview:

> One student in my class, he plays for the soccer team, and he was waiting for his parent to come pick him up after the game was over. I guess the coach had left and he was sitting down in front of the school building and these boys, I guess, were smoking weed or something and said, "you better not tell on us because if you do, we'll do something to you" and they jumped him…[Later], he was so scared he didn't want to leave out of the room to go get his lunch, he didn't want to go to the restroom by himself.

Teachers described how dealing with bullying affected their ability to provide classroom instruction and guidance. They stressed that teachers must take the time to address the behavior of both the aggressor and the victimized student. These efforts focus on discipline and crisis management, reducing teacher opportunities to focus on developing the cognitive and prosocial skills of the larger group of students in their classrooms.

Low Academic Motivation

Teachers also described their students' low academic motivation as limiting their ability to provide effective guidance. Many teachers believed that violence-related fears contributed to the low levels of academic motivation exhibited by students in their classrooms. According to Mrs. Walton at Grandview Middle School:

> You know, I think that violence and other home situations get them distracted so they're not focused on education; they're mentally somewhere else, dealing with whatever they have to deal with…

Mrs. Bates at Danbrook reported that students in these violent, low-income communities often failed to see the long-term benefits of education. She reported that students were frequently absent. She had three students who failed all their classes for the entire year. She explained:

> …they feel that they're not going to be nothing more than a rapper or singer or a basketball player, sports figure so they figure that's the only way they're in. They never look at college as an option…They don't look past 7th or 8th grade...They're not looking at the basis of education as getting them out of their situation. None of them are. So it makes my job very difficult. Like homework is non-existent, class-work is only when I holler, okay.

Mr. Bailey from Grandview agreed that students are not motivated academically because of the adults they idolize, including those that glamorize violence:

> I feel like the role models are athletes and hip-hop gangster rap type people, and I don't think that's going to help these children succeed in life. I hated hearing it when I was a kid, but it's like you gotta have a backup if you're not going to be an athlete, well you gotta have some ideas of what you're going to do.

Teachers described the challenge of guiding and educating students in classrooms where there was often a lack of motivation to take school seriously. Ms. Dunn from Danbrook provided an example from Career Day during which her students engaged a real estate agent in a conversation tangentially related to her career:

> They kept saying, "How do you buy a house with cash?" She didn't catch on. I said "Ma'am, they're talking about drug money." And they just told her, "yeah," they were trying to figure out how they could do this and buy a home and still be a drug dealer. And they tell you, they wanna be drug dealers.

Some teachers reported problems in motivating students to pursue college and professional careers when the most financially successful adults in their neighborhoods engaged in illegal activities.

Parental Apathy

Interview questions addressing challenges asked teachers to describe the challenges encountered by students' parents and families in neighborhoods with high levels of violence. Questions further probed teacher interaction with their students' parents. The vast majority of teachers reported that their relationships with parents were a major source of disappointment in their jobs.

Teachers shared an array of challenges in providing guidance to students that they attributed to the backgrounds of parents and family members. Many teachers described a "cycle of disadvantage" in these families, characterized by poverty, single and early parenthood, and a lack of motivation among their students' parents. Teachers stated that these factors contributed to parental apathy with respect to their children's school success. According to Ms. Ramsey from Grandview:

> [Parents] don't know that life is better than what they're living…it seems like they grew up in this area and they've been stuck here. And because you don't know that things can be better, then you just really don't know things can be better. Like you just survive and you do the things the way you've always done them, so it's almost like you don't know you have another option. So the same way they were goofing off in school and didn't succeed, that's the same way their kids are.

Additionally, Ms. Ramsey from Grandview placed blame squarely on parents for their children's failures. Responding to a mother who feigned involvement after her child failed an entire school year, Ms. Ramsey displayed her frustration:

> …and then she's like, "why didn't you call me?" Why didn't I call you? Your kid failed last year, and it's not your kid failing at this point, now it's you. You're not doing anything for him. You should have called me. You should have been up here. I did call you.

The majority of teachers felt some resentment toward parents' lack of involvement in the school. However, many teachers also sympathized with the plight of

parents who faced socioeconomic challenges. According to Mrs. Walton from

Grandview:

> I think the challenges are that there's not a lot of participation of parents and I don't know exactly why that is, but I can speculate that a lot of parents have to work hours that are not conducive to volunteering, they may have more than one job, [and] there are a lot of single parent families.

Teachers stated that early adolescents without healthy, productive, future-oriented

role models have the potential to become part of the "cycle of disadvantage." According

to Ms. Willis, a 27-year-old African American science teacher at Danbrook Middle

School:

> …When you first learn, you start at home so teachers can only do so much. So if you're not going with your child every night and looking over their work and studying with them, you know what I'm saying, just being a parent and a role model, then the child doesn't have any guidance…Don't get me wrong, I know it's hard out there raising children and stuff…I just feel like the parents are slacking a little bit. They're not doing what they supposed to do. They always depend on the teacher, but the teacher can only do so much, that's not our children, you know. So I think that some of it is part of the parents' responsibility to and some is on the teacher, but when they're not in the classroom, what are they doing at home?

Mr. Bailey from Kendall Lake also noted that parents have the primary

responsibility for raising and guiding their children. He expressed concern about the

effects of parental apathy on the everyday activities of middle school students.

> I'm not speaking for everyone, but in general I would say a lot of times the parents are not involved and they're not there for their kids when they need them. They're not there helping them with their homework, they're not there making sure they're dressed well, eating, just regular stuff, getting sleep, in the house where they're supposed to be, not getting into trouble.

Many teachers reported that parents failed to implement limits for their middle

school children's behavior. Ms. Farmer from Grandview stated that, "[Students are] not

used to the strict schedules…" Furthermore, according to Ms. Willis, a 27-year-old

African American teacher from Danbrook:

> [Parents] are not encouraging their children like they should, to read, to write, to sit down and do their math, to go over their homework, to keep struggling doing those problems, finding enrichment activities.

Mrs. Daniel, a 62-year-old African American teacher at Kendall Lake, echoed this

sentiment, stating that teachers have little power to guide student behavior and enforce

limits if parents are not providing boundaries in the home:

> Well one of them, the parent told me, said I just can't make him come. They're making their own decisions, so many of these children, and I see that when we say something to them, these kids are used to raising themselves. So who are we to tell them what they can and cannot do when in their home, they do whatever they want.

> Mrs. Walton from Grandview hypothesized that some parents of students

exhibiting behavior problems may appear apathetic about their early adolescent's

education because they have failed to cope effectively with their own stress:

> I mean, if your child is not behaving at school, they're bringing home bad grades, and you feel overwhelmed with your job and you don't feel like you can control your child, maybe you just ignore it, which is not really a coping mechanism.

In virtually every interview, teachers noted the additional burden they faced in providing

students with constructive guidance due to parental apathy and lack of parental

involvement in their middle school children's academic lives.

Negative Parent Behavior

A fourth problem noted by some teachers in guiding student learning and social

development was negative parental behaviors. In my field notes, I wrote, "it's hard to get

a sense of whether challenging parents are a majority or a minority. Some teachers make

it sound like they need to get out of the school system because disrespectful, violent

behavior from parents is rampant. Others see it as manageable." Ms. Jennings at Kendall

Lake stated that a majority of parents were well-intentioned and would respond to their

early adolescent's aggressive behavior in the same general way a teacher would respond.

However, she noted that a minority of parents accept violence as a problem-solving

strategy and even expect their child to resort to violence in response to threats or conflict:

> They see fighting as the only way of solving it, proving your manhood or your
> womanhood is the only way of solving it. It's kind of unfortunate because they
> come in here with that mentality and because at home, they're forced to know that
> if they say something to you, you should hit them…

Mrs. Bates, an African American teacher who lives in the Danbrook community

voiced concern that children see negative parental behavior and learn that violence is an

appropriate outlet for anger. She described a situation where a parent threatened a teacher

during class:

> …the parent came and approached [the teacher] and told her if she does
> something like this again, I'm gonna whoop you're a-s-s and teacher was just like,
> "are you kidding me?" And she was in front of all the students in the classroom.
> She didn't pull the teacher off to the side…She came inside the classroom and
> was this close to her and told her, "I will beat you up if you do this"…

Teachers did not describe these school encounters with violent parents as frequent

occurrences, and reported the problem of parental apathy to be far more common.

However, several teachers stated that efforts to guide students away from violent

behavior were hampered by students having parents and caregivers who advocated

violence to retaliate for slights and aggressive behaviors or who personally resorted to

violence in stressful situations.

Challenges Related to Structure

A second set of challenges described by teachers in this study focused on

structural problems within their school and within the larger community. Teachers

described being challenged by 1) insufficient time to interact with students who experienced community stressors; 2) school policies and administrative decisions that compromised their ability to protect and support middle school youth; and 3) the lack of a community infrastructure to provide safe, healthy educational and social activities for their students. Interview questions did not explicitly address the subject of community challenges related to violence. However, teacher statements about the need for community level change to address the needs of middle school youth emerged from questions about how best to handle the threat of violence within the schools.

Insufficient Teacher Time

Teachers in all schools described "insufficient teacher time" as a structural challenge that limited their effectiveness as educators. Teachers reported that they did not have enough time to encourage their students to succeed and to maintain communication with their families. Mr. Harris from Danbrook voiced his frustration with the monumental task of trying to teach and counsel needy students while balancing the large class sizes and multiple demands on a teacher's time:

> I have 90 altogether, about 90-95. About 30 to 35 a class, no teacher's assistant. That's like ridiculous, that's scary, to some degree 'cause you can't really teach. It's like you have 30-35 students and you're trying to teach all of them how to learn how to read and write better. Like where do I start?

Ms. West from Kendall Lake described the stress of managing time as a teacher, noting that it precludes teachers from providing extra one-on-one student support:

> I am so busy with my own duties in this school, I am here late every night, and I still don't get all of my work done. It's like I don't have anymore time. They really have us working down to the bone, and there's really, for me, there's no extra time to really do anything outside of my own job duties.

Although time is also a challenge for teachers in schools unaffected by violence, schools in low-income, violent communities are more likely to have students who are not meeting county, state, and national standards for academic achievement. Teachers reported that this problem imposes an extra burden on them. According to Mr. Lyons, a 29-year-old African American/Latino U.S. history teacher:

> We have too much going on. We have, you know, an aggressive curriculum that…just the fact that we as a county are "behind" in our state standardized tests, which are MSA's (Maryland School Assessment), so everything is kind of MSA driven…So there's a lot of pressure to get those things done so we can't slow down and we can't go back, we have to move along because we have to get these kids prepared for the test and everything like that.

A number of teachers noted that heavy schedules and recent demands for academic accountability force teachers to focus on academic success. They stated that there is little time to mentor individual children or to address their socioemotional needs.

Teachers also voiced frustration that insufficient time limits their ability to communicate with the parents of their students. Ms. James from Danbrook stated that she had planned to be in better contact with her students' parents, but the demands on her time were too taxing:

> I really just don't have the time to sit and call parents and tell them how wonderful their child is. Most of the time, if I have to make a phone call to the parent, it's because the child is acting up.

Ms. James, like other teachers, found it disappointing that their major contacts with parents focused on student behavior problems rather than on student achievements.

School Policies Compromising Safety/Security

Teachers from each of the three middle schools shared stories about structural challenges related to school policies and procedures. The nature of these problems varied and was related to the school in which the teachers taught. For example, Grandview was

a new school that opened three years prior to this study. During the first two years, teachers were busy establishing a school community, but morale was high. In the third year, a new principal from New York was hired who did not listen to the teachers in the school. During this period, teachers were unsure about the school policies and procedures related to handling threats of student violence in their school. This principal did not last through the school year, and while teachers were pleased with the choice for their acting principal, they did not know who would be principal for the following year. Overall, a sense of turbulence and unease permeated the accounts of teachers from this school.

Several teachers at Grandview stated that school policies were unclear about how to address threatened and actual violent behavior, causing teachers to feel as if they did not have control of their classrooms. According to Ms. Ramsey:

> …A lot of times we let the kids dictate the climate of the schools, like they act crazy, so then we are just frazzled, like we don't know what to do, and we're the adults, and I think that if we go along better and if we actually started networking and making sure that we had one plan and one agenda then everything else will fall into place. The kids would do what they were supposed to do because they didn't have any choice.

More specifically, school policies about the release of information resulted in teachers feeling fearful about their own safety. Ms. Holloway from Grandview believed that policies intentionally failed to warn teachers of potential threats within the school:

> They've found knives, they've found look-alike guns, they've found a real gun, and none of the teachers were informed about it. And then when they don't expel the kids and we don't know what's going on, the reason why they weren't suspended… when there's a weapon found, teachers are not told and I really believe that if they find a weapon in the school or on the bus, all teachers need to be informed about that particular incident.

Teachers further voiced frustration that consequences for violent and aggressive behavior were lacking in their schools. According to Ms. Willis from Danbrook, early adolescents learn to manipulate a system in which serious consequences are lacking:

> Students have more rights than the teachers. So they're quick to tell you, "You can't do that," but you know, I be like, "Okay. Alright." They tell you in a minute, "You can't do that. I'll get my mother up here."

Ms. Walton also noted a lack of consequences for aggressive behaviors at Grandview:

> You have kids in the hallway that threaten you.....And because there's no consequences they feel like they can say anything they'd like....Why am I going to chastise a child if nothing is going to happen to that child?

Still other teachers noted the lack of school rules or inconsistent enforcement of rules relating to youth violence. According to Ms. Richards from Grandview:

> There was not a lot of rules, it was back and forth. There's supposed to be a policy where they're suspended [for violence], but I'm not sure, it's different cases for different people, there's not structure.

At Kendall Lake, teachers were pleased with the leadership provided by the current principal. However, they still experienced school policies which they felt compromised their safety. For instance, Mrs. Daniel discussed the potential danger of cell phone use in school:

> The first year was fine, they couldn't have them on, they couldn't bring them in the building. Now they can carry them, but they can't turn them on. Tell children that. So we have them going in the bathroom and they will call whomever to come up here. So that makes it not as safe.

In addition to being displeased with school policies addressing aggressive behavior, some teachers expressed their disappointment that teachers and school administrators did not come together as a whole to discuss structural issues that might improve student and teacher safety. Mr. Harris from Danbrook voiced irritation with his principal for not prioritizing the importance of forming relationships with the school's

teachers. He met with the principal at the end of the school year for an exit meeting. Mr.

Harris described this meeting during our interview:

> The first time I had a meeting with my principal was when I left the school, on the last day- our exit interview. That was the first time I had a meeting with her other than the initial, "How're you doing? My name is…I come from…I'm teaching…" But other than that, it's the only time.

As a result of administrative instability and lack of communication, teachers

expressed a sense of paralysis in assisting students and their families. Teachers at

Grandview indicated that without strong leadership, communication channels were

blocked between teachers and other school professionals. According to Ms. Walton:

> I don't know much about it at all so kind of the services that they have at guidance really aren't communicated to the teachers so there's a big disconnect there. And a lot of parents, you know, if they're coming to talk about their child, they say, "You know, I just don't really know what to do. Is there someone I can take them to talk to?" And I can't communicate to that parent what's offered through the guidance office. I mean, I don't know what services are offered, if any.

Several teachers at Grandview and Danbrook noted that shortcomings in school

leadership and communication limited teachers' effectiveness in helping students and

parents deal with the stressors of community violence.

Lack of Community Resources

A third structural challenge voiced by teachers related to lack of community

resources. In their interviews, teachers volunteered that the absence of constructive after-

school/weekend programs and counseling services in some communities hindered

students' academic and personal development.   Mrs. West, a White veteran TAG teacher

from Kendall Lake, who expressed pride in the network of teachers, counselors, and

strong administrators in her school, was less sure about the availability of community

resources to address early adolescent's exposure to violence. When asked about potential

resources to help youth deal with neighborhood stressors, she replied:

> To help actual kids? The actual kids, you know, I don't even know of anything.
> Probably the guidance counselors [know] if there is anything. The guidance
> counselors should know, but personally I really wouldn't know where to send [the
> kids]. I don't think we do a very good job of that really, on a county level.

In fact, teachers' awareness of the separation between school resources and community

resources was not limited to one school. According to Mr. Harris at Danbrook, "The

community isn't a viable part of the school system. That's making problems."

Teachers voiced a sense of injustice at the inequalities between school districts.

They compared the resources of students and schools within wealthier, nearby suburban

communities with those in their own schools. Mrs. Palmer from Danbrook expressed the

irony that children in violent communities are most in need of healthy outlets as

alternatives to violence, yet these resources are not funneled to her school's community:

> …And that's why I'm running so hard because I don't see the resources there to
> support the children, you know. I don't see politicians being responsible in this
> area. You can go out to Bowie and they've opened a theater for those kids after
> school. You just don't see it here…If the politicians did what they needed to do, I
> think the businesses would follow suit. I really do, but until the people who make
> a difference really step up again, it's putting a band-aid on a problem rather than
> correcting what's really wrong.

