**Rural School Counselors' Perceptions of Children and Adolescents
Living in Poverty: A Phenomenological Study**

by

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored perceptions of rural school counselors toward children and adolescents living in poverty. Eight rural school counselors, employed at high poverty schools, completed on-line demographic surveys and participated in individual semi-structured phone interviews. Three themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study. Emergent themes included parental involvement, lack of resources, and recommendations. Discussion of research findings are provided which makes connections to professional literature related to emergent themes. Recommendations for training and professional development for school counselors based on the American School Counselor Association National Model (2012) are made for preparation of school counselors to work with children and adolescents living in poverty.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Poverty is an issue which affects many Americans. Currently more than 45 million

individuals, or 14.5 percent of the population of the United States live below the poverty

line (Gongloff, 2014). Even though the percentage of Americans living in poverty has

fallen from15 percent since 2012, the poverty level is still higher than it was at the

beginning of the recession in 2008 (Gongloff, 2014). Poverty is a persistent issue facing

many Americans and the current economic climate is only offering modest hope for

better opportunities. Despite the fact unemployment has held steady at 5 percent, wage

gains for employees have not been significant. In December 2015, the average hourly

wage dropped by a penny to $25.24 (Harlan, 2016). Only 47.7 percent of adults in the

United States are working full time and even though the rate of unemployment has fallen,

many of the new jobs available are part-time which means diminished benefits, lower

pay, and lack of job security (Zuckerman, 2014).

The number of individuals who have been unemployed for more than six months is

approximately three million which is above the historical average (Zuckerman,

2014). According to the Urban League, poverty is higher among the

unemployed (Nichols, & Callan, 2011). Many children in the United States living in

poverty are in homes where parents are struggling to find employment. The number of

children with parents who have been unemployed at least six months has tripled since the

beginning of the recession in 2007 (Mitchell, 2014). According to the Kids Count Data

Book (2015), without at least one parent employed in a full-time job, children have an

increased chance of experiencing poverty. However, many parents lack the skills and

education to secure good, fulltime employment and instead have to seek temporary or part-time work that does not provide stable or sufficient income. The statistics indicate many Americans are faced with poverty and unemployment or underemployment. Poverty due to unemployment or underemployment creates many challenges for individuals in this country. Without basic resources, many families are struggling. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (2014), there is not a state in the United States where a minimum wage worker can afford a two bedroom apartment at fair market value when working 40 hours a week. Challenges such as housing and meeting basic needs become issues for those living in poverty.

Defining Poverty

There is not an agreed upon definition of poverty offered to create a comprehensive picture of this complex issue. The U.S. government uses the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy to define poverty. This definition is based on a set of money income thresholds varied by family composition and size to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is lower than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered to live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The official poverty thresholds are not varied geographically, but rather are updated to reflect inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition uses money income prior to taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as Medicaid, public housing, and food stamps),   (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This definition offers a standard for measuring family poverty income.   When addressing poverty in the school setting, free and reduced lunch eligibility is often used as data to identify students potentially living in poverty. Free lunch eligibility is defined as students

from households with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty income threshold.

Reduced lunch eligibility is defined as students from households with an income between

130 percent and up to 185 percent of the poverty threshold (National Center

for Educational Statistics, 2015). These free and reduced lunch definitions are often used

when identifying students with low socio-economic status when looking

at standardized assessment data and school attendance.

The aforementioned definitions provide an economic snapshot of what poverty looks

like but it does not provide a complete view of what living in poverty

encompasses. The definition used by Jenson (2009) provides a descriptive of what

poverty looks like. Jenson describes poverty as a debilitating and chronic condition that

results from multiple synergistic risk factors, and impacts the body, mind and soul

(2009).

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (2015), poverty is defined

as having income which is below a federally determined threshold. These poverty

thresholds were developed during the 1960's and are annually adjusted to reflect

inflation. The thresholds represent the Federal Government's estimate of the point below

which a family of a given size has total income that is not sufficient to meet basic needs.