Teachers kept themselves abreast of local political conditions that had some

impact on their schools. Decisions made by County Executive Jack Johnson were a

popular subject in response to the question, "Who is responsible for improving safety in

the school community?" Ms. Griffin from Kendall Lake stated that Jack Johnson and

other politicians had mobilized efforts to vacate apartment complexes known for violent

activities, but these actions were not expected to protect middle school youth from

exposure to violence on the streets. According to Ms. Griffin:

Basically, Jack Johnson has pinpointed apartments…and they were given 3-6 months to leave, because it's like subsidized apartments and basically he's doing that because of the drugs, drug problems, gang violence, things like that. That's not going to help…He doesn't care, they don't care where they're going, just out of his jurisdiction.

Interviews revealed that the plan to close dangerous apartment complexes was affecting neighborhoods in all target schools. Teachers did not see the point of moving members of a community out without devising a plan to address their children's education and safety.

Challenges Related to Self Preservation

A third salient concept that emerged from teacher responses to questions about the challenges of community violence revolved around issue of teacher mental health. Nearly half of the teachers interviewed reported symptoms of stress and concern for their personal safety. Specifically, teachers reported the following mental health challenges: 1) fear, 2) stress and somatic issues, and 3) desensitization. They indicated that these stressors compromised their own mental health and well being while working in neighborhoods characterized by high violence.

Fear

Several teachers voiced fear for their own safety and feelings of personal vulnerability. Ms. Holloway at Grandview Middle School stated that she kept her classroom door locked out of fear because her school failed to warn teachers about potential threats of violence:

> I felt like I was kind of scared, kind of nervous, but then I was like, I was okay because we keep our classroom door locked. So if there was anyone who was trying to get into our room, whoever is in charge opening the door has to announce who it is and then we can tell them yes or no, you can open the door or not…

Ms. Holloway recalled that a student who brought a "real gun" to school should have been expelled, but was suspended and returned to classes ten days later. She questioned the administrative decision that made teachers and students fearful, stating "what makes you think he's not going to bring [a gun] again?"

Ms. Chazz from Kendall Lake claimed that her fellow teachers in violent communities live in constant fear of students coming to school with weapons.

> I fear on a daily basis…cause we have students coming in with knives and in a way you always have to have that fear cause you never know, cause you can have a student who can just turn on you in a second.

Mr. Romero, a 30-year-old Asian male math teacher from Grandview Middle School, stated that he was fearful of walking in the school hallways:

> It's difficult, I pray for myself as well, I pray for myself because sometimes I'm afraid of just walking in the hallway, that's why I just make sure that my back is on the wall…It's kind of scary at times…

Stress and Somatic Issues

Other teachers reported that working in violent communities contributed to their ongoing stress and somatic problems. Ms. James, the 35-year-old African American music teacher who lived in the Danbrook school community, described how violent events involving her students were contributing to psychological stress and sleep problems:

> I am not responding very well. I just went to a funeral on Monday of another student's brother who got killed and I've been losing sleep over this. I've only been at Danbrook for three years. Some of the teachers who've been there much longer, they say there's so many that they've had to go to funerals for, so many. And I think they're more hardened to it than I am. I don't want to become hardened, but I want to be able to deal with it in a more effective way so that it doesn't affect my health.

Ms. Ramsey from Grandview also found her mental health compromised by the stress of her work. She described how teaching early adolescents in a violent community had contributed to serious distress:

> …Like from this school I needed counseling, because you know I mean I can't take it anymore I need someone to talk to, and I know if I'm not even going through what they're going through, it's just what they're going through affects me…

At the time of the interview, Ms. Ramsey had sought mental health counseling to deal with her stress symptoms. She had plans to leave the school system at least temporarily because her anger, anxiety, and advancing "burnout" were becoming unbearable for her. She said she would, perhaps, return to teaching in the future.

Desensitization

Many of the teachers interviewed for this study acknowledged that gunshots, funerals, and other evidence of community violence were a reality that they must face. Some of the teachers noted that the frequency of its occurrence had begun to "desensitize" them to its devastating effects. Mrs. Bates, as an African American teacher who lives in the community and has taught for two years at Danbrook, stated:

> Violence in my school and how it affects the people, is it's like an everyday occurrence; nobody goes through withdrawal, nobody acts out, nobody does much of anything cause they are so used to violence occurring. It's nothing new. It's like somebody putting butter on a slice of bread and it's really sad, but that's how it is right now…

Mrs. Palmer, a teacher for 24 years (four years at Danbrook), also demonstrated some desensitization when discussing a student who was experimenting with risky behavior:

> I haven't gotten cold or anything, but we just knew, with the community, with the resources of the mom, and the non-support from the father, we said, "that boy is gonna end up dead," you know and I don't know if it's a sign of the times….

The guidance counselor at Kendall Lake, Ms. Chazz, reported another incident in which a student in her school was shot but survived. She described how she no longer became highly emotional when learning about such shootings:

> And so that I won't be here boo hoo in tears and waste all my napkins in my napkin holder…It was like a tear jerker when I heard and I was like oh my gosh. But, after you hear that you go on and start doing something because you don't want people coming in and boo hoo.

Several other teachers also shared feelings of desensitization, but noted they could not dwell on these violent incidents if they were to maintain their mental health and teaching effectiveness.

Strategies

The second major research question in this study was, "What strategies do teachers use to buffer early adolescents from violence-related risks in their schools and communities?" Teachers responded to many questions intended to elicit teacher strategies for fostering early adolescent learning and resilience in violent communities. Among the questions posed to teachers were:

- Are there things you regularly do in the classroom to prepare your students to deal with violence?

- What kinds of things do you try to do to keep students in your classroom safe from violence?

- How do you handle a student who consistently acts aggressively or bullies other students in your classroom?

- How do you help a student who is upset or stressed about an incident of violence such as a fight, a shooting, or a gang crime?

- When you are upset about a violent event on the school grounds or in the school's neighborhood, what do you do?

- What does the school do to handle violence?

- Who are the individuals who work to improve safety in this school community? How do they do it?

As in the case of challenges, strategies clustered in three major conceptual areas: guidance, structure, and teacher self preservation.

StrategiesR elated to Guidance

The most prevalent strategy described by teachers to promote youth resilience in violent communities was to provide students with guidance that would enhance their learning, personal adjustment, and ability to cope with stress. Teachers reported that they provided guidance in three major ways: 1) by listening, offering personal advice, and counseling; 2) by empowering students and introducing them to positive role options; and 3) by encouraging parental involvement.

Listening, Advice, and Counseling

Many teachers described efforts to buffer middle school students from the negative effects of violence by listening, offering advice, and counseling students about individual problems. Younger teachers felt their age helped them relate to students and gain a special rapport with them. Older teachers stated that they gained respect from students because of their age and years of teaching experience. Ms. Griffin, a younger African American teacher from Kendall Lake, described her ability to connect with early adolescents as a skill that she used to guide students and protect herself from confrontational youth:

There have been teachers who have been physically assaulted; there have been subs that have been physically assaulted. Luckily, like I said, because I understand my kids and I take a different approach with them. I take more of a, I don't want to say, a younger approach, but I take a more understanding approach with them and I luckily haven't run into anything too bad.

Mr. Harris, an African American teacher from Danbrook, stated that age and cultural awareness made him a positive role model, especially for African American male youth. He described his role in relating to students who may not have adult males actively involved in their lives:

One, me being young, I know their language. I know their language, I know their style of dress, their whole culture. I'm not that far removed…Some of the males that I deal with have a lack of a positive Black male figure so all of them are under my wing.

Mrs. Daniel, the 62-year-old African American teacher from Kendall Lake expressed her ability to understand difficult students better than younger teachers:

I tell them, "I know it's not easy, and I said I've had a lot of years to get to that point now. I couldn't have done it at first. But I've had a lot of years to get to that point."

One key strategy adopted by the teachers to foster youth resilience was to listen to what students were saying about their lives and communities. Teachers reported "checking in" with students about personal difficulties, gang activity, and community violence. According to Ms. Griffin at Kendall Lake, listening is crucial to addressing student needs:

…You have to understand where the kids are coming from, because if they just saw Big Ray get shot last night, they're not going to come to school and think about doing anything math, science, social studies, I don't care what it is…so it's like, if you don't know what happened last night... Some teachers get upset, "Well, get out, you're not listening. Get out." But you have to have a rapport with your kids where you can talk to them and say, "How was your day?" You know, "Is everything okay?"

Teachers often used their own experiences to connect with students, listening to their problems and providing advice about academic and personal behavior. Those teachers, who grew up in communities with high rates of violent crime, and those who currently lived in a community near the school, felt they had a special bond with students. Ms. Farmer, a 31-year-old reading and language arts teacher from Grandview stated:

> My main focus is to show the kids that there's more out there than just what's in the neighborhood. I tell them right off that I'm from the neighborhood. You know where I live…so they can relate to me by that, because I'm from where they're from, you know.

Some teachers attempted to connect with youth by sharing their own mistakes. Ms. Griffin from Kendall Lake made change in her life after college and used her past to advise students to think carefully about the future:

> I give them some of my life experiences. I let them know my past as far as, the way I started out. I let all my kids know I've been suspended from elementary, middle school, high school, and I got put out of college. I tell them even though all of this happened to me, look at where I am now. I'm not saying that I'm the greatest person, but I have realized that that's not the road that you want to go down…

Teachers also provided students with concrete advice about avoiding violent behavior in their schools and larger communities. Ms. James from Danbrook handled the challenge of students "beefin'" in her school by asking students to consider whether involvement in these disputes is worth what they are likely to lose:

> We talk to those children all the time, especially when I see that they're, we call it beefin' with someone else. I try to keep them focused. I tell them, you know, "Is it worth it? Is it worth getting suspended from school for fighting? Is it worth losing that time as far as, in school you're losing that learning time? What are you arguing about? Is it really worth it? Think about it." And sometimes it helps. It gives them another perspective where they're like, "Oh, maybe this is stupid."

Teachers also advised students to stay clear of violent activities in their

neighborhoods and communities. They implored students to consider the consequences

of violence, noting that such consequences may be overlooked by middle school youth

who are seeking peer approval. According to Ms. Jennings at Kendall Lake:

> I always want to stress, especially when it comes to violence in the community, to stay away from it. It's not worth what it's trying to prevent for you. The positives and the benefits of being down with that gang, or if you beat up somebody because somebody asked you to and you may get some kind of fulfillment for that minute, but what's down the line is either a cop looking for you or somebody getting you back, or eventually maybe you're going to jail or dying yourself.

It was clear that teachers felt the magnitude of the danger confronted by their

students. Many teachers stated that they felt responsible for providing students with

"life-saving advice." Mrs. Bates at Danbrook discussed the advice she gives "all the

time" in order to prevent murders by middle school students:

> No matter how you justify something happened, taking someone else's life is hurting, not only yourself, but mothers, parents, their families." So you can say, "Fine. This person shot my cousin," or "This person shot my sister and I have to go back and do it to them." I said, "An eye for an eye went out in the stone ages." You can't expect to think that violence committed to you and you doing violence to somebody else is going to solve any problem. And I have to stress that to them all the time.

Many teachers stated that they engaged in some form of counseling individual

students. They evaluated their own capability to handle a student's situation before

sending him/her to a guidance counselor. Ms. Jennings from Kendall Lake stated that

there is a counseling component to teaching:

> So, in that way, you just have to, as a teacher, sometimes I call ourselves being social workers in a way, because sometimes you're faced with a lot of difficult decisions and you can't get too caught up in it.

Mr. Bailey from Kendall Lake stated that he sought to provide effective guidance to his students but knew his limitations. He voiced awareness of the complexities of a teacher's job in providing a safe space for students to talk while also listening for signs that a student needs professional mental health assistance:

> …I'll try to bring them outside one on one, talk to them, hey is everything okay, anything I can help you with, anything you need. Sometimes they open up and sometimes they don't…It's hard. You really do kind of have to be a counselor when you're a teacher, and if it gets anything serious, I step aside and let them deal with people that are trained to do that, but if I can help them with little things, I'll try.

Many teachers reported that they sometimes took on the roles of counselor, social worker, or parent proxies as they listened and provided guidance to individual students.

Student Empowerment

When I asked teachers about their strategies for protecting youth from negative effects of community violence, many described efforts to empower students to set and achieve personal goals. These teachers expressed faith in their students and their abilities. They adopted a positive focus in their teaching, recognizing student strengths, communicating high expectations, and rewarding student achievements. Ms. Jennings from Kendall Lake stated:

> And some of my colleagues they say I treat it like a high school, but I have high expectations for them because a lot of them, even at home, they don't have any kind of expectations. So at least they know somebody is trying.

Other teachers described the importance of helping students to identify academic and personal opportunities, noting that many have parents who are not involved with their children's schoolwork or activities. Mr. Bailey, a teacher from Kendall Lake, talked to students about life options and attempted to create positive opportunities for even the most challenging students.

I try to talk to them about having options. You want to do the best that you can. The child that I told you about that was shot, I tried to get him into a private school this year…

Despite teaching in schools affected by violent crime, poverty, and drug activity, many teachers voiced their belief in the potential of their students. Mr. Harris provided his students with a positive focus while recognizing the problems encountered by African American youth in violent communities:

I try to instill in them the importance of being positive… I just try to get them to be a more positive person and a more well-rounded person, to love the differences and love the similarities between people, but also, that you have to love, you have to love yourself first… when I go into the classroom, I don't look at you as if you're acting like a nigger, you know what I mean. I look at you as if you're still a king, no matter what.

Some teachers reported introducing empowerment programs in their schools to foster healthy youth connections to their culture. Ms. Ramsey implemented an empowerment group at Grandview called Sisters Keeping It Real Through Service (SKIRTS). This community service and mentoring group teaches female students how to be effective leaders in their schools and in the larger community. Mr. Harris organized a similar program for male youth at Danbrook Middle School. He lamented that television feeds African American male youth a preponderance of hypersexual, hyperthug images rather than featuring more positive careers:

Yeah, I had poets come in, speakers, doctors, professors…basically come in and speak to them. All Black men so they can see Black men writing books, Black men doctors, you know, so there's so many other things you can be other than that.

Ms. Jennings at Kendall Lake reported that teachers had introduced two empowerment groups to provide leadership and service opportunities for middle school students. The group for male students was named Boys to Men and the group for female

students was named Fame. These groups specifically targeted students exhibiting risky

behaviors:

> And those are the kids that I really try to reach, because I'm like, "Just stay strong. If you definitely keep your grades up you get a scholarship to get out of this city, to get out of this state, go explore. Go west, go to California in school, just get away, because a lot of the students which I am very worried about, especially being African American, is that they get caught up in this atmosphere and the world around us is not all like this.

Parent Involvement

A third major guidance strategy adopted by some teachers was to foster and

encourage greater parent involvement in their children's education. One of the teachers

in this study was Ms. Richards, a biracial (African American/White) special education

teacher in a contained classroom at Grandview. She reported maintaining open

communication with parents of all students in her classroom:

> …and in this classroom we actually talk to parents everyday, everyday…either to help with, they call and ask us to help with, if a student is calling their house too much, or if they could help out with the field trip, a lot of parents just call and tell us what's going on at home so we'll know how their child is going to act...

However, it should be noted that Ms. Richards' class size was small and staffed by two

certified special education teachers and two aides.

At Grandview Middle School, teachers were divided into teams by grade and

subject area. Mr. Lyons, a team leader, stressed the importance of maintaining open

communication with parents to teachers on his team by modeling respect for all parents.

> It's about respect, period. I mean, no one can ever say that a parent doesn't love a child. If a parent calls up or calls me, they call me they're upset about something, maybe a grade or disciplinary action or something that happened, if they call up and they're upset, I don't care if I haven't heard from them all year long. They've now made the effort to call me. They care.

Although several teachers seemed to place blame directly on parents for their

children's misbehavior and poor academic skills, a minority of teachers mentioned using

strategies for involving parents through parent-teacher communication, educational

programs, Parent Teacher Association (PTA)/Parent Teacher Student Association

(PTSA), and other social events. For example, Mr. Lyons from Grandview encouraged

parent involvement and offered a solution to low attendance at events. He successfully

implemented a strategy to increase the participation in a recent PTSA meeting:

> Everybody donated something, we had so much food, it was ridiculous and you
> know, it was like a little social event. Have meet and greets that don't involve any
> complaining or whining at all, just have food, you know. Let people talk, let
> people showcase their kids…Here's a trick that I learned too, it's the truth, let the
> kids perform. Then who's going to come because the kids performed? The parents
> of those kids and then you're bringing more parents, you know. So you put on a
> social event like that where you let the dance squad, the step team, the band, the
> chorus, and who's coming to pick them kids up?

In addition to promoting parent involvement in the school, a few teachers made

efforts to provide guidance through parenting classes or advice. Mrs. Daniel, a seasoned

teacher at Kendall Lake, informally helped parents to set up a program for checking

students' schoolwork in the evening:

> The parents, yeah, they just don't know how to begin. They don't know how,
> what can I do to help my child. And I tell them, the first thing is, you have to
> send them to work, and this is their work…If they're coming here and they're not
> prepared to learn, there's nothing we can do about that. If they come here, "oh,
> my book's at home" or "I don't have any paper" or "I don't have pencils,"
> repeatedly, we need to set up some type of a program at home where these things
> are checked daily. Yes, it's work. Yes, it takes time. Parenting is work, parenting
> takes time.

In her 18 years at Kendall Lake, Mrs. Daniel helped parents learn parenting practices to

facilitate student learning in challenging neighborhoods, such as checking their children's

homework and imposing weeknight curfews. However, most teachers in the study

reported that they had very limited involvement and interaction with their students'

parents.

Strategies Related to Structure

Teachers demonstrated four clear structural strategies to foster youth resilience in

violent communities---three implemented within the school and one in the larger

community. These strategies included: 1) provision of structure, monitoring, and control

within the classroom; 2) participation in violence prevention training; 3) drawing on

strong school administrative support; and 4) engagement in community activities that

benefit students.

Structure, Monitoring, and Control

One of the most salient strategies adopted by teachers to insure students' safety

and well being was to provide a structured classroom with continuous monitoring of

student behavior. Teachers in this study reported that classroom management and control

were key to fostering learning and healthy student development. Many described the

importance of establishing clear rules for behavior, giving straightforward directions,

maintaining consistent expectations, and monitoring the activities of students during their

classes.

 Ms. Ramsey from Grandview used the strategy of rule setting to insure order and

to discourage bullying and disrespectful behavior:

> At the beginning of the year we always do the golden rule. Treat people how you
> want to be treated and I'll let them know, I don't really care what goes on outside
> of my classroom, but this is my house, and in my house you follow my rules and
> one of the rules is, "You don't talk about people, you just don't do that."

Ms. Willis from Danbrook described how she monitors her classroom for potential distractions and trouble every day, and instructs her students to focus on their schoolwork, as a strategy for maintaining a healthy classroom environment:

> That's one thing, I'll sit in my chair and I'll just scan the whole classroom and just see what's going on so like I'm real good at pinpointing when something is going on and I can hear. Either I'll call them up to me or either I'll go up to them…Your job is to what? Do your classwork, do your homework. Playing comes later. That's not gonna get you anywhere in life.

In their efforts to maintain classroom control, one quarter of the teachers interviewed reported eliminating troublemaking students from their classrooms. Teachers sent students who were violating rules or exhibiting unacceptable classroom behavior to the office or another classroom on a temporary basis. Mrs. Walton, a teacher from Grandview, described the positive outcome of using this classroom management strategy:

> A lot of teachers do that, because you'll find that when they're not in their home environment (their own classroom), then they don't tend to act out because they really don't have an audience, they don't know those children, they don't know the teacher…

In other words, some teachers found that sending a misbehaving student into another teacher's classroom, without a familiar audience, essentially averted a disturbance.

The teachers in this study reported working hard to provide students with a classroom structure that would promote learning, safety, and clear expectations for student behavior. However, they acknowledged that even the most dedicated teachers could not always structure the larger school environment to protect students from harm. According to Ms. Farmer from Grandview:

> While they're in my classroom, I am their parent, is what I feel like and I have to protect them at all costs. And once they go out there, it's somebody else's job. Do I feel like they're protected all the time? No. I wish I did have the time to walk everyone, that boy to class, that specific boy to class that day, but I couldn't;

I just couldn't be in two places at one time. But while you're in my classroom, oh, you're going to be safe.

Participation in Violence Prevention Training

A second structural strategy adopted by some teachers in this study to improve their school's violence prevention/intervention efforts was to enroll in in-service training programs. These programs were designed to help teachers manage aggressive student behavior and increase school safety. When asked about these violence training programs, teachers within the different schools reported mixed feelings about their quality and usefulness. Teachers at Kendall Lake were most satisfied with the training opportunities afforded them. Ms. Chazz, the only guidance counselor who I interviewed, reported that the county's Pupil Personnel Worker comes to the school and talks to teachers and students about violence:

> The Pupil Personnel Worker is a person who's hired from the county, but he's like at maybe twelve schools. He's like an advocate for the students…As far as in-services dealing with violence we'll have the Pupil Personnel Worker to come in and talk to us, we may have an officer, police officers to come in and talk to us. As far as with the students we'll have again a Pupil Personnel Worker to come in and talk about the Code of Conduct, and focus on the violence part.

Furthermore, Kendall Lake's guidance office arranged trainings on different topics every month, with violence addressed as one of the rotating topics.

Mrs. Palmer, a veteran teacher from Danbrook, had received some training in antiviolence programs such as Second Step, Cooperative Discipline, and Peer Mediation. Second Step, as Mrs. Palmer described it, deals with consequences of adolescent involvement in violent behavior. She described the impact of this program:

> …It's a very structured program dealing with teens' issues and "How would you handle this because sometimes violence comes out?" And, "This is what happens as a result of you not being able to control your anger, you know, you shot somebody. Now look at your life."

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However, Mrs. Palmer reported that teachers are no longer able to participate in trainings such as Second Step due to recent cuts in the county's school budget.

A younger teacher, Ms. Peterson from Kendall Lake, came to the teaching profession through the Resident Teacher Program, a program that trains teachers who did not major in education. For this group of teachers, she stated, "We had different workshops on being an effective teacher, classroom discipline and management." Ms. Peterson believed that these training opportunities were beneficial in helping her to control classroom misbehavior.

Finally, Ms. West from Kendall Lake reported that the Board of Education offered training on classroom management for a small fee. She urged young teachers in her school to take the course. Ms. West and other teachers who had been in the school system for many years were most likely to state that they had pursued training as a way to help them manage the behavior of aggressive students. Younger teachers appeared to have missed such opportunities because recent school budget cuts eliminated violence prevention training and resources, or resulted in lower quality programs.

Reliance on Strong School Administrative Support

A third structural strategy that teachers employed to foster youth resilience and reduce negative impacts of community violence exposure was reliance on a strong administrative structure within their schools. The majority of teachers at Danbrook believed that solid administrative support was effective in releasing teachers to focus solely on their responsibility of educating students. Ms. James from Danbrook shared an example of the principal fighting for the safety of the school community.

…Our principal really went to try and get a police officer in our school, you know. When Jack Johnson came, she basically bit his ear, so to speak, just like, "Look, these things are happening in our community. These things are happening to our students. We need a police officer here."

Teachers from Kendall Lake were unanimous in their respect for the current principal's visibility, strictness, and control of the entire school. They stated that they benefited from policies and procedures addressing violent behavior, such as the principal's involvement in disciplinary consequences and the school's suspension and expulsion policies. In this school, teachers felt that the principal and administrators had taken steps to protect them from harm and to increase their safety and well-being.

Community Engagement

A final structural strategy adopted by a few teachers, particularly those who resided in communities near their school, was to become engaged in the neighborhoods where students live. Several teachers stated that they used their personal knowledge of the neighborhoods to guide students and inform their teaching. According to Ms. Farmer, the 31-year-old African American teacher who lives in the community near Grandview Middle School:

> I'm not saying that every teacher needs to live right here…but if every teacher just took a few minutes to realize what the kids are bringing to the classroom, it can make a big difference.

Ms. Willis from Danbrook tutored students in her school's community. She believed that going into students' homes gave her a better perspective on the families and the challenges faced by students:

> Because I tutor also, so I really get to get an idea of what goes on at home and I see that some parents—some, I'm not going say all of them—they're not encouraging their children like they should, to read, to write, to sit down and do their math, to go over their homework, finding enrichment activities…

Regardless of whether they lived in the communities surrounding the schools and experienced the effects of violence directly, several teachers found ways to educate themselves about the home and neighborhood situations that were influencing students' school behavior.

Some of the teachers in this study displayed a sense of optimism when they talked about current efforts to improve their school's communities. Mrs. Bates from Danbrook provided the example of an event in the school, a community effort to stop the violence in the neighborhoods near Danbrook Middle School. Businesses and church leaders joined teachers and other school staff who contributed to the event held annually at the end of the school year. According to Mrs. Bates:

> [They] just had a community day June 12th . They had it at Danbrook and it's [a community day] where the cops come out, and they have Health Fairs, and you know, showing the kids different activities as alternates to violence.

Ms. Farmer from Grandview noted that her school employed the strategy of bringing a police officer to the school on a regular basis to interact with student. This activity familiarized both students and teachers with the officer so they would feel more comfortable if the need for police protection arose. Mr. Lyons, also from Grandview, knew of churches in the community working to provide alternatives to violence. He noted that churches can supplement the constructive efforts of other short-term, neighborhood programs involving youth.

Several teachers mentioned referring their students to innovative after-school programs in their communities. These programs partnered with schools to provide after-school activities that would occupy youth time, keep them off the streets, and foster early

adolescent development. For example, Mrs. Palmer from Danbrook sent students to an

after school program called Roja:

> The community program involved with our school, that's in the neighborhood, called Roja. It's up in one of the shopping centers and what she tries to do is provide an after school program for those middle schoolers to bridge their academic skills, to increase their performance.

Mr. Romero, a math teacher, reported that he referred some students to a NASA

science program in a nearby community. He stated that this program not only provided

an educational opportunity, but also deterred violent behavior:

> …If I remember even University of Maryland did some invitations here, they gave some invitations for the NASA [curriculum], it's a science curriculum that the kids are invited to join. Those things, yeah, because when the kids are bored to death, they can do a lot of other stuff, that they probably, you know, is going to be violent.

All of the teachers at Grandview Middle School reported on how their school had

partnered with "community activists" to improve their school conditions, including

student and teacher safety. According to Ms. Ramsey:

> And then there's this older couple, I can't even remember their names, but they're advocates for the community, and they come in. They volunteer, they try to figure out what we need to be able to go back into the community and to the local government to get things for us...they helped us a lot with being able to let the board know and the people in the community know that the reason the school was the way it was (relating to student behavior problems) wasn't because the teachers didn't have a plan. It was because our plan was kicked out, and that we really needed some help, so we got like the support of the bus drivers and everyone from the community came in to talk to us and figure out what's the next step to try to get out.

Teachers provided other concrete examples of linking up with community

members who provided time, energy, knowledge, and resources to support the youth in

their schools. For example, Ms. Griffin from Kendall Lake described an individual in a

particularly violent neighborhood who established positive relationships with youth and

reduced their involvement in dangerous activities:

> A prime example is, I know a guy who grew up in [the local] community and he
> works with the kids in [his community], and he's like the football coach, mentor,
> all types of things…It doesn't have to be sports celebrities, just people who they
> can relate to, not somebody who read it from a book.

Strategies Related to Self Preservation

A third set of strategies adopted by teachers to "stay strong" and increase the

resilience of youth in violent communities focused on self preservation. Teachers used

five major strategies to preserve their mental health: 1) venting to other teachers and

members of their family, 2) praying, 3) separating work and personal life, 4) limiting

involvement with difficult and potentially dangerous students, and 5) seeking

professional counseling.

Venting to Teachers and Family

One common strategy reported by the majority of middle school teachers to help

them cope with the emotional nature of work in a violent community was venting to co-

workers, family members, or friends. Ms. Richards, a special education teacher at

Grandview, talked with other teachers to reduce stress:

> During our planning time which is an hour and half we discuss it, then if some of
> us go home and we think about something else we bring it back tomorrow and we
> discuss it, but nobody has to exactly take it home and burden it, have the stress of
> it all day and the next day.

Mr. Harris from Danbrook described the importance of choosing the appropriate person

to vent with in order to avoid negativity:

> If I don't talk to nobody, I'll flip out. I would've been lost. My first month I
> would've lost it. So you gotta talk to somebody, you have to vent, but you have
> to vent with somebody that's constructive, and not somebody that's destructive.
> "Ah, yeah, they dumb anyway, them kids. I don't know why they teaching them

kids anyway." Shut up. I'm not trying to hear that. So as long as it's somebody constructive, who's positive.

Other teachers reported venting to family members. Mrs. Bates from Danbrook found that her family members knew how stressful her job could be and checked in with her so she could share her frustrations:

> …My sister or my mother-in-law will call on me planning to see how I'm doing and to make sure I don't want to choke a kid that day because it does get to the point where you're like, "I'm quitting. Y'all can have this." So we've gotten to the point where things have happened like that, but we definitely, as teachers, take that break [to vent]…

Praying

Many teachers mentioned prayer as a strategy they used to help them cope with school stressors, including the threat of violence. Mr. Romero at Grandview Middle School stated that, "I pray for myself because sometimes I'm afraid of just walking in the hallway." Ms. Holloway claimed that she has used prayer as a strategy since her first day at Grandview:

> With me, I'm a really religious person so I just pray a lot. I remember when I first started, I just used to pray over my classroom and my students and everything like that. So that's my number one tactic that I use.

Ms. Jennings from Kendall Lake described using a combination of prayer and reliance on family to deal with the stress that accompanied teaching in a violent community. She reported that these strategies helped her remain strong and positive for her students.

> I don't, I'm not a crier, so I don't cry, I don't take it out on the kids, I'm not angry, majority of the time, like I said…I pray about it and I just mention it to my fiancée and my mom and once that's out, I feel better, I can go right to school the next day and just do my job.

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Limiting Involvement with Difficult Students

A third strategy employed by teachers to preserve their mental health and physical

safety was ignoring the disrespectful, aggressive behavior of students outside their school

classroom. Teachers admitted that failing to confront these students about negative

behavior was a strategy they used because the problem was too broad to address each

transgression. Several admitted to lacking the time and energy to address every offensive

behavior they confronted in the school setting. According to Mr. Bailey from Kendall

Lake:

> I think you just turn a deaf ear to the stuff that happens in the hallway, which is
> probably not good, but it's like, how do you decipher what's really bad and
> what's just bad? I mean there's constant cursing and racial slurs being thrown
> about, constantly…you kind of just think well, what can you do? You have to
> pick and choose your battles and pick the more, you know, kids are going to have
> foul mouths, that's fine, I wish it wasn't in school, but I don't know how you deal
> with all of it.

Other teachers also adopted this strategy to avoid difficult, potentially violent

students. Mrs. Walton from Grandview reported ignoring potential troublemakers:

> I mean, I've been threatened by kids, boys that say, "I'm gonna kick you're A,"
> you know, and all kinds of stuff like that...You know, there are a number of kids
> that you get to know in the hallways, that you know are not here to learn, that are
> here to cause trouble. And I just kind of avoid them, you know, if they're doing
> stuff in the hall that they're not supposed to do, just kind of ignore it…

Mrs. Daniel from Kendall Lake expressed her frustration with students who threatened

teachers attempting to deal with their misbehavior. She also removed herself from

students who might put her in harm's way.

> How much you press a child on their behavior, because they'll tell you in a
> minute, I'll have my people come up here and take care of you. And once you
> hear that, I back off. You don't have to stay after school. I'm not staying after
> school. I'm not going to get into it. You're trying to help a child and this is what
> they're telling you.

Separating Work and Personal Life

Some teachers were willing to become extensively engaged with students who were perpetrators or victims of violence. Others limited involvement with the most difficult students. Teachers also discussed their need to maintain strictboundaries between their work and personal lives. Nearly half of the teachers stated that healthy separation from their work was crucial to reducing stress and preserving their own mental health. Mrs. Daniel, a seasoned teacher of 18 years, believed that young teachers who do not learn this strategy burn out, leave the community, and perhaps even abandon the teaching profession:

> I said I think that's why I've been able to stay for forty years. I have a separation between my life and my job, and teaching, as much as I love it, and as much as I love working with children, it's my occupation and my job, it's not my life. And because, I think with a lot of the young teachers, and I can remember waking up at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning and say, "Oh I might do this and this to get through to them." But the kids now, they don't, they're not as receptive when you do, and you wear yourself out, and I think that's one reason why we lose so many young teachers.

> Mr. Lyons, a younger teacher from Grandview in the system for just three years

stated that he immerses himself fully in his job, but takes nothing with him when he exits the school ground:

> From the time I walk into the school until the time I leave the school, I know I'm going to make it. I'm not a tourist. I know that what helps me is that when I leave the school, I'm not taking anything.