Income amounts necessary to meet basic needs are set by the Office of Management and

Budget (OMB). The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides examples of what the

poverty line would be for different family configurations. For example, a family of

five with two adults and three children would be at the poverty line at $28,252 annually.

These poverty thresholds are set for families based on size and composition. Those who

work with the homeless, hungry, under-paid and uninsured know this is an insufficient

measure of poverty (Abramsky, 2013). Individuals below these thresholds are faced with economic challenges in meeting their basic needs to live.

Poverty is particularly pervasive for certain populations and regions. The groups most impacted by poverty are women, where 15.8% live in poverty compared to 13.1% of men, Blacks and Hispanics, with 27% of Blacks and 23% of Hispanics living at or below the poverty line, and children with 19.9% living in poverty, and Southerners and Westerners who have the highest regional poverty rates (Cook, 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the South had the largest proportion of people living in poverty than any other region at 27.4% (Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013.)

Poverty and Food Insecurity

One of the critical elements of defining poverty, especially when considering children and adolescents is the concept of food insecurity. According to the No Kid Hungry, Share Our Strength Study (2013), in the United States there are 48.8 million individuals living in food insecure households. These households include 16.2 million children. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), (2015), food insecurity is defined by not having consistent access to adequate food. According to Wight, Thapi, and Briggs (2010) the estimates of food insecurity are based on eighteen questions in the Food Security Supplement of the Current Population Survey. The USDA identifies households as food insecure when there are affirmative responses to a minimum of three of the eighteen questions.

According to the Children's Health Watch Research Brief (2016) the following findings have been found in relation to childhood food insecurity: 1. Food insecurity harms the health and development of young children, 2. Due to increased risk for

developmental delays, children who are food insecure have greater difficulty acquiring

academic and social skills necessary for successful transition to pre-school or

kindergarten, 3. Food insecurity predicts poor performance in a student's first years in

school which in turn has implications for future academic success, and 4. The Special

Supplemental Nutritional Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC),

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and The Child and Adult Care Food

Program (CACFP) are federal programs that can assist young children to overcome the

negative effects of food insecurity on school readiness by supporting their health and

development (Hickson, Ettinger, deCuba, Donofrio, & Cook, 2011). Educator

understanding of the impact of food insecurity and its long-term effects on academic

performance is essential to meeting the needs of this specific population. Informed school

counselors can serve as social advocates and make families aware of resources which

serve to remove barriers to food security. School counselors' views of the causes of food

insecurity could impact how they perceive their role in addressing student food

insecurity. School counselors who view student food insecurity as being the result of

barriers to resources may be more involved in social justice advocacy on behalf of

students than counselors who view access to food being an issue that is the family's

responsibility to address. If school counselors view the issue of food security as the

parents' responsibility, they may also view not meeting this basic need as a failure on the

part of the parents.

Children and Adolescents Living in Poverty

Poverty is an issue that impacts a significant number of children and adolescents in the

United States. Current statistics related to this topic provide insight into what the face of

poverty looks like across our nation. Children comprise 24% of the population, but make up 34% of all the people living in poverty. One in five children come from poor families. Nineteen percent of adolescents aged 12 to 17 also come

from poor families (Addy, Englehardt, & Skinner, 2013). These numbers have the potential to be even more significant in areas of high poverty concentration. Students living in poverty are also more likely to attend schools offering poorer quality instruction and teachers with less experience (Ametea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Thus, students who are already potentially in need of extra support have less positive resources available to them. Most school counselors who work in the K-12 setting will work with students who live in poverty. It is essential that school counselors and counselors-in-training understand the broad reach of poverty as well as the potential challenges and strengths of students living in poverty. Current statistics show there are many children and adolescents facing the effects of poverty (Ratcliffe, & McKernon, 2010).