This strategy of separating teaching and personal life was also echoed by Ms. Jennings, an African American computer and keyboarding teacher from Kendall Lake. She recalled the shift that she made in her relationship with work in order to remain strong while working in a community where violence is an everyday stressor:

That's one thing I kind of got caught up, I almost was superwoman and I almost ran myself just ragged. And I realized that I'm human, I can't save everybody's life. So I've learned to kind of back off certain things, not get involved and really just help as much as I can and just pray for the rest.

Seeking Professional Counseling

Regardless of whether teachers learn to separate school life from home life, teaching is an emotionally challenging profession. As noted earlier, many teachers in this study reported fear, stress, and somatic complaints. One teacher in this study relied on professional counseling as a strategy to preserve her mental health in a stressful school setting. Ms. Ramsey from Grandview described how she came to the realization that she would benefit from counseling:

> I think that was something that I just had to come to terms with myself, that I'm not coping like I should cope and everything. So I'm about to suffocate if I don't get this off my chest. So I think it's something you just have to come to the realization that that's what you need, and like talking to your friends…really isn't good enough…

Ms. Ramsey stated that adult members of her community were unlikely to seek counseling for work-related stress:

> In the Black community, or just in the minority community in general, going to a counselor is really looked down upon, like you seeing someone it's almost like you're crazy.

Yet she claimed to have "always marched to the beat of my own drum" and chose to ignore this social norm:

> …And people have said to me who knew that I was seeing a counselor, why are you doing that,that's what you have friends for, you're paying someone to do something that your friends are supposed to do for free…and it's like, whatever, you can't help me, and you talk to me all the time and I'm still feeling what I'm feeling so obviously I need something more…

Ms. Ramsey was the only teacher who voiced that she had actually sought counseling as a strategy during the interview. Additionally, she had made the decision to leave the teaching profession at the end of the school year.

Support Needs

The final research question addressed supports needed by teachers to deal with community violence and its impact on their schools. I asked teachers about the resources that were available, as well as those that were missing from their schools. This section of the interview was unique in that it elicited information about the future, particularly the final two questions of the interview. Questions included:

- What resources are available to help students deal with community violence?

- What school resources are lacking?

- How do you think you could better support families to help their children cope with neighborhood violence?

- Let's say we could look into a crystal ball to a day in the future and find this neighborhood safe for its students, families, and school staff. What do you think it would really take to make this happen?

Teachers described a number of resources at the family, school, and community levels that they felt would improve the safety of students and teachers, as well as reduce their violence-related stress. These resource needs focused on the three guiding concepts in the interviews: guidance, structure, and teacher self preservation.

Support Needs Related to Guidance

Teachers described several resources and support systems that they felt would improve their ability to provide effective guidance for their students. Specifically, they

reported a need for 1) student counseling and crisis intervention programs, 2) behavior management training, and 3) programs and initiatives that would involve parents in their middle school students' education.

Counseling and Crisis Intervention

Teachers voiced concerns that school-based counseling services were currently not adequate to meet the needs of the high risk population of students they serve. Some teachers felt that guidance counselors were skilled at helping students with educational issues, such as coursework, graduating, and college options, but were ill-equipped to handle emotional problems associated with violence exposure. Several teachers recommended addition of school counselors who specialized in treating social-emotional problems of youth. Ms. Ramsey from Grandview stated:

> And I think a lot of our kids, a lot of our kids need counseling, like we need a counseling center within the school, not just guidance, because....they really deal with grades and getting kids to pass and things like that, and getting them accommodations, but they're not really dealing with the social issues…

According to veteran teacher Mrs. Daniel from Kendall Lake, many of the students are unaware of their own psychological problems, such as the possibility of post-traumatic stress resulting from their direct experience with violence. She described how some of these youth would benefit from professional help:

> I also would like to see social workers come in to work with these, so many of these children. Some of our children already have probation officers and they do come into the building to work with them. But so many of these kids have problems that they don't know they have. They don't know certain things are causing them to react and if you sit and talk to them, they'll take you back to things that have happened to them a long while ago, and they don't realize that could be leading to the kinds of problems that they're getting into today.

Mr. Romero from Grandview cited a particular need for psychologists to come in and work with students after a violent event. Ms. James from Danbrook also voiced a

need for mental health professionals to provide crisis intervention following violent

activities:

> Well, we haven't brought in any grief counselors in our school. The student that was murdered on [a street known for violent activity], he was a [local high school] student, but all the kids knew him. A lot of the children, we've had to take to the counselor. They've come out of the classes "balling"- you know, crying- and you know, we take them to the [guidance] counselor.

Ms. James from Danbrook noted that when a child is killed in a particular neighborhood,

it may be important to provide grief counseling for children in all the nearby schools—

elementary through high school—who were affected by the family's loss.

Behavior Management Training

Many teachers were displeased with in-service training programs in adolescent

behavior management that are currently available in their schools. They reported a

special need for experts to help them deal with the aggressive behaviors of children from

high risk communities affected by violence. Teacher training focused on managing youth

behavior in crisis situations is now handled through showing videotapes, with assistant

principals charged to facilitate the training. Teachers at Danbrook believed that recent

increases in violent crime within their neighborhoods and the entire county necessitated

better training with skilled behavior specialists and facilitators. Ms. James noted that

such training is above and beyond her teacher certification, but is needed to help teachers

manage their students and classrooms under stressful conditions:

> If I could get some type of training, I don't know exactly what, but that would help me help them better. That's not something that's part of our requirements as far as certification is concerned…But this violence thing, I mean, it's always been around, but I think it's escalating. Kids are dying now, you know, younger and younger, and that's not something that you're used to seeing. So some type of training.

Ms. Willis, also from Danbrook, wished to receive training on comprehensive strategies to handle behavior problems and to motivate students who reside in violent communities:

> Dealing with disadvantaged youth, we should have some type of training, some type of strategies that we can incorporate into the classroom, as well as outside the classroom…Strategies that we could incorporate in the lesson plan, how to get them motivated, how to keep them motivated, you know…

Veteran teacher, Ms. West at Kendall Lake, suggested that there are some training opportunities available, but the programs are not required and are currently offered outside of school time. She stated that these factors discourage teacher participation:

> Most of them choose not to, because of course, they have to do it after school on their own time, and a lot of teachers won't do that. But there is help they could get if they really wanted it.

Many of the older teachers interviewed stated that the availability of resources and the quality of training had decreased with reductions in the school budget in recent years.

Parent Involvement and Education

While many of the teachers in this study were disappointed with the amount and quality of parental engagement in their students' education, they perceived a strong need for initiatives aimed at increasing parental involvement. Mr. Romero from Grandview came to the conclusion:

> You have to have a link with the parents, because I think the best support that teachers can get is from the parents. If the parents are with you…then you will have a good year.

Ms. West from Kendall Lake stated that schools needed to offer parenting courses to stop the cycle of disadvantage that contributes to the violence in the community.

> That's probably at the bottom, the root of the problem. You have parents who didn't have a proper upbringing, who don't know how to parent, who are bringing children into the world, and they know nothing about how to raise these children.

> Parents probably need education as far as, if they haven't finished high school, getting their GED diploma, getting as much education maybe in a field, training in a specific field, so that they can get jobs, get out of welfare. Because I really do believe, and I guess every teacher would say this—we wouldn't be in this field if we didn't—education is the basic tool for anyone, be it child or adult, and it is never too late, it really isn't.

Other teachers also recommended high quality parenting classes. Teachers stated that parents need opportunities to learn how to become involved in their children's education, as well as how to motivate their children to achieve in school.

A teacher from Danbrook, Mr. Harris, suggested that schools employ a parent educator. He stated, "We need a person in the building who is solely responsible for bringing parents in." He explained that a full- or part-time parent educator could improve the relationship between parents and the school, help the parents access educational resources, and alleviate some of the burden placed on teachers who are trying to address children's academic and socioemotional needs.

The majority of teachers believed that parents needed to be more involved in both the school and the greater community in order to foster resilience in their children. According to special education teacher Ms. Richards from Grandview:

> We don't have a lot of parent involvement which is bad, maybe parent awareness …Trying to get the parents more involved in what's going on in their community and also what's going on in the schools. If we had more parents with the PTA or in a community watch program that the students can help out with or something…

Yet many teachers believed that mobilizing involvement in the PTA/PTSA was a losing battle. Rather, teachers stated that it would be more effective to bring parents, teachers, and other community members together using a fun activity. Ms. Ramsey suggested a radio or television station sponsored event:

> It's difficult to try to get in a community, but I think once you start doing things where you invite the community in and you talk, really the only thing that'll get

them to come out is either a radio station coming because they think they can be on the radio or TV station coming, or some type of fun activity for everyone to do. Otherwise, if you just say come out for a PTA meeting, no one comes out… and I think that different bribing activities for the community to come out, that'll definitely help. And then once you get them here, like kind of catch them. This is what we need to do.

According to Ms. Ramsey, such an event would enable school staff to capture the attention of parents and present some future options for strengthening their connection to the school.

Support Needs Related to Structure

Teachers suggested a number of concrete structural needs that had the potential to create safer middle schools and communities. Some of these needs were voiced in response to the question asking teachers to envision what it would take to make the school and neighborhood safer for students, families, and school staff. Structural support needs reported by teachers included: 1) improved school safety/security, 2) provision of antiviolence programs including peer mediation, 3) effective school leadership, and 4) expanded community resources.

Improved School Safety/Security

Although teachers did not describe school security systems as being in crisis, many described a need to improve security with additional resources and improving school communication about violence-related policies. Teachers in all three schools reported that they would feel more secure in their role as teachers if their schools devoted more resources to teacher and student safety. Ms. Chazz from Kendall Lake stated two particular needs: police officers on staff at middle schools in violent communities, and installation of metal detectors in middle schools where violence has been an issue. She

noted that metal detectors are now installed at many of the high schools in these communities, but not at the middle school level.

Other teachers reiterated her belief that more security officers were needed to help teachers and students feel better protected. According to Ms. Willis from Danbrook:

> I feel we need somebody in there that's strong, you know…I mean, I'm not trying to take anything away from what we have, but I'm just saying for the kids' sake, we need somebody in there who doesn't play with the kids, you know what I'm saying? They need to be strong, firm and you know, believe in discipline: "Hey, where do you belong? Go there now."

Mrs. Daniel at Kendall Lake mentioned a program that no longer exists in which "community officers" went on field trips and other activities with middle school students. She described the program as having the potential to foster more positive relationships between youth and law enforcement:

> They stopped [the program]. And sometimes kids would really respond to [the officers] when they would see them in the hall or someplace. "I need to talk to you" and they would always remind them, "No names." Just talk in general. But that helped them and they were stationed in these apartment complexes around here. They had substations there. All that's gone.

Teachers also reported a need for better communication between school administrators and teachers about emergency plans, policies, and procedures for handling violent students/individuals in their school buildings. Ms. Richards from Grandview claimed that administrative procedures are inconsistent:

> …you fight once, you get suspended, not you fight once, it's okay, second time you fight, third time you fight, I think we need the strong discipline at this school. You throw a chair at a teacher, you fight, you curse, you're suspended.

Teachers felt that consistency and shared understanding of school policies and procedures would improve safety and reduce teacher stress.

Antiviolence Programs/Peer Mediation

Many teachers felt that student-focused, antiviolence programs, such as peer mediation, would provide an important structural support in their middle schools. Peer mediation programs are supervised by skilled educational specialists who train a group of students to help other students resolve their disputes responsibly and peacefully. A number of the teachers interviewed had experience with these programs and felt they successfully reduced violent, aggressive student behavior.

Teachers in all three schools reported that they had recently lost the services of a peer mediation specialist who was formerly on staff. They speculated that the county had cut the budget for the peer mediation program. In some cases, other school staff members took on the adult educator's role, such as a security guard, a health teacher, or a school counselor. However, in each school, teachers felt the program operated more effectively under the leadership of the professional adult peer mediation specialist. According to Ms. Peterson at Kendall Lake, the program was effective and widely used by students:

> One, the students knew they had an alternative to fighting. They knew if they were arguing with someone, instead of fighting, they knew they could go to the peer mediator and say, "I need to be mediated. I need two mediators to come in and talk to us. And they actually would use the mediators like that.

Ms. Ramsey at Grandview also shared one her student's reactions to recent loss of their school's peer mediation program:

> And like the little girl who ended up fighting who didn't want to fight, she was saying how if they had peer mediation, they would have taken both of them in the room together and they would have talked it out and she wouldn't have been in that situation, so she was very mad at the school for her telling the school constantly, this girl is trying to fight me, you aren't doing anything about it.

With the loss of peer mediation staff in each school, a "roving" peer mediator now cycles through many county schools. The diluted effect of this effort has been a disappointment to teachers. Additionally, school counselors have been asked to take responsibility for the program. Ms. Chazz, a school counselor at Kendall Lake, reported that this decision has compromised implementation of the peer mediation program:

> But as far as for counselors to do it, one because we just don't have the time, and a lot of times when we bring them together, we just call it a mediation, but they're not the peers mediating…We find it convenient to just deal with the situation rather than have them mediate.

Ms. James from Danbrook also described the downside of having the peer mediation program run by counselors:

> Sometimes the kids will have altercations on the weekends and bring it to school on Monday. And we've had to do serious peer mediation. And that's the one thing. I think that they've done us a disservice by taking peer mediation out of this school and putting it in the laps of guidance counselors instead of having a separate position for peer mediation. And I think that that's a disservice to the school and to the children.

Ms. Walton from Grandview stated that some teachers were unaware of how the peer mediation program was now operating. She noted several changes in how the program was implemented over the last year and admitted to not knowing its current status:

> You know, last year we had a good peer mediation program. This year it kind of just fell by the way side. Last year we actually started out with a resident peer mediator adult who actually was over the entire program, but I guess funding got cut. I don't know what happened but that person became responsible for more than one school so they weren't here full time. Then we got somebody else. We kinda had this person back and forth and so it was a lot stronger last year. This year we had one person that ran it and I don't know, all of a sudden this person is gone. I don't know what happened to peer mediation.

Effective School Leadership

Teachers in all three schools stated that a strong principal and competent administration was a needed support system to help them combat the negative effects of community violence on their schools. Mrs. Bates from Danbrook described the need for teachers to have responsive, effective administrative support when a potentially violent situation occurred:

> Having someone, a vice principal or security person, monitoring the halls at all times and not sitting in the office in meetings because that's usually what's happening. "Come down to my office, we're having a meeting." That's the principal's fault. I completely blame her, completely, because she'll call a meeting in a quick minute and I'll call admin. "[The vice principal's] in a meeting right now. Is it something serious?" If I'm pushing the button, it's really serious.

Teachers from the three schools differed in their appraisal of how much work needed to be done to improve school leadership around the issue of violence prevention. Generally teachers from Kendall Lake were more satisfied with school leadership and administrative support for antiviolence activities than teachers at Grandview and Danbrook.

Expanded Community Resources

At the structural level, teachers also reported a need for more community resources to address the needs of youth in violent communities. Ms. Jennings from Kendall Lake stated that more community recreation centers and innovative community programs would provide early adolescents with an alternative to sitting on street corners:

> I really feel that if there were more community events, then they would have something to do. We're trying to do some things like that, and actually they had a talent show at one of their rec centers and it was a good turnout, I heard. It was a very good success…Right now a lot of the kids are bored. That's why some kids come to this school, they come to school to see other kids, to do something other than sit on the corner or see the same old people. It gets old. It gets very, very old.

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Some teachers voiced concern that families of early adolescents were not using programs that could provide their children with support services. According to Mrs. Palmer from Danbrook:

> …You know, a lot of these parents don't believe in programs like Big Brother and Big Sister... I think direct programming for these kids…like the Metropolitan Police and Boys club that has, I think, a very major recreational program…

Teachers emphasized the need to offer more community-based youth programs, to publicize their availability to early adolescents and their families, and to develop strategies for increasing youth participation. Mr. Lyons from Danbrook stated that, "Students may have rec programs, sport programs, but you know, a lot of those sports aren't all year." He suggested that area churches offer programs in which students can participate throughout the year. He added his belief that sustained involvement in positive community activities was the best strategy for keeping youth safe in communities plagued by violence.

A few of the teachers interviewed stated that there was also a need for schools to communicate with parents about basic resources that might benefit their children and families. Mrs. Bates, who lives in the neighborhood near Danbrook Middle School, highlighted this need:

> So you're having a lot of people that are having problems because they don't know the programs are there. They don't know that they can go and get free food from this place, they don't know that they can go and you know, get clothes from this person because if it's not directly related to P.G. County, then the school is not telling them about it.