Poverty among children and adolescents can have many significant educational, personal and developmental implications. Thus the current rates of poverty among children and adolescents are very concerning. According to the Children's Defense Fund, U.S. Census data indicates one in three of those who live in poverty is a child (Elderman, 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2014) children in poverty are defined as those below the age of 18 who live in families with annual incomes below $23,624. Approximately three million more U.S. children live in poverty than did at the beginning of the recession, a rise from 18% in 2008 to 22% percent in 2014. Sixty-three percent of children become adults without living in poverty but 10% of children spend at least half of their childhoods in poverty.

Black children are two and a half times more likely than white children to live in poverty and seven times more likely to persistently be poor (Ratcliffe, & McKeran, 2010). The percentage of adolescents living in low income homes has increased from 35% in 2007 to 41% in 2013 (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015). Child and adolescent poverty is a persistent and significant issue. Understanding the potential outcomes and barriers facing children and adolescents in poverty is key to meeting their needs. Even though the poverty rate has dropped overall, the number of children living in poverty has increased.

More than half of the ten states with the lowest level of overall child well-being are Southern states (Strugis, 2013). The top ten states associated with low levels of child well-being are ranked in ascending order: New Mexico, Mississippi, Arizona, Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Texas, and California (Strugis, 2013). Poverty areas are locations where more than 20% of the population is below the federal poverty line. Nearly one third of Southerners live in poverty areas. Most Southern states lag behind the rest of the county in positives such as economic mobility, wages, and access to health care (Gongloff, 2014). People living in the South are more likely to have chronic illnesses and poor health outcomes (Peralta, 2014). According to the Rural Poverty and Welling-Being Brief from the United States Department of Agriculture (2015) the American Community Survey identified 43 counties in their study that had child poverty rates at 50% or higher and 39 of those counties are clustered in the south. Southern states are faced with many challenges related to child and adolescent well-being. Children and adolescents living in rural, high poverty areas are particularly vulnerable.

Poverty and Education

The impact of poverty on children and adolescents is linked to the financial issues facing schools in high poverty areas. There are indications in the last decade the status of funding to public education has had a significantly detrimental effect on the schools in these high needs areas. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2014), at least 35 states are allocated less money per student than before the recession. Fourteen of these states cut spending per pupil by over ten percent. The two states initiating the deepest cuts were Oklahoma and Alabama who both reduced funding by more than 20% (Leachman & Mai, 2014). Students attending school who come from low income homes are on the rise. According to the Southern Education Foundation (2015) low income students make up the majority of children sitting in classrooms across the nation. Fifty-one percent of school aged children live in poverty. The report indicated the majority of low income students live in the southern and western United States. Mississippi has the highest rate of low income students with three out of four students attending public school living in poverty (Southern Education Foundation, 2015). A report from the National Center of Educational Statistics indicates a majority of school aged children in twenty-one states live in poverty. Nearly two-thirds of these states are in the South (Rich, 2015).

What is most concerning is the impact on students at these high needs, high poverty schools. The Center for Law and Social Policy (2015) reported data based on an analysis of educational data from high schools in the 100 largest U.S. School districts and highlighted some of the barriers to postsecondary success for low income students. The study found that high poverty high schools often had less qualified and less experienced teachers, and students often had less access to college prep courses. The study also found

that more high poverty schools did not have counselors than low poverty schools. Data indicated that 3% of students attending high poverty schools did not have a school counselor, compared to 1-2% of students at low poverty schools. In many rural and low income schools in particular it is not uncommon for the student to school counselor ratios to be one to one thousand to one or higher which is four times the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommended level of two hundred and fifty to one, (Rothman, 2010).

High rates of poverty within communities also impacts the likelihood of students dropping out of school. In communities with high poverty levels there are significant levels of unemployment, poor health, substance use, family instability, welfare dependency, and crime. Disadvantaged neighborhoods influence the development of children and adolescents due to the lack of resources such as playgrounds, parks, after-school programs, and negative peer influences (Rumberger, 2013). Issues such as transportation, family care, and health care, often lead to high tardy and absenteeism rates for students with low income putting them at risk academically (Jenson, 2009). Absenteeism is the single factor most closely correlated with student dropout rates. (Jenson, 2009).

Low income neighborhoods are more likely to have lower quality municipal, social and local services (Jenson, 2009). Children living in high poverty neighborhoods do not have the same access to services and community support as their more affluent peers and these deficits have the potential to impact their performance at school and their long-term success.

Approximately 5 to 7.5 million students miss almost a month of school in the United States each school year (Sparks, 2010). Over the course of time this adds up to over a year of missed school by the time of graduation. Statistics show that absenteeism rates in kindergarten can often rival what is seen at the high school level (Sparks, 2010). An average of one in ten students in grades kindergarten through 12th grade nation-wide are chronically absent from school which is defined as being absent more than 10% of the school year (Sparks, 2010). According to Child Trends (2015) chronic absenteeism for any reason is considered an early warning sign for being at risk for school retention or dropping out of school. Poor attendance can serve as a barrier to reading proficiency by the end of third grade, which has been shown to negatively impact chances of graduating from high school on time (Williams, 2015). The data reflects the importance of all students attending school regularly. However, students living in poverty may have more to lose than peers if they are frequently absent from school.

Poverty and Attendance

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2011) students attending school where over 50% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch are more likely to be reported missing three or more days of school. Students from poor families are four times more likely than their peers to be chronically absent from school (Williams, 2015). Chronic absenteeism creates achievement gaps in elementary, middle, and high school so students living in poverty stand to benefit from being in school (Balfanz, & Barnes, 2012). Due to issues of healthcare, transportation, and family care, high absenteeism and tardy rates are frequent issues for poor students. Unfortunately the factor most closely correlated with dropout rates is absenteeism (Jenson, 2009). School

absenteeism is a barrier which has the potential to stand in the way of student success. However, one positive is students living in rural areas are not as likely to miss school as their urban counterparts (NCCP, 2011)

School counselors working with students living in poverty are faced with the challenge of improving student attendance rates. Their attitudes toward and knowledge of the needs of students living in poverty could potentially effect student outcomes.

<p align="center">**Attitudes and Beliefs about Poverty and Education**</p>

Research has indicated a direct connection between poverty and student academic achievement. According to Licour and Tissington (2011) the U.S. Department of Education determined through research that both school and student poverty impacted student achievement. This government study from 2001 conducted with 3rd -7th grade students from 71 schools identified as high poverty had the following findings related to the effects of poverty on student achievement: students scored below norms in all years and grades tested; and students who lived in poverty scored significantly worse but slightly closed the achievement gap over time. This study indicates there is much work to be done by those employed in schools to assist students in poverty to have the opportunity for academic success.

Dell'Angelo (2016) conducted a survey with teachers in a large, urban Northeastern school district to examine how a teacher's sense of efficacy can impact the detrimental effects of poverty on student achievement. One thousand nineteen teachers were surveyed about how they perceive obstacles to student learning. The study indicated teacher perceptions of student obstacles to learning are strong predictors of student performance regardless of student poverty level. These attitudes or beliefs can become an impediment

<p align="center">11</p>

to students' success. The article also offered recommendations of how teachers can achieve a greater sense of agency in the classroom.

Dell'Angelo (2016) asserted that poverty is often predictive of student achievement at under-performing schools. However, she concluded that it is not acceptable to determine that educators have no power when serving students with low socioeconomic status. The research presented in this article suggests that teachers have the power to mediate the impact of poverty by refocusing their views related to obstacles to student learning. She suggested that teachers need support in exploring the ways they can affect change for students living in poverty.

There is research that supports the assumption that student-teacher dynamics may impact academic and personal outcomes for students, including those living in poverty. Specifically, there is research suggesting that teachers may hold negative attitudes or beliefs towards students living in poverty. These attitudes have the potential of impacting the educational environment and students' outcomes. Cole and Grothaus (2014) conducted a phenomenological study related to the perceptions of urban school counselors of low income families in their school. All participants in the study reported recognizing a need for more reflection and self-awareness in regard to their work with low-income families. They also reported negative perceptions related to low-income family characteristics, their environments and/or their children's academic success and growth. The majority of participants negatively described the environmental conditions of low-income families and perceived families as lacking in parenting skills. The study also revealed over half of participants had perceptions that family members of students were unmotivated. The authors cited these findings and concerns about the influence of

these beliefs on the academic environment as a need for more research exploring these issues and attitudes among educational professionals in K-12 schools. Thus, there is a need for more research related to the attitudes of those who serve students living in poverty.