In addition to improving communication between schools and parents, some teachers voiced a need for county and state politicians to become more engaged with the problem of community violence. These teachers felt that local, state, and national

officials should physically see the impact of violence on schools and communities. Ms. West, an older teacher from Kendall Lake, felt the county should carefully study the problem and implement a solution that would benefit students and schools:

> It would take the government of Prince George's County to come in here with a team and really analyze the problems, set up a plan of action, and follow through.

Mrs. Palmer from Danbrook also urged state and national intervention to improve the lives of students in violent communities:

> I think the state or the government know these issues are out there. I think the Congressmen assigned to these areas need to come down to see what is really happening with these teenagers. I know it's idealistic, but I look at myself as an educator wearing a different hat.

Teachers acknowledged that major changes in the safety of their schools and communities would not only need political support from elected and appointed government officials, but would also require a great deal of financial support.

<center>*Support Needs Related to Self Preservation*</center>

A final area in which teachers described a need for support was self preservation. Although many teachers described dealing with fear, stress, and desensitization as a result of teaching in violent neighborhoods, the interview did not explicitly ask teachers about their mental health needs. However, in response to a question about mental health resources for students, several teachers raised the need for teachers to have access to mental health professionals.

Access to Professional Counseling

Three of the teachers interviewed in this study reported that schools should make some psychological counseling available to teachers who were dealing with violence-

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related stress. Ms. James from Danbrook stated that providing access to counselors

would help to preserve teachers' mental health:

> Just like they bring in grief counselors for students, I think they need to do the same thing for teachers...No one really asks are we okay or what we think and I think that needs to be addressed, I really do. I think that's why some teachers become hardened, because that's their way of coping and dealing with it, where they, I guess, put up a shield.

Ms. Ramsey's view about the importance of teacher access to mental health

services stemmed from her own emotional stress relating to violence issues at

Grandview. She described her own needs:

> And I think they definitely, like from this school, I needed counseling, because, you know, I can't take it anymore. I need someone to talk to, and I know if I'm not even going through what they're going through, it's just what they're going through affects me…

Finally, Ms. West from Kendall Lake, voiced a need for both mental health and

behavior management specialists to assist teachers in coping with the problems of

students who reside in violent communities.

> We need specialists to come into this school from the county, on the county level, as mentors and help these teachers with the strategies on how to cope with these difficult students. We don't get any of that. Right, of course our county has been in turmoil for the last four years, which doesn't help, but this should be happening.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the findings described in Chapter 4. The first section relates the theoretical framework, ecological/risk and resilience, to the study results. Second, I provide a summary of major findings, relating the research questions of teachers' challenges, strategies, and support needs to the emergent concepts of guidance, structure, and self preservation. I discuss the results in relation to the existing literature on community violence, schools, early adolescent risk and resilience, and adult strategies to protect children and youth in dangerous environments. In the third section, I examine how findings relate to the cultural values of the predominantly African American teachers in the study. In the fourth section, I describe the strengths and limitations of this research. Finally, I present implications of this study for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, incorporating recommendations for future research.

Ecological/Risk and Resilience Framework

The theory, ecological/risk and resilience, prevailed as an appropriate framework for this study. At the study's inception, I employed Maxwell's (1996) metaphor of using existing theory in a grounded theory study as a place to "hang" the data, like coats in a coat closet. Using grounded theory, concepts were allowed to emerge through participants' stories of their own challenges, strategies, and support needs; the emergent concepts fit within the context of the ecological/risk and resilience framework. Results of this dissertation research reveal that teachers, like adolescent youth, may experience risk and protective factors at all levels of the ecological system. These factors influence the socioemotional adjustment of the teachers; the presence of more protective factors

appeared to contribute to more optimal teacher functioning in school environments threatened by the adverse impact of community violence.

The current study integrated ecological and resiliency frameworks to examine risk and protective factors at various levels within the specific ecological context of middle schools located in violent neighborhoods. From an ecological perspective, an individual is embedded in four subsystems which include the individual, his or her family, the school, other relational contexts, the community, and the larger society or culture. The present study focuses on what Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined as the mesosystem of teachers in schools.

An underlying assumption of the current study was that risks associated with environmental stressors such as community violence could be counteracted by protective factors in the home, school, and/or community. Adults, in this case, teachers, who are involved in the lives of early adolescents affected by these risks, have the potential to foster youth resilience and reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes. Teachers in this study articulated a number of risk factors, including community violence, inadequate parenting, poverty, weak school leadership, and lack of community resources for youth. Yet teachers also recognized their potential for adaptation in the face of these external stressors.

The process of adaptation or occupation of an adaptive range in ecological theory (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993; Klein & White, 2002) helps to bridge ecological and resilience frameworks. Teachers are capable of drawing on protective resources from multiple ecological levels, including empathetic family members, supportive fellow teachers, effective administrators, and engaged community activists to provide students with

guidance and structure. These protective factors help teachers adapt to their environment and make conscious decisions to effect changes that foster more optimal academic performance and social behavior among students within astressful community context.

Findings from this study are also consistent with previous research indicating that resilience is not a trait attributable to an individual, but to the interaction of multiple systems (O'Donnell et al., 2002; Waller, 2001). At the individual level, teachers may possess personal resources, such as good health or an easygoing temperament, as well as resources related to their past experiences in the social environment, such as self esteem and the self confidence that stems from their own ability to transcend adversity (Gore & Eckenrode, 1994). At the environmental level, teachers may experience family, school, and community support. Absent these resources, teachers may enter the school system "at risk," just like youth who lack individual, family, school, and/or community resources in high violence neighborhoods. Teachers have the capacity to foster early adolescent resilience as they guide and support students' development. However, this study underscores that their ability to help students succeed and cope with adversity is influenced by the interaction of risk and protective factors within their own ecological environment.

Middle school teachers in the current study shared stories of how they contributed to students' resilience by employing behavioral strategies at all levels of the ecological system. Teachers offered examples of their efforts to deflect potential risks for students both in and out of school. For example, in their classrooms, teachers provided clear rules and carefully monitored student behaviors. At the family level, many teachers encouraged parent involvement and some organized school events involving parents. At

the community level, teachers discussed safety, warned youth about gangs and the consequences of aggressive behaviors, and referred them to constructive, after-school community programs.

The current study revealed that teachers working in communities affected by violence must contend with their own set of risk factors. In their work with students, teachers interact with multiple systems, including their own families, students and their parents, other teachers, administrators, and members of the greater community. In order to "stay strong" for their students, teachers in violent communities must also draw on protective factors at multiple levels of the ecological system. For example, at the individual level, teachers may rely on prayer, and at the family level they may turn to sympathetic family members to help them cope with work-related stress. Teachers also voiced the protective value of engaged parents, positive fellow teachers, strong administrators, mental health counselors, and community volunteers. Throughout the study, teachers voiced feelings that their own ability to summon protective resources was critical to preserving their personal mental health. Moreover, maintaining positive mental health was essential to their ability to foster resilience in the students they served.

The current findings provide insight into the challenges, strategies, and support needs of teachers as they strive to teach students, offer guidance, and foster hope for the future. Results reveal that an ecological/risk and resilience approach is appropriate for examining teacher functioning, as well as youth resilience, within a stressful community context. It should also be noted that, to a large extent, use of the ecological/risk and resilience theoretical model is undeveloped (Murry, 2001). Very few existing studies have examined the specific ways in which teachers interact with neighborhood violence,

a community level stressor, to influence youth behavior and development. One seminal work that provided some insights concerning teacher resilience is a study of preschool teachers in violent communities by Garbarino et al. (1992). The study concluded that teachers need help in coping with violence-related stress to improve their effectiveness in working with young children. The current research built on the work of Garbarino and his colleagues, and appears to be first study to adopt an ecological/risk and resilience framework to investigate the functioning of middle school teachers in violent communities. Use of a qualitative design provided a foundation for emergent concepts that may inform the existing literature and guide future investigation of teachers' challenges, strategies, and support needs in their efforts to foster youth resilience in challenging community contexts.

<div align="center">Summary of Major Findings</div>

This section is organized around the three research questions examined in this dissertation study. It begins with an overview of the central phenomenon, community violence. This presentation is followed by discussion of the three major questions: 1) What are the challenges that middle school teachers face in low-income neighborhoods with high community violence? 2) What are the strategies that teachers use to foster resilience in the youth they serve? 3) What supports do teachers need to more effectively teach and guide youth within communities affected by violence.

In the final phase of my analysis, three concepts emerged to organize the information that was shared by teachers working with early adolescents in violent communities. These emergent concepts are: 1) guidance, 2) structure, and 3) self preservation. Teachers in all three schools shared challenges in providing guidance to

students and obtaining structural supports to foster adolescents' resilience, as well as challenges to preserving their personal mental health. Yet despite teaching in schools threatened by neighborhood violence, they sought to offer guidance to youth and their families; provide structure in their classrooms and tackle structural challenges in their schools and larger communities; and employ coping strategies to preserve their own mental health. Within this same framework, teachers expressed a need for support that would allow them to provide youth and families with more effective, comprehensive guidance; implement structural approaches to increasing safety and security within the school and larger community; and access services to improve their own mental health. These concepts of guidance, structure, and self preservation were voiced explicitly or implicitly in almost all of my conversations with teachers as they described their efforts to be strong, effective teachers in schools affected by community violence.

Community Violence

Although violent crime is at historic low levels nationwide, it reached an all time high in the site of this research, Prince George's County, Maryland, in 2005 (Zenike, 2006). This trend is consistent with the increasing levels of community violence in many other low-income, predominantly African American communities (O'Donnell et al., 2002). While community violence is widely perceived to be a problem in the neighborhoods affected by this study, the interview protocol was designed to avoid making assumptions and leading questions. Throughout the interviewing process, I reminded myself of Maxwell's (1996) caution that a principal investigator must be prepared to alter his or her stance if data do not match preconceptions.

All of the teachers in this study confirmed that community violence was a salient community level stressor. Participants identified shootings, assaults, robberies, gang activity, drug trafficking, and substance abuse in the neighborhoods surrounding each of the schools. They reported witnessing fights ("beefin'") on school grounds and were, in some cases, physically threatened in their classrooms by both students and their parents. Teachers also described visiting students with gunshot wounds in the hospital and attending students' funerals. These findings are consistent with other studies that describe preschool teachers' experiences with community violence (Garbarino, 1992; 2001; Osofsky, 1995). According to Garbarino (2001), educators working in "urban war zones" may be traumatized by their exposure to violence. They are, at the very least, affected by their students' experiences with endemic gun violence and gang activity. For children whose parents have limited education or employment prospects, and whose capacity for positive parenting may be limited by depression, substance abuse, and other problems, school teachers and counselors may be crucial resources for support.

The framework, which developed during the coding phases of my analysis, confirmed that stories of teacher challenges, strategies, and support needs could all be connected conceptually to problems of community violence. Therefore, the central phenomenon in this study was community violence and its pervasive effects on early adolescents and their families in the three target schools, and on the teachers themselves.

Challenges

What are the challenges that middle school teachers face in low-income neighborhoods with high community violence?

The first major research question addressed the challenges confronted by teachers working in violent communities. Teachers described challenges relating to their ability to

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provide students with guidance and sufficient structural supports, as well as challenges to preserving their own mental health.

Challenges Related to Guidance

Teachers in all three middle schools noted that their students needed guidance in negotiating the developmental stage of early adolescence. While this is true of all adolescents, teachers working in violent communities reported that they were often challenged by confrontational and threatening youth behavior, also known as "going hard." Teachers noted that students who witnessed or were victimized by violence may "turn to the dark side" as a survival strategy; these students were more likely to interact with a delinquent peer group and less likely to attend their classes. Teachers also stated that students who "go hard" may victimize or bully other students, or become involved in a "beef" that filters into the school. At the extreme, some students get "lost to the streets." Teachers' reports were similar to those in a study by Kuther and Wallace (2003) who found that violence-exposed youth often deal with conflict by resorting to a form of "street justice" rather than relying on conventional authority figures.

Current findings are further consistent with research on school age children which revealed that violence exposure weakened children's disinclination to behave aggressively and increased self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, and life threatening reenactments (Farrell & Bruce, 1997; Garbarino et al., 1992; Osofsky et al., 1993). However, it is important to note that "going hard" may have an adaptive function for youth who lack other resources to protect themselves in dangerous communities (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991; Tolan, Guerra, & Montaini-Klovdah, 1997). Nevertheless, these coping responses are ultimately

ineffective in fostering personal well-being and quality of life (Garbarino et al., 1991; Tolan et al., 1997).   For example, in the current study, teachers shared stories of how students who witnessed violence and "went hard" were likely to fail in school and become victims of violence themselves. Teachers lamented that early adolescents who grow up in violent neighborhoods are exposed to aggressive behavior, gun activity, and drug dealing among older peers and adults as a social norm. Aggressive behaviors such as "going hard," bullying, and "beefin" pose challenges for teachers seeking to guide youth in their academic, social, and moral development.

A second guidance-related challenge for middle school teachers was the students' parents. The vast majority of teachers resented parental lack of involvement in their children's school work. They viewed parents as apathetic and contributors to their early adolescents' academic problems. Many teachers in the current study described a "cycle of disadvantage" in families which includes poverty, single and early parenthood, and lack of motivation among parents. A few teachers conceded that the impact of such environmental stressors may compromise parents' own coping resources and their ability to motivate their children in school.

Research on the relationship between teachers and parents in low-income, violent communities is remarkably absent from the literature. However, Garbarino et al. (1991) noted that a child's adaptive behavior in the home and community (e.g., resolving disputes by physical means) may be maladaptive for school success. Bronfenbrenner (1986) also emphasized the importance of schools in changing the behavior of children from homes lacking intergenerational communication. Teachers reported being challenged in their efforts to provide guidance for youth whose parents may be

disengaged or supportive of aggressive problem-solving strategies. Just as teachers grappled with aggressive youth behavior in their classrooms, they were also challenged by guiding children when parents were apathetic, confrontational, or reinforcing negative youth behaviors.

Challenges Related to Structure

A second set of challenges described by teachers related to their efforts to provide structure and control in their classrooms and schools. Undoubtedly, time constrains teachers in all schools. However, unlike their peers in communities without violence and its related stressors, teachers in these schools were burdened with the blame of failing test scores. Students in all three schools failed to meet the state of Maryland's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards for the proportion of students achieving proficiency in reading and math. Moreover, some teachers noted "bright (students') flight" from their gifted programs when parents observed the impact of violence on their schools. The demands on teachers in communities affected by violence include dealing with academic failure and preexisting risk factors, such as poverty, family stress, and discrimination (Reinke & Herman, 2002).

The structural challenge of having adequate time to raise children's academic test scores, in the context of addressing other home and family problems, was also noted in a study of African American elementary school children in Washington, D. C. (Nettles et al., 2000). In this study of fourth and fifth graders attending school in high crime neighborhoods, exposure to violence was negatively related to reading and math achievement scores. Students who perceived more violence in their home, school, and neighborhood performed worse on a standardized achievement tests than those who had

observed less violence. Teachers in this study also reported class sizes of as many as 30 to 35 students. Finding the time to help large numbers of students increase their test scores, as well as cope with community stressors, was a major structural challenge confronted by teachers in this investigation.

Middle school teachers also reported that several school policies compromised the safety and security of teachers, staff, and students in their schools. The lack of adequate safety/security measures created a special structural challenge because it deprived teachers of a sense of control. Teachers described being challenged by the unpredictable nature of violent events such as students walking in the hallways with knives or guns, and angry parents threatening teachers in their classrooms. These events, combined with the lack of strong, widely understood, and consistently enforced policies for handling them, contributed to the fear and anxiety experienced by many of the teachers who were interviewed.

Lastly, teachers shared that the lack of community resources posed structural challenges for students and their families. One teacher noted the lack of parity between resources in wealthier school districts in nearby communities and those funneled to students in her school. Other studies of low-income African American communities have also found a dearth of economic, social, and institutional resources (e.g., Jarrett, 1998). Students in more resource-rich communities benefit from the availability of well-functioning schools, churches, libraries, and constructive after-school activities. Teachers in this study noted that the lack of these structural community resources, in combination with the problems of pervasive community violence, created an additional burden for teachers striving to foster positive youth outcomes.

Challenges Related to Self Preservation

A final set of challenges described by teachers focused on the need for them to preserve their own mental health so they could continue to be effective in their classrooms. These teachers, who were regularly exposed to community violence and its impact on students, described symptoms of fear, stress and somatic issues, and desensitization. Some teachers stated that their fears of physically aggressive youth were exacerbated by the lack of consistent school policies to deal with students who bullied others or brought weapons into the school.

A number of teachers reported concerns that chronic community violence exposure in their schools/neighborhoods contributed to feelings of desensitization. Other studies have found that violence is often so common in poor, urban neighborhoods that it is perceived as "background noise" by its members (Tolan et al., 1997). Thus, the high frequency of witnessing, hearing about, or experiencing violent events may lead to a sense of emotional numbness for children or adults. While many teachers described desensitization as a coping mechanism, it is also likely to have long-term negative consequences for teacher and student mental health. Farrell and Bruce (1997) reported that desensitization may cause children and adolescents to become uncaring toward others; this outcome may occur for teachers as well. One teacher, who was experiencing psychological stress and somatic issues due to the violence, was concerned that she might become "hardened" like other teachers in her school. Desensitization may not only block teachers from effective coping, but may also reduce their capacity to sympathize with students who need sensitive care and support following a violent event (Garbarino et al.,

2001). Thus, mental health issues related to violence may be a major challenge for teachers seeking to foster adolescent well being.

<div align="center">*Strategies*</div>

What are the strategies that teachers use to foster resilience in the youth they serve?

The second major research question addressed strategies that teachers employ to protect, guide, and support youth in violent communities. Teachers described strategies they used to guide early adolescents and increase structure in their students' schools, homes, and communities, as well as strategies they employed to preserve their own mental health.

Strategies Related to Guidance

Most teachers in the current study recognized the realities of aggressive student behavior, low academic motivation, and parental apathy in poor, high crime neighborhoods. They responded with three guidance-related strategies in their efforts to foster youth resilience. First, teachers made themselves available with advice, counseling, and a willingness to listen to student needs. Second, teachers empowered students through their own positive attitudes and through referring students to programs with a positive focus. Third, teachers made efforts to involve parents in their children's education.

Teachers stated that they guided students most effectively by listening, giving advice, and counseling. Many teachers sought to increase social problem solving skills, including students' ability to anticipate the long term consequences of violent acts. Young teachers used their age and cultural understanding to connect with students while experienced teachers shared wisdom gained in years of teaching in their efforts to

dissuade youth from violent activities and promote positive planning for the future.

Current findings are consistent with previous research which indicated that adolescents

who experience feelings of acceptance by their teachers and schools are more committed

to learning and academic goals than students without such experiences (Becker & Luthar,

2002; Reinke & Herman, 2002; Wentzel, 2002). Indeed, school attachment relationships

act as a protective factor and are vital to early adolescent retention in school (Becker &

Luthar, 2002). Additionally, qualitative research by Sweatt et al. (2002) revealed that

adolescents in violent, urban communities had a desire to engage in open, honest

discussions with teachers about the impact of violence on their lives.

Many middle school teachers in the schools targeted by the current study believed

that early adolescents in violent communities have the potential to overcome problems if

they are empowered with a positive focus and the belief that positive behavior will enable

them to succeed. Adopting this perspective, some teachers set high expectations for

students' academic/classroom behavior and made efforts to connect students with youth

empowerment programs. These strategies are consistent with two mechanisms identified

by Rutter (1987) for fostering youth resiliency: helping adolescents *establish and*

maintain a sense of self esteem and self efficacy and *creating opportunities for success*.

Garmezy (1994) also indicated the need for teachers, parents, and other adults working

with low income urban youth to focus on hope rather than problems. By actively

listening and engendering a positive focus with their students, teachers helped to decrease

the likelihood of students' risk taking behavior and to foster resilience.

The third salient guidance-related strategy used by teachers in the current study

was parent involvement. Some teachers in the present study believed that parents needed

encouragement to become involved in the school. Others believed that parents needed

assistance in parenting and preparing their children for academic work. A number of

studies have found that parent involvement and supervision are protective factors for

early adolescents. For example, a study by Ceballo et al. (2003) demonstrated that

elementary age children whose parents engaged in more supervision were less likely to

experience personal victimization and witnessing of violence. The researchers concluded

that high levels of monitoring moderated the relationship between violence exposure and

children's psychological well-being. Teachers in the current study also attempted to

teach parents some of the in home learning strategies that have been associated with

student success, such as preparing and checking homework, and praising good

schoolwork and report cards (Jarrett, 1997a). One middle school teacher, for example,

recognized that parents "just don't know how to begin" and helped parents establish

curfews, check homework, and provide adequate school supplies. Most teachers

recognized the need to foster positive parental guidance, and some took active steps to

increase parental involvement while also providing guidance to youth within their

classrooms.

Strategies Related to Structure

In addition to making efforts to guide their students' behavior, middle school

teachers employed a variety of strategies to increase structure in their students' lives, both

in the school and in the larger community. Within the school setting, most teachers

focused on establishing clear rules for behavior, maintaining consistent expectations,

monitoring their classrooms, and expelling troublemakers. These strategies are consistent

with another protective mechanism identified by Rutter (1987) to foster youth resiliency:

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reducing the impact of risk. Teachers reduced the likelihood of their students engaging in negative behaviors by monitoring adolescents' time and behaviors in the classroom, instructing students to focus on their school work and refusing to allow bullying or disrespectful behavior. Many teachers further encouraged students to withdraw from relationships with delinquent peers in the larger community. Some teachers employed still another of Rutter's protective mechanisms: *reducing the likelihood of negative chain reactions associated with adversity* (Rutter, 1987). Specifically, some teachers eliminated aggressive students from their classrooms before they could incite others to disrupt the climate of learning. Although previous studies have not explored teachers' use of such strategies to enhance youth resilience, the current study indicates that teachers were employing mechanisms identified by Rutter to reduce the impact of high risk, adolescent behavior.

Teacher monitoring and control strategies parallel those used by parents in other studies of adolescents (Jarrett, 1997b) and younger children (Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2003; 2004). According to one teacher in the current study, "When they're in my classroom, I am their parent, is what I feel like and I have to protect them at all costs." Teachers adopted strategies to provide students with structure and control, two factors also identified as critical in optimal parenting (Slater & Power, 1987).

Research on early childhood classrooms also demonstrates that teachers who establish clear classroom rules, structure children's activities, provide straightforward directions, and maintain consistent expectations are more likely to prevent aggressive, antisocial behavior. Reinke and Herman (2002) reported that while it is critical for teachers to provide youth in disadvantaged communities with guidance, it is not sufficient

to change students' behavior. Teachers must also establish a consistent classroom structure and enforce reasonable rules for behavior. Teachers in this study adopted many structural strategies to help students develop self control and focus on the class work that is needed to succeed in middle school and beyond.

Notably, the teachers in this study felt a stronger sense of control in their classrooms than in the larger school setting, including the hallways. Teachers made choices about where they were willing to impose structure and insist on conformity to school rules, acknowledging that their main goal was to maintain a healthy classroom environment. In other words, teachers seemed to know the limits of their power and control within the school setting and did not attempt to address every aggressive or antisocial behavior they encountered.

Many of the teachers in this study advocated for greater structure and control within the school and in the larger community. Some invested their time in behavioral training programs that taught them to manage the behavior of aggressive students. Others sought help from effective administrators to handle incidents of violence or threatening behavior. Still other teachers attempted to increase their knowledge of the strengths and challenges of the neighborhoods surrounding their schools. A few engaged in community mentoring programs, and others connected youth with extracurricular activities, enrichment programs, and community resource persons. These structural strategies enabled some teachers to provide middle school youth with valuable social capital in their neighborhoods and in the larger community.

Strategies Related to Self Preservation

Teachers in the present study not only adopted strategies to guide and provide structure their students' lives, but also to preserve their own mental health in a challenging school environment. Many middle school teachers described coping strategies they employed to facilitate self preservation. The existing literature on stress and coping addresses strategies for reducing symptoms of distress. According to Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989), coping is a process of executing a response to a perceived threat, rather than an individual disposition. Emotion-focused coping is aimed at reducing the emotional distress that is associated with a situation, while problem-focused coping is aimed at doing something to alter the source of stress.

Middle school teachers in this study employed both emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies to reduce their distress. Praying and venting were the salient emotion-focused strategies adopted by the teachers. Many teachers mentioned prayer as a strategy for self preservation, stating that religiosity helped them to cope with work-related stress. The widespread use of prayer by the predominantly African American group of teachers in this study is consistent with other research demonstrating African Americans' reliance on prayer (Chatters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 1999; Thomas, Quinn, Billingsley, & Caldwell, 1994). African Americans not only have high rates of attending church, reading religious material, and watching or listening to religious programming, but also are more likely than many racial/ethnic groups to engage in private religious or spiritual activities such as prayer (Chatters et al., 1999).

A large number of teachers also reduced their stress through venting, another emotion-focused strategy. These teachers reduced the pressures and frustrations of

teaching in a high risk environment by complaining to other teachers, family members, and/or friends. Venting also seemed to overlap with seeking guidance from members of the teacher's social support network, which could be defined as a problem-focused approach. Therefore, venting was a help-seeking behavior that sometimes served multiple purposes: letting off steam, talking to someone who could relate to the problem, and seeking guidance about how to solve a problem.

Teachers also preserved their mental health through three problem-focused coping strategies: separating work and personal life, limiting involvement with difficult students, and seeking professional counseling. Some teachers identified a need to put boundaries between their work and personal lives. This strategy enabled them to preserve a sense of control and autonomy, especially outside the school setting. Many teachers also learned to limit their involvement with difficult students who could drain away their energies and sense of self efficacy. Current findings are consistent with a study of high school teachers by Austin, Shah, and Muncer (2005) that measured their work-related stress and coping strategies. These researchers found that knowing personal limitations and exhibiting assertiveness, as exemplified by the ability to say 'no', were effective in reducing teacher burnout.

Interestingly, only three teachers mentioned mental health counseling as a source of help for work-related stress, and only one teacher admitted to actually seeking counseling. While this African American teacher boasted, "I've always marched to the beat of my own drum, and so I don't really care what people say," she shared the tendency for such counseling to be stigmatized by members of her community and other minority cultures. Research corroborates this assertion. Using data from focus groups

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conducted with male and female African American adults, Thompson, Bazile, and Akbar (2004) found that African Americans were likely to believe that personal problems should be solved by seeking guidance and support from family members and friends. Study participants noted a stigma associated with use of psychotherapy, linking it with serious mental illness. This stigma may have influenced teachers' willingness to seek help, and if sought, to reveal their use of mental health counseling to me. Current findings indicate that use of coping strategies to preserve mental health may be culturally bound.

<div align="center">

Support Needs

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What supports do teachers need to more effectively teach and guide early adolescents within communities affected by violence?

The final research question in this study asked teachers to identify support systems and resources that would improve teachers' capacity to guide and support their students. Middle school teachers described a number of family, school, and community level resources that would enable them to better foster youth resilience and improve the well-being of the larger school community. These needs again focused on the three guiding concepts in this study: guidance, structure, and teacher self preservation.

Support Needs Related to Guidance

Teachers in the current study identified several resources and support systems that would improve their capacity to effectively guide students who lived in violent communities. Specifically, they reported a need for mental health counselors and crisis intervention programs in their schools, behavior management training, and parent involvement programs. The severity of mental health problems exhibited by some students in the targeted schools led many teachers to assert a need for full-time, professional counselors. Previous research has found that mental health professionals can

be protective for children and youth in low-income, urban settings (Black & Krishnakumar, 1998). Indeed, the latter study underscores the benefits of accessible, school-based health centers that provide preventive mental health services, crisis intervention, and educational activities such as group counseling and life planning. Interestingly, teachers in the current study voiced concern that school guidance counselors were being asked to take on the role of professionally trained mental health counselors without the credentials to do so. They advocated for professional mental health staff but surmised that the cost to the county would serve as a barrier to action.

In addition to addressing student mental health needs, many teachers believed they could provide more effective guidance to students if they had better training to handle the behavior problems of children exposed to community violence, poverty, and a lack of structure and control in the home. This reported need was consistent with one identified by preschool teachers in violent communities, who sought to increase their understanding of the relationship between exposure to chronic cumulative risk and the resulting psychological, physical, and behavioral effects on children (Garbarino et al, 1992). Teachers in this study recognized that cumulative risk factors impeded the academic motivation and mental health of middle school youth and necessitated effective intervention. The researchers concluded that teachers need the expertise, collaboration, and support of professionals to help them motivate students, manage aggressive classroom behavior, work effectively with students exhibiting fear or anxiety, and reduce students' violence-related stress.

While teachers in the present study were often critical of parents, most teachers perceived the benefits of partnering with parents and families to support youth, build their

academic and social skills, improve their future life options, and minimize the stressors associated with life in violent communities. Moreover, many teachers recognized the need for intervention at the parent/home level. This finding is consistent with previous research that indicated a need for mental health services for parents of young children in violent communities (Garbarino, 2001; Tolan et al., 1997). Other studies have also underscored the importance of interventions that address both adolescent functioning and family functioning (Tolan et al., 1997). Teachers in the current study expressed a need for parent education programs, initiatives that would foster greater parent-school involvement, and even a full-time parent outreach worker. Without such efforts to address the parenting and mental health needs (including anger management) of students' parents, teachers feared the "cycle of disadvantage" would continue for generations to come.

Support Needs Related to Structure

Participating teachers also described important support needs related to structure: safety/security on the school grounds, antiviolence programs, and expanded community resources. Overall, teachers emphasized the need for administrators to take strong, consistent positions on issues relating to youth violence.   This need for effective leadership in stressful environments was also articulated by Garmezy (1993) who concluded that schools are most likely to be effective when there is close collaboration between administrators, teachers, and parents. Data from three schools with distinctly different leadership within Prince George's County highlight the need for effective leadership to implement antiviolence strategies to protect the school community and reduce teacher and student stress.

At the school level, teachers also described a need to develop clear safety/security protocols. Safety is of paramount importance in schools where community violence is a social norm for many students. Teachers reported that it was common for students to be "jumped" on their way to school and forced to give up popular brand name shoes or coats. Moreover, it was not unusual for teachers and students to hear gunshots in the distance during the day. A number of teachers expressed needs for more protective security devices in their schools, noting that area high schools had metal detectors, while students and teachers in middle schools were left at risk for violent incidents.

In addition to security measures, teachers advocated strongly for the reinstatement of peer mediation programs. They noted that budget cuts forced such programs to be taken over by school counselors who attempted to solve their students' problems themselves. Teachers indicated that peer mediation programs had been effective because they provided peer reinforcement for prosocial skills and outcomes. Clearly, peer pressure has a significant impact on the behavior of middle school youth (Tolan et al., 1997), and in the current study, there was often peer pressure to retaliate for even minor slights or transgressions. Teachers emphasized that programs such as peer mediation, which promote the antiviolence values of peers (as well as teachers), may be especially beneficial in schools that are located in violent communities.

Teachers in the present study also perceived a need for more community level supports such as after school programs, recreation facilities, and church involvement. One teacher suggested that well-publicized community events sponsored by recreational facilities would provide students with safe alternatives to the streets when school is not in session. Teachers advocated for more county- and state-supported services, such as

greater involvement of law enforcement in school and community activities, parent education, drug/alcohol rehabilitation programs, and empowerment programs for adolescents and families. Other studies have also suggested that youth in violent communities would experience more optimal outcomes with greater local and national investment in child and family-serving institutions (Jarrett, 1997a). Teachers in the current study recognized a need to restore order and cohesion in the neighborhoods surrounding their schools and provide positive, out-of-school alternatives for students.

Support Needs Related to Self Preservation

When asked about needs for support, teachers noted a few resources that would improve their own mental health. A few teachers expressed a need for mental health counseling for teachers, but most were more likely to mention a need for professional training on behavior management and counseling/crisis intervention for students. Seeking mental health services may be a last resort for teachers from African American and other racial/ethnic backgrounds who may be influenced by cultural traditions of turning to friends and family for help (Thompson et al., 2004). It is also possible that teachers' experiences of desensitization prevented them from perceiving a need to seek mental health assistance. Teachers in this study did indicate that they would benefit from training on how to help students reduce violence-related stress and from professional interventions to address students' mental health needs. The latter programs may also benefit teachers who are experiencing fear, anxiety, somatic issues, or other stressors.

<div align="center">Cultural Context</div>

In the literature review, I indicated the importance of using a culturally relevant context to interpret the strategies used by teachers to foster youth resilience. Current

findings demonstrate the need to consider the cultural backgrounds of teachers, the majority of whom were African American (75%) or biracial African American (10%). As noted in the results, many teachers shared a common guidance strategy of adopting a positive focus and seeking to empower early adolescents. These teachers created opportunities for students through setting high expectations and talking to them about life options. They also introduced empowerment groups that engaged students in leadership development and service opportunities. These strategies, employed by African American teachers, are similar to those used by some African American parents in poor, urban neighborhoods (Jarrett, 1997b). Specifically, parents adopted a positive focus in creating opportunities for success by connecting their children to church activities, community programs, and other institutional resources. The Africentric concept of *positivity* emphasizes the importance of hopefulness in negative situations and generating positive problem solving strategies in the face of adversity (Randolph & Koblinsky, 2003). The positive, empowerment orientation adopted by many teachers in the current study supports this cultural value of *positivity* among African American individuals and families.