Gorski (2012) asserted that even some of the research on poverty and education have perpetuated myths and stereotypes about children and adolescents living in poverty. He primarily focused on examining how the work of Ruby Payne perpetuates stereotypes related to poor students and their families, even though her goal is to prepare teachers to work with these students. The myths identified from her work include: 1. Poor people do not value education,2. the poor are lazy, 3. the poor are substance abusers, and 4. the poor are linguistically different. If these attitudes are held by educators, they could impact the delivery of services provided to students who live in poverty. Gorski (2013) suggested negative stereotypes may misguide educators into expressing low expectations for poor students and their families or blaming them for the very way in which the barriers they face stand in the way of their abilities to engage with schools as others might engage with schools. In the current proposed study, the author will further examine specific questions related to school counselor perceptions of students living in rural poverty to add to the body of knowledge related to this topic.

Grimes, Haskins and Paisley (2013) conducted a phenomenological study which explored the experiences of rural school counselors as social justice advocates. Several significant themes presented in the results which consisted of stability of place, community promise, mutual reliance, and personal and professional integration. The research participants found both positives and negatives related to the stability of their

place. They discussed the benefit of knowing families in rural areas and how these relationships made working with families easier but also described negatives of generational reputations in a small rural community.

The theme of community promise also emerged in this study. The participants identified a wide range of indicators of success in their rural community. One of the major indicators of community promise was lessened separation between groups in their communities. They gave the example of how sports brought the community together and community participation broke down barriers between groups. Another benefit of community promise is the pride and investment rural community members have in their schools. The theme of mutual reliance also emerged as a significant theme. The research participants discussed how school needs were met through relationships between the community and schools. Some of the significant relationships forged to meet student needs were with faith based organizations interested in helping local schools, and coaches involved in the parks and recreational program in the community who encourage students to do well in school.

The final significant theme is personal and professional integration. For these participants crossing boundaries, understanding the unique make-up of the community, and trading anonymity for connections emerged as essential skills for engaging in social advocacy in the rural setting. The outcomes of this study suggest rural school counselors serving as social justice advocates often benefit from partnering with community organizations to meet student needs.

The authors recommend the following social justice practices for rural school counselors: the organization of community summits, and exposing the socioeconomic struggle faced

by rural areas, and developing community partnerships. The authors of this study recommended additional research related to working with students in rural schools to continue to address the needs of this population.

Other studies have focused on how we can best prepare to work and excel in these environments. Ullucci and Howard (2015) make recommendations for preparing new teachers for working with students living in poverty through the use of anchor questions to increase understanding of the complexity of poverty. These questions include: What are institutional and systemic factors that impact poverty? How are student lives impacted by poverty? What are some of the assets in communities with low income? Do schools provide equal educational opportunities to children living in poverty? And can schools eliminate poverty? The purpose of using these questions is to move teachers-in-training away from the premise that poverty is pathological and to help them realize poverty is a complex issue. The authors encourage the use of these activities to assist teachers-in-training to see that teaching is context specific to the needs of the students served. In this article the authors are critical of the concept of a "culture of poverty" where those in poverty are treated as part of a monolithic group who thinks, speaks and acts in a similar fashion. The authors view this approach as being deficit based. This article challenges the work of Ruby Payne, who is noted for her research related to poverty.