Findings from the current study also support the Africentric concept of *communalism* (Randolph & Koblinsky, 2003). Many teachers in the present study advocated for strategies of community engagement to foster resilience in their students and families. For example, in one school, teachers engaged business and church leaders, police officers, school staff, and other community members in planning an annual event intended to model non-violent activities for youth. Such efforts to connect youth with

community resources are consistent with an Africentric worldview that places value on group (versus individual) goals and solutions to problems.

Two of the coping behaviors used by teachers in the current study also appear to have been influenced by cultural factors: the use of prayer and the avoidance of counseling/psychotherapy by African American teachers. As noted earlier, prayer is a widespread coping strategy among African Americans (Chatters et al., 1999; Randolph & Koblinsky, 2003; Thomas et al., 1994). This reliance on prayer is consistent with African American traditions and with the Africentric value of *spirituality*, which may encompass prayer and religiosity as well as a focus on spiritual goals (Randolph & Koblinsky, 2003). Finally, the finding that few teachers sought mental health counseling, even in the face of high levels of stress, may be related to the stigma attached to professional counseling in the African American community. Teachers were more likely to turn to friends and family for psychological support. Such behavior is consistent with African Americans' reliance on strong familial and informal social support networks (Billingsley, 1992). These findings illustrate the importance of cultural context when investigating the challenges, strategies, and support needs of teachers working in high risk communities.

Limitations and Strengths

Limitations

Although the current findings provide insights about the lives of teachers in violent communities, there are several limitations to this study. First, this study does not adopt a pure grounded theory approach in that a theoretical framework of ecological/risk and resilience served as a guide. While there appears to be a trend among qualitative researchers to use theory as a foundation rather than expect it to emerge entirely from the

data (Ragin, Nagel, & White, 2004), pure grounded theorists may take issue with the methodology used.

Second, although I employed four techniques to establish the trustworthiness of the data (e.g., prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks), I was the sole interviewer and coder of the data. It is possible that my biases contributed to the data and emergent concepts that are presented. If a different researcher or research team conducted and analyzed the data, that individual or team may have come up with other major concepts or added concepts to those identified in this study.

Another limitation involves the sampling methodology of volunteer selection and snowball sampling. These procedures limit the findings to those who self-selected into the study. While there is diversity in the participants by age, race, gender, number of years teaching, and views on community violence, the nature of self-selection suggests that the participants are those who were willing to share their experiences. It is possible that the process excluded other teachers who were not coping effectively with community violence and were uncomfortable sharing their stress. Thus, the views and experiences of teachers in this study may not represent those of teachers who did not respond to my written or oral request for interested participants.

Finally, it must be noted that a qualitative study of this nature is not generalizable to other populations. The qualitative methodology invites teachers' voices to enter the dialogue on early adolescent resilience in communities affected by violence. I purposely approached teachers in three schools with predominantly African American students that were located in neighborhoods affected by high levels of violence. Therefore, the research and the emergent concepts may only be relevant to the targeted schools and

communities, but my study may be transferable (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) as a framework to guide future research.

Strengths

A major strength of this study in its use of a qualitative design was that it invited participants to be critical members of the research team, empowering them to become potential change agents (Morrow & Smith, 1995). At the end of nearly every interview, when I turned the tape recorder off and stated my appreciation for their participation, teachers shared their gratitude for the opportunity to participate, share their stories and opinions, and be heard. Teachers have important insight into early adolescent resilience in violent communities. However, they are too often a missing link in the dialogue among school officials, researchers, and policymakers. Therefore, this study should have important implications for future research, policy, and practice.

Another strength of the current study was its use of four techniques to establish trustworthiness of the data, the qualitative research equivalent to reliability and validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using the technique of *prolonged engagement*, I spent many days in each of the schools meeting with principals and office staff, attending events (e.g., awards ceremonies), and speaking with teachers. I also shared with teachers my background as a counselor of high risk adolescents in violent, Washington, D.C. communities and my marriage to a public school teacher.

By conducting interviews in three schools representing different communities, I used the technique of *triangulation*. That is, I reduced the risk of bias by collecting information from a range of individuals in different settings. Additionally, my journal provided reflections and notes that added depth to the data. I also established a small

peer debriefing group of four graduate students conducting qualitative research with whom I shared data and sensitizing concepts to gain their insight. Although I conducted all the interviews myself, these meetings helped reduce any of my biases and strengthened the trustworthiness of my data. The final technique I used was *member checking* with a selected group of teachers who stated that the excerpts I shared on community violence, challenges, strategies, and support needs provided an accurate depiction of their school and teaching experiences.

Another strength of this study is its consideration of how cultural factors may influence teachers' coping strategies as they attempt to preserve their mental health under stressful teaching conditions. This study focuses on a group of teachers, the majority of whom were African American and teaching in predominantly African American schools. The study specifically addresses the role of cultural values and practices, such as religiosity and prayer, communalism, and positivity, in teacher approaches to working with students and preserving their own mental health. A final strength of the current study is that the findings have implications for programmatic and policy interventions in communities plagued by high levels of violence.

<div align="center">Implications for Researchers, Practitioners, and Policymakers</div>

This research has several important implications for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. It is essential that we learn more about how teachers cope and stay resilient in the face of continuous stressors that accompany teaching in violent communities. Educators and policymakers need to build on the existing strategies and strengths of teachers working with young adolescents who confront violence on a daily basis.

Research

The current findings have a number of implications for future research. First, through the use of grounded theory methodology in this study, a framework for teacher challenges, strategies, and support needs developed in relation to the central phenomenon, community violence. Further research might use this framework to examine the behaviors and needs of teachers working with middle school students in other community contexts, such as those characterized by different racial/ethnic demographics. In this study, one school located in a community designated by police reports as high in community violence was not approached in order to *tell a consistent story* of middle school teachers' experiences in predominantly African American urban communities. Future research might examine predominantly Hispanic schools or compare schools with different demographics.

Second, this study suggests that violence as a pervasive community stressor affects the coping resources of early adolescents, their families, and their teachers. However, the current study did not distinguish between levels of violence. Teachers and students in what Garbarino (2001) called "urban war zones" may experience greater distress than those in less "toxic" communities. Therefore, future qualitative research might rely on quantitative measures of neighborhood/community violence and study the challenges, strategies, and needs of teachers in communities characterized by low, moderate, and high violence.

Another area for future research addresses the ages of the children teachers serve. It would be interesting to investigate similarities and differences in the challenges, strategies, and support needs of teachers providing instruction at the preschool,

elementary, middle school, and high school levels. Studies might also continue to explore these differences among teachers who vary in gender, cultural background, neighborhood residence, and years of teaching experience.

Results from the current study indicated that teachers were challenged by behavior management issues and chose, in the most extreme cases, to limit their involvement with behaviorally aggressive students. Using qualitative research, future research might focus more specifically on teachers' experiences with these at risk youth who have a history of violence, truancy, and engagement in illegal activities. A study by O'Donnell et al. (2002) indicated that these are the students who have the greatest need for teachers to be available, empathetic, and attentive. Yet teachers must balance their own safety and mental health needs against the needs of these challenging students. Qualitative research has the potential to examine whether and how teachers play a role in the lives of these high risk youth. It is important that we continue to listen to teachers' voices as we investigate their strategies for fostering youth resilience.

With regard to parenting, the interview protocol for the current study did not focus on the nature and quality of parent-teacher relationships in violent communities. As indicated in the literature review, recent research has addressed parental strategies for protecting children from exposure to violence (Burton & Jarrett, 2000; Fagan & Stevenson, 2002; Jarrett, 1997a; Jarrett, 1997b; 1998; Jarrett & Jefferson, 2004; Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2003; 2004) but there is little mention of parents' communication with teachers. Current findings reveal a need for more in depth exploration of the issues that facilitate or hinder healthy parent-teacher relationships, as well as identification of strategies for increasing parental involvement in their children's education.

Lastly, researchers might further explore teachers' emotion-focused and problem-focused coping styles in violent communities. The current study did not find some of the common coping strategies used by other adults under stress, such as avoidance, distraction, humor, and use of alcohol and drugs. More detailed examination of how different types of coping contribute to teacher stress and positive mental health outcomes would provide an important contribution to the resilience literature.

Practice

Current findings have important implications for teachers, school and county administrators, and helping professionals seeking to increase the resilience of high risk youth. Teachers shared many effective strategies for working with adolescents and families in communities affected by violence. For example, teachers expressed a clear need for strong county and school leadership in addressing violence-related issues within the public schools. Middle school teachers shared the benefits of competent, engaged principals, clearly articulated policies and consequences for violent/antisocial behaviors (e.g., bullying, bringing weapons on school grounds), and administrators' involvement in the discipline of youth who violate the rules.

Many of the teachers interviewed described aggressive behaviors that youth bring to the classroom. They also described youth who exhibited anxiety, withdrawal, and mental health symptoms that began with students' direct exposure to violence. Teachers advocated for school systems to provide them with behavior management training (at no cost to teachers) to help them better address students' antisocial behaviors and mental health problems. Specifically, they described a need to learn strategies for teaching prosocial skills such as anger management and conflict resolution. These

psychoeducation programs should be culturally sensitive and responsive to the stressors in target communities (Jarrett, 1998).

One of the most compelling findings of the study was the need for peer mediation programs in schools affected by violence. Both teachers and counselors agreed that these programs worked because they involved influential peers, supported anti-violence values, and engaged students in solving their own problems.

Findings also revealed a need for middle schools in violent communities to have access to one or more full-time mental health counselors. Such counselors might provide violence-exposed youth with the empathy, counseling, and academic assistance they need to adjust to traumatic experiences. In communities that are regularly affected by unpredictable shootings, murders, gang fights, and funerals, schools at all levels (elementary, middle, high school) may require mental health interventions when there is a child/youth victim of violence. Children and adolescents in these communities may be familiar with the victim or the victim's family and may benefit from grief counseling. Mental health counselors might also address the needs of aggressive, antisocial youth, relieving guidance counselors and administrators of some of this burden. Finally, middle school teachers might also benefit from having access to mental health counselors as they struggle to preserve their own mental health in a challenging school environment. Although few teachers expressed the need for personal mental health services, researchers have found that use of such services may lessen the likelihood of teachers' burnout and increase their longevity in difficult schools (Austin et al., 2005).

Current findings also reveal a need for middle schools in violent communities to examine and strengthen their school safety and security procedures. Some teachers

voiced a need to employ no-nonsense security guards or police officers as a preventive strategy; others suggested installing metal detectors in their schools. Equally important, teachers expressed a need for better communication from school administrators about school security, safety and emergency plans.

Given teachers' stories about the challenges of working with parents in the current study, there is a clear need to implement strategies for improving parental involvement in their children's education. Findings suggest that parents need guidance from teachers, counselors, or other school personnel on how to provide family support for student learning, such as establishing family routines, setting curfews, encouraging homework, communicating with teachers, participating in school events, and related strategies. Parents may also need assistance in advocating for their children's special needs. Current findings suggest the need for innovative approaches to improve parent involvement in school activities, such as those involving radio deejays or local celebrities. A full-time parent educator at the middle school level could develop such interventions and foster positive parent-teacher-child relations. However, after listening to the frustrations teachers voiced about parents, skilled counselors/mediators may need to tackle this problem before teacher-parent communication can be improved.

Policy

This study also has important implications for policymakers at the school, community, county, state, and national levels. At the school level, teachers noted the importance of establishing and communicating clear policies for responding to the violent and threatening behavior of students. All schools should have emergency plans for dealing with a crisis, such as a gang altercation or a student bringing a weapon to school.

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Findings furtherindicate the importance of administrators enforcing the consequences of violence-related policies, such as suspensions, expulsions, or reassignment to alternative schools. Finally, findings reveal that county policymakers should make more resources available to schools in violent communities to fund peer mediation programs, teacher training in behavior management, mental health counselors, parent educators, and sufficient safety/security measures.

At the community level, the current study underscores the need for policymakers to improve the conditions in the violent neighborhoods in which these schools are located. First, there is a need to develop and implement policies that would create recreational centers, parks, and other social centers for youth in poor, violent communities. Facilities such as movie theaters, bowling alleys and other recreational outlets would offer early adolescents safe and healthy alternatives to the streets.

Policymakers should also consider funding faith-based initiatives that support youth programs and capitalize on the traditional strengths of Black churches in African American communities. Research indicates that in the face of reduced federal funding to support youth initiatives, the Black church has the potential to respond to the needs of African American youth with educational, vocational, and professional opportunities (Rubin, Billingsley, & Caldwell, 1994). Policymakers should fund programs that empower youth, introduce them to constructive educational and career options, and build on their cultural strengths.

Finally, state and national policymakers should allocate funds to support youth and families in violent communities. The parents of youth in this study needed job training, GED and college preparatory courses, career/vocational training, and drug and

alcohol rehabilitation programs. Moreover, tax dollars should be used to support positive opportunities for high risk youth, including after-school and recreational programs. Funds should also be committed to improving law enforcement and neighborhood safety. Provision of these crucial elements of a safe, cohesive community will greatly increase teachers' effectiveness in promoting the resilience of early adolescent youth.

Conclusion

The current study investigating the challenges, strategies, and needs of middle school teachers in violent communities is unique within the community violence literature in a number of ways. First, the study is one of the first to investigate the protective role of middle school teachers with whom early adolescents spend a significant portion of their waking hours. Second, this study focuses on the teaching of low-income, African American youth, a group that is overrepresented in violent communities. Third, this study uses qualitative methodology, allowing the data to emerge through the voices of teachers themselves.

The current study is an important first step in identifying how middle school teachers enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes for early adolescent youth in stressful communities. All of the 20 teachers interviewed demonstrated a clear capacity for resilience under challenging conditions, working to provide adolescents with guidance and structure while preserving their own mental health. These findings reveal that these teachers need strong school leadership, involved parents, and supportive communities. They would further benefit from innovative, culturally-sensitive interventions that provide peer mediation, violence prevention training, mental health counseling, improved security, parent education, and additional community programs for

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youth. In order to most effectively guide and support early adolescents living with violence, teachers need resources that are missing in the current environment.

In my analysis, a sensitizing concept emerged which I named "It's worth it" to document the stories that teachers told about why they come back year after year. Ms. Farmer from Grandview recalled a conversation with her class, "You might not have learned everything you were supposed to that was in the book, but you learned something." And everybody was like, "Yeah, I did, I did, I did," so it's a good thing. "That's what keeps me coming back every year." Teachers play an important role in supporting early adolescents in communities affected by violence. They recognize that they do have a significant influence on the lives of at risk youth.

Without attending to the voices of our teachers, we cannot fully understand how they facilitate positive youth development and reduce the impact of violence related stressors. Despite their work in extremely taxing school environments, middle school teachers in this study frequently succeeded in guiding, supporting, and educating their early adolescent students. My dissertation research enabled teachers to share stories about their own challenges, strategies, and support needs as they work to prevent and ameliorate the negative effects of violence, and to foster the resilience of middle school youth.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter to Principals with Proposal Summary

<Date>, 2005

Dear *<principal name>*,

The purpose of this letter is to introduce myself and to ask you if it might be possible to collect research data within your school. I am presently a Ph.D. student in the Department of Family Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am very interested in factors that might help to protect early adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14 from some of the negative effects associated with community violence.

This is a field research project in which I will meet with and interview teachers about their experiences with early adolescents and community violence. All individuals and schools involved in this study will remain anonymous. Pseudonyms will be given to schools and individual participants. I assure you that I will respect your needs as a principal to minimize politically sensitive issues. Consequently, the complete research will only be shared with my dissertation committee and published in professional journals where I will maintain the anonymity of participants/schools. Before beginning the study, I will gain approval from the University's committee which insures the ethical treatment of participants and sharing of results.

With your permission, I would like to approach teachers in *<school name>*. Enclosed you will find a summary of the research proposal. Briefly, the focus of the study is to provide teachers with an opportunity to share their views about teaching children who may encounter community violence. Teachers will be asked about their challenges, the strategies they use to foster early adolescent resiliency, and the supports they need to most effectively protect early adolescents from negative effects of violence. *<school name>* was chosen based on information provided by the Prince George's County Police about communities experiencing violent activity.