Funding for Schools in Poverty

Despite the statistics related to child and adolescent poverty, federal spending for children has fallen for the first time since the early 1980's. In 2011, federal layouts for children fell from 378 billion in 2010 to 376 billion. Federal spending on education was also five billion dollars lower in 2011 than in 2010 (Isaacs, Toran, Hahn, Fortuny, & Steuerle, 2011). This short fall in revenue leaves many children and adolescents with even less resources to help in overcoming the systemic barriers often associated with poverty. As stated earlier, school counselors in rural, high poverty schools often have high counselor to student ratios and are frequently employed at schools that lack monetary and community resources (Murphy, 2016). Despite these potential challenges, school counselors are trained professionals who are prepared to help all students develop competencies in the areas of personal and social development, academic achievement, and career planning (American School Counselor Association National Model, 2012). Thus, the examination of counselor perceptions of children and adolescents living in poverty is key to helping school counselors improve the quality of services delivered to this student population.

Attitudes toward Education Funding

Despite the ideal that all students have the opportunity to pursue the American dream, there are disparities in education funding in the United States. A student's zip code could make a huge difference in the educational opportunities he or she has available. Public school funding in the U.S. is provided by federal, state and local sources. However, over half of the funding for public education comes from local taxes which creates significant funding differences between impoverished and wealthy communities (Biddle, & Berliner, 2002). In a report from the U.S. Department of Education (2011) data shows more than

40% of schools that receive Title One funding to serve students in poverty spent less state and local funds on teachers and other staff than schools that did not receive Title One funding in the same districts. These findings reflect that high poverty school districts in many parts of the country are not receiving their fair share of funding. In this same report from the U.S. Department of Education (2011) an analysis in the report shows providing poverty impacted schools with comparable spending would cost an amount as minimal as 1% of the average school district's total spending. With such a small amount of spending standing in the way of equitable funding, the reasons for this disparity must be examined.

Biddle and Berliner (2002) addressed three of the commonly used excuses for funding disparities. These excuses include historical experiences, beliefs related to the cause of poverty, and flawed studies. The first excuse is based on historical experiences related to funding of schools. Public schools, when first developed in this country were often funded through voluntary donations and then later local property taxes. This system began to struggle in smaller communities as more people moved to suburban areas. After people moved to other areas, they saw little need due to how schools have traditionally been funded to pay additional taxes to assist in funding schools in impoverished areas left behind in rural towns and city centers.

The second reason cited for resistance to equitably funding schools is several belief systems related to the causes of poverty. These belief systems include individualism, essentialism, and beliefs related to the culture of poverty (Biddle, & Burliner, 2002). The first of these beliefs about poverty is the ideology of individualism. This ideology is based on the premise that success and failure is mainly the result of individual effort

instead of social circumstance. The second belief system related to poverty is essentialism, which is the idea that less privileged groups may inherit certain genetic characteristics which account for any lack of success experienced. The third belief is the idea of the culture of poverty. This belief system suggests those from impoverished communities fail due to "limited linguistic codes" or a deficit of appropriate "social capital" (Biddle, & Burliner, 2002).

The final excuse often used for inequitable funding is use of flawed studies which suggest there is not a connection between school funding and student achievement. The authors refer to the Colman Report when making this assertion. With many rural, high poverty schools facing such funding disparities, school counselors are tasked with doing more with less. Thus, their attitudes toward the barriers facing students could potentially impact the delivery of counseling services.

Attitudes and Beliefs Related to Poverty

Despite the fact poverty affects many children and adolescents in the United States, very little research in the area of psychology has been conducted related to attitudes toward individuals living in poverty (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2000). To be better prepared to serve those who live in poverty, there is a need to understand commonly held attitudes and beliefs toward poverty.

Belief in a Just World

Belief in a Just World theory (BJW) asserts individuals have a psychological need to believe the world is a just place where people get what they deserve (Wilkins, & Winger, 2004). Those with belief in a just world when confronted with instances of suffering may be prone to make the following conclusions (a) the observed suffering is not really

happening, and/or (b) the victim is worthy of blame (Rubin, & Peplau, 1975). In an

effort to build on the work of classical social theorists such as Weber, Marx, and

Durkheim, social scientists have continued to study individual's subjective reactions to

inequality (Hunt, 2000). According Andre and Velasquez (2014), Zick Rubin and Anne

Pepleau conducted surveys to examine characteristics of individuals with high levels of

belief in a just world. In their findings, they found people with a strong belief in a just

world were more authoritarian, conservative, and religious, and were highly likely to

admire political leaders and support existing social institutions. They were also more

likely to hold negative attitudes toward groups that were under-privileged. A belief

system such as BJW has the potential to serve as a barrier to individuals such as

counselors being prepared to provide appropriate services to students living in poverty.