As a way to reciprocate your generosity for this opportunity, I would be happy to provide a one-hour workshop for teachers to share information about the strategies found to be most useful to foster early adolescent resiliency in communities affected by violence. I will also provide the school with a summary of my research findings. As a thank you to teachers who participate in the study, I would like to provide a gift certificate to a retail or grocery store such as Target or Giant. I would enjoy any opportunity to discuss this project with you. I will contact you during the month of March to arrange a meeting with you at your convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, you may reach me by phone at 301-405-4015 or by email at Lisfostmaring@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Fost Maring, Ed.M., Doctoral Candidate
Department of Family Studies

FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENTS EXPOSED TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS IN PREDOMINANTLY AFRICAN AMERICAN URBAN COMMUNITIES

Proposal Summary

According to Healthy People 2010, community violence, especially in urban areas, continues to be a threat to the health and well-being of our nation's young people. The National Center for Children Exposed to Violence reveals that more than 33% of American children and adolescents report being the direct victim of violence and over 75% report having been exposed to community violence. Research demonstrates that community violence exposure places early adolescents at risk for negative developmental consequences such as poor school achievement, aggression, anxiety, and self-destructive behaviors.

Families and schools have the potential to be a major protective factor for children and youth. Over the past decade, there has been an increase in research on the competence-building strategies that mothers use to ensure the safety of their children in violent neighborhoods. A small number of studies have also examined strategies that fathers use to protect their children from the adverse effects of violence exposure. Yet very little research examines the role that teachers play in the lives of children and youth exposed to violence in their neighborhoods and communities.

The proposed research study explores the challenges faced by teachers in middle schools located in communities with high levels of reported violence, the strategies teachers use to help early adolescents cope with violence-related stress, and the supports that would help teachers more effectively address the needs of students who encounter community violence. Underlying the proposed research is an ecological/risk and resilience framework. One key assumption of this research is that teachers can provide important information about how to increase students' safety and increase understanding of protective factors that foster early adolescent achievement and promote positive relationships with peers and family members among early adolescents exposed to community violence.

To fully understand the experiences of middle school teachers in communities with reported violence, 20 teachers in three schools will be approached for individual interviews. The primary method of data collection will be in-depth individual interviews. Adopting a qualitative approach, the overall goal of this study is to identify ways that teachers and schools can more effectively protect early adolescents from the potential negative effects of community violence exposure.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Elisabeth Fost Maring, Ed.M., Doctoral Candidate, Department of Family Studies,1204 Marie Mount Hall, University of Maryland, College Park,20742, phone: 301-405-4015, email: Lisfostmaring@yahoo.com.

Appendix B: Letter to Teachers

<Date>, 2005

Dear *<Name of School>* Middle School Teachers,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting. I am a graduate student in the Department of Family Studies at University of Maryland, College Park. I am very interested in factors that might help to protect early adolescents ages 10-14 from some of the negative effects associated with community violence.

Briefly, the focus of the study is to provide teachers with an opportunity to share your views about teaching children who may encounter community violence including your challenges, the strategies you use to foster youth resiliency, and the supports you need to most effectively protect youth from negative effects of violence.

The voluntary and anonymous interview will take 1-1 ½ hours. I will schedule interested teachers to meet for the interview at a time that does not conflict with your teaching schedule. To thank participating teachers, I will be providing a $25 gift certificate to a choice of retail or grocery stores.

I know that you have important information to share and appreciate your help with this study. If you are interested, please send me an email at the address below.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Fost Maring, Ed.M., Doctoral Candidate
Department of Family Studies

RESEARCH STUDY INTEREST
Send an email with the following information to Lisfostmaring@yahoo.com

Name of teacher _____

Availability
1. Are you available between 8:30 and 4:30 on *<list of dates>*?   Yes   No

2. If we are not able to schedule an appointment before the end of the school year, are you available during the summer at a location convenient for you? (Note all that apply)
June   July   August

How may I reach you to schedule an appointment?

Phone _____   Email _____
If you have any questions, you may reach me by phone at 301-405-4015 or by email at
Lisfostmaring@yahoo.com.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Fostering Resilience Among Early Adolescents Exposed to Community Violence:
Challenges, Strategies, and Support Needs of Middle School Teachers in Predominantly
African American Urban Communities

Time of interview: _____ Date: _____ Interviewer: _____
Interviewee: _____ Place: _____

Research for Dissertation by: Elisabeth Fost Maring, Ed.M., Doctoral Candidate

Brief Description of Project: Children and adolescents spend much of their waking
life at school during important years of their development. As a result, teachers are
like parents in that they have the potential to play a vital role in improving the
everyday lives of young adolescents. However, there is very little research telling us
how teachers help their students deal with the problem of community violence. Little
is known about how exposure to community violence influences teachers' ability to
effectively teach, advise, and mentor adolescents. The goal of this study is to hear
your voices and your suggestions for dealing with this issue of community violence.
We want to know about your challenges, the strategies you use to help youth, and the
supports you need to more effectively protect your students from negative effects of
community violence.

Description of an interview guide: This qualitative study uses an interview guide
based on three themes: Challenges, Strategies, and Support Needs. The questions
should help lead you to the issues of interest, but your responses may lead me to ask
other questions not on the guide.

Research Questions for the Study:
Research Question 1: What are the challenges faced by teachers who work in schools
that are located in violent communities?

Research Question 2: What strategies are teachers using to help protect youth from
violence-related risks in their schools and communities?

Research Question 3: What supports would help teachers be more effective in
helping youth deal with some of the negative outcomes associated with violence
exposure?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

GENDER (Circle one)
Male   Female

AGE
What year were you born? _____

RACIAL/CULTURAL GROUP
What do you consider to be your cultural or ethnic background? (Circle one)
Black   Hispanic   White   Asian   Other (specify) _____

EDUCATION
What is the highest degree you have earned? _____

DO YOU LIVE IN THIS COMMUNITY? (Circle one)
Yes   No

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU TAUGHT IN THIS SCHOOL?
_____

WHAT GRADE(S) DO YOU TEACH?
_____

WHAT SUBJECT(S) DO YOU TEACH?
_____

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: CHALLENGES

1) I want to first ask about your experience as a teacher in this community. Can you tell me a little about how you came to work at this school and how long you have been here?
    PROBE
    - Why did you choose to work in this school?

2) What are the challenges for families whose children attend this school?
    PROBES
    - Talk about how parents cope with stressors in the community

3) Tell me about the neighborhood around the school.
    PROBES
    - What is the area like where the students in the school live and hang out?
    - Do you feel the neighborhood is safe? How does it feel safe or unsafe?
    - Are there things you've experienced related to violence in the community?
    - Would you consider this to be a violent community?
    - Can you give me examples based on personal experience?
    - How have these things affected your teaching?

4) How has general neighborhood violence affected students in your classroom? Describe what you have experienced.
    PROBES
    - Acting out or withdrawal
    - Violent events discussed openly or appearing in art, music, drama
    - Students who have **observed/witnessed** a violent event?
    - Students who have been the **victim** of violent events?
    - Do you find that students who have observed or been victimized by violence have more extreme reactions to stressful events than other students?

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: STRATEGIES

1) Talk about ways that you respond to general violence in the community. Are there things you regularly do in the classroom to prepare students to deal with violence?
    PROBES
    - Try to help them be hopeful for the future; focus on positive
    - Talk to them about walking home in groups or being out late at night
    - Talk about safe places to go for help
    - Warn against using guns

2) What kinds of things do you do to try to keep students in your classroom safe from violence?
    PROBES
    - Keep youth in the classroom because of the threat of violence
    - Monitor the halls looking for non-students

- Avoided a lesson, activity or reading because of violent content

3) Can you tell me about any experiences where the threat of violence was immediate?
   PROBES
   - Gunshots heard in the neighborhood
   - Gang-related activity near the school

4) A) How do you handle a student who consistently acts aggressively or bullies other students in your classroom?
   B) Have you seen a student upset or stressed about an incident of violence such as a fight, shooting, or gang crime?
   PROBES
   - How do you help students in these situations?
   - Differences in the way you and the student's families respond?

5) How does the school handle violence?
   PROBES
   - In-service training programs through the school to train you
   - Other educational, mental health, or community programs that address violence
   - Can you describe these programs and approximately when you attended them?

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: SUPPORTS NEEDED
1) When you are upset about a violent event on the school grounds or in the school's neighborhood, what do you do?

2) What resources are available to help students deal with community violence?
   PROBES
   - Mental health consultants
   - Peer mediation or other antiviolence electives
   - Who provides you with these resources
     o School
     o County
     o Other teachers
   - What school resources are lacking
     o Training programs
     o Security guards
     o Posted emergency plans

3) Let's move away from your classroom and talk about the community. Who are the individuals who work to improve safety in this school community? How do they do it?

  PROBES
  - Church leaders, business people, neighborhood watch, police
  - Do you have any contact with the police?
  - How effective do you consider the police to be?

4) You've just told me so much about your experiences teaching in this community and I have just a few more questions. How do you think **you** could better support families to help their children cope with neighborhood violence?

5) Let's say we could look in a crystal ball to a day in the future and find this neighborhood safe for its students, families, and school staff. What do you think it would really take to make this happen?

Appendix D: Codebook

Number	Code Label	Description
1	TEACHING	Teacher challenges, strategies & support needs
1 1	Challenges	Challenges faced by teachers working in violent communities
1 1 1	Time	Not enough time to contact parents, provide adequate support
1 1 2	Parents	Lack of involvement, disrespect from parent figures
1 1 3	Violence	Need to deal with violence-related issues that affect the classroom and teachers'/students ability to cope
1 2	Strategies	Helping to protect youth from violence-related risk in school/community
1 2 1	Classroom prep	Prepare students for violence-related risk through classroom activities
1 2 2	Warn about guns	Warn students about the danger of guns
1 2 3	Walk in groups	Advise students to walk home in groups
1 2 4	Keep in class	Keep students in class b/c of violence-related risk outside class
1 2 5	Monitor halls	Monitor halls for nonstudents
1 2 6	Avoid lesson	Avoid lesson because content may upset students
1 2 7	Give Advice/Relate to students	Advice & anecdotes, older teachers vs. younger teachers explanations of relating
1 2 8	Listen to children	Give students a chance to talk
1 2 9	Role Models	Role models for students and parents
1 2 10	Mediation	Teacher mediates conflicts or sends to counselor
1 2 11	Involving families	Strategies teachers use directly with families
1 2 12	For kids	Programs teachers use directly with kids, assemblies, training progs, referrals outside school
1 2 13	Counseling	Refer student to counseling
1 3	Support needs	To help teachers feel more effective in dealing with violence
1 3 1	Vent	Talk with colleagues, friends or family members
1 3 2	Church/Pray	Religion and prayer
1 3 3	Counseling	Talk with school counselor or individual therapist
1 3 4	Training	In-service trainings through school
1 3 5	Peer mediation	Peer mediation cut in all schools by the county
1 3 6	Separate	Maintain separation between home and school
2	THIS SCHOOL	1) Why you chose to work here 2) population of students attending

2 1		Close to home	Chose school because it is close to home
2 2		This population	Chose school because I wanted to work with this population of students
2 3		TAG vs. Comp	Talented and Gifted vs. Comprehensive
2 4		Special Ed.	Special Education teachers are in contained classrooms
2 5		PGCPS	Prince George's County Public Schools
2 6		Community	Descriptions of the community, neighborhoods around school
	3	VIOLENCE	Violent activity on school grounds or in community
3 1		Witness	Student responses to witnessing violent events
3 2		Victim	Student responses to being victimized by violence
3 3		Gang	Gang activity in the neighborhood around school
3 4		Gunshots	Gunshots heard in neighborhood around school, guns brought on school property, descriptions of shootings
3 5		Lockdowns	Need to lock down school/classroom because of violence outside
3 6		Defining the violence	Teacher definition of community violence/school violence
3 7		Grieving	Grieving as response to violence
3 8		Numbness	Numbness or seemingly unaffected by violence
3 9		Violent community	General comments about violent community- "yes, it is" or "no, it is not" a violent community
4 6		Drugs	Drug activity in the community
	4	KIDS	Student-related information provided by teachers
4 1		Early adolescence	Developmental stage
4 2		Bullying	Aggressive behavior/bullying
4 3		Withdrawal	Student stressed about an incident of violence and withdrawing from activity
4 4		Beefin'	physically fighting, preparing to fight, arguing
4 5		Jonin'	Making fun of others
4 7		Sex	sexual activity among students/sexual promiscuity
4 8		Going hard	Acting tough, becoming violent
4 9		Behavioral issues	Not doing homework, talking back, disruptive in classroom, disrespectful
	5	PARENTS	
5 1		Cycle	Young & immature, teen parents
5 2		Single	Father absence, different fathers of siblings
5 3		Disrespectful	parent behavior is disrespectful and sets bad example for child

5 4		Violent	Parent acts violently or condones violence
5 5		Respond differently	Parent response differs from teacher response
5 6		Positive parenting	Parent involvement in classroom, PTSA, and other school related events
5 7		Time	Lack of time, busy, working two jobs…
	6	SECURITY	Ensuring school safety-is the school safe or unsafe?
6 1		Police	Police involvement on school property and in community
6 2		Security Guards	Whether security guards are effective or ineffective in maintaining school safety
6 3		Administration	Principal, VPs, other school personnel
6 4		PGCPS	Prince George's County Public Schools
6 5		school safety	Does the school feel safe or unsafe?
	7	COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	Individuals/groups in the community who work to improve safety
7 1		Churches	churches involvement in school community
7 2		Businesses	Businesses involved in school community
7 3		Policymakers	Government
7 4		Volunteers	Volunteer involvement in school community
7 5		Community leaders	Community leaders involved in school community

FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENTS EXPOSED TO
COMMUNITY VIOLENCE: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND SUPPORT NEEDS
OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS IN PREDOMINANTLY AFRICAN AMERICAN
URBAN COMMUNITIES

Introduction
Hi, I am a graduate student from the Department of Family Studies at the University of
Maryland and I am conducting a study of teachers' strategies for working with youth in
schools where violence affects the community. The purpose of the study is to learn more
about your challenges, the strategies you use to help protect youth from the negative
effects of community violence, and the support that you need to feel more effective in
this job. I plan to use the information to identify needed improvements in support for
students and teachers, and to recommend educational policies and training programs
addressing these needs. Teachers who participate in the study will receive a $25 gift
certificate to a retail or grocery store such as Target or Giant for their time and effort.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY, PLEASE READ AND
SIGN THE INFORMED CONSENT FORM.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

Elisabeth Fost Maring, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Family Studies
1204 Marie Mount Hall
University of Maryland
301-405-4015
Lisfostmaring@yahoo.com

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title	FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENTS EXPOSED TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE: TEACHERS' CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND SUPPORT NEEDS
Why is this research being done?	This is a research project being conducted by student investigator, Elisabeth Fost Maring at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research because you are a teacher in an area where community violence is an issue. The purpose of this research is to learn more about the challenges you face in your job, the strategies you use to help protect your students from the negative effects of community violence, and the support that you need to do your job most effectively. The information will be used to identify needed improvements in support for students and teachers and to make recommendations to address these needs.
What will I be asked to do?	The procedures involve a 1-1 ½ hour interview. During this interview, you will be asked about your experiences as a teacher in an area where community violence is an issue. The interview will take place in a convenient location for you after the school day is complete. You will receive a $25 gift certificate for your participation in the study. You will also receive a summary of study findings and recommendations after the project is completed.
What about confidentiality?	We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, your name will not be identified at any time. Instead, the information will be identified using a pseudonym for your name and the name of the school in which you work. An identification key that links your real information to the pseudonym will only be available to the student investigator. This information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. Your principal will not be informed by the researcher as to whether or not you consented to participate in this study. This research project involves making an audiotape of the interview for coding purposes. The audiotape will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office and will be destroyed within one month of completion of the study. _____ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study. _____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental agencies if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
What are the risks of this research?	There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the challenges, strategies and support needs of middle school teachers in communities affected by violence. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the programs or policies that could protect early adolescents from the effects of violence exposure.

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Project Title	FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENTS EXPOSED TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE: TEACHERS' CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND SUPPORT NEEDS
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.
What if I have questions?	This research is being conducted by student investigator, Elisabeth Fost Maring in the Department of Family Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Elisabeth Fost Maring, 1216 Marie Mount Hall, 301-405-4015, Lisfostmaring@yahoo.com or her faculty advisor, Dr. Sally Koblinsky, 1204 Marie Mount Hall, 301-405-4009, koblinsk@umd.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742; 301-405-4212; irb@deans.umd.edu. This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.
Print your name:	
Signature:	
Date:	

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