In 2001, in an NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School poll of 2000 Americans 18 years or older,

participants were asked what was the bigger contributor to poverty: people not doing

enough for themselves or circumstances they could not control. The poll showed that

48% believed people were not doing enough to help themselves and 45% believed

poverty was due to circumstances beyond people's control. In the same study 52%

indicated lack of motivation was a major cause of poverty (Lichter, & Crowley, 2002). In

a poll conducted in 1995 by the Wall Street Journal and NBC News, Americans were

found to be twice as likely to hold the belief poverty is the result of individuals not doing

enough to help themselves rather than attributing poverty to external forces. In 2013, a

poll asking the same question used in the above studies, showed there has been a

promising shift in American attitudes toward poverty. In this poll one thousand people

were surveyed and results reflected that people were as likely to blame poverty on

circumstances beyond one's control as they were to believe the poor are not doing

enough to help themselves. Even with this is shift in attitudes over time, there are still a

significant number of people nationally who have beliefs that place blame on those living

in poverty. This has the potential to impact decisions made by policy makers, which can

potentially affect the level of support offered to those living in poverty in this country.

These attitudes may also impact attitudes toward funding schools in high poverty districts

and the attitudes of those who serve students daily in public schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine school counselors'

perceptions of students living in poverty. This will include specific focus on perceptions

in phenomenology as they relate to school counselors in rural school settings. The aim of

this study is to provide a rich, detailed description of the phenomenon of rural school

counselor perceptions of children and adolescents living in poverty. Furthermore, the

study will include consideration of the challenges that school counselors in rural settings

experience when working with students living in poverty.

Significance of Study

The high counselor to student ratios in high poverty schools are at odds with the

increased needs of students living in poverty especially in rural areas where access to

public services are less likely. According to Hartley, Bird, & Dempsey (1999) children in

particular lack in public transportation outside what is provided by school systems in

rural areas. The services offered by the school counselor within the school setting

are often the only mental health option for students. School counselors are needed to help

students navigate the barriers often associated with low income. Students living in

poverty, especially those living in rural, high poverty areas often face limited access to resources. The rural poor are not only impacted by low income, but are also faced with poor public transportation, physical isolation, inadequate schools, limited access to basic public services, and medical care (Litcher, & Johnson, 2007). The school counselor is often the only counseling provider available to students. Not only are school counselors needed in high poverty schools, schools with high poverty concentrations need school counselors who are prepared to meet the needs of students from low income homes.

According to the American School Counselor Association Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (2014), school counselors are committed to helping students remove social/emotional, physical, and career readiness barriers which can stand in the way of student success. Examining the perceptions of school counselors working with rural students living in poverty is a logical first step to increasing understanding of how to better meet student needs. Cole and Grothaus (2014) conducted a phenomenological study related to school counselor perceptions of low income families. They conducted this study with ten school counselors who worked in urban settings. In the current study, the researcher plans to conduct a similar study interviewing counselors working in rural, high poverty schools in the Southern United States. Since there is a paucity of research related to school counselor attitudes toward children and adolescents living in rural poverty, this study is a first step to increasing understanding of lived experiences of counselors serving students in rural, high poverty schools.

Summary

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Poverty affects a significant number of students across the United States. Many of the students living in poverty are in rural areas. There is a paucity of research related to counselor attitudes toward students living in poverty, especially in rural settings. It is essential to begin to explore the perceptions of school counselors working with children and adolescents living in poverty, to increase knowledge about how to better meet the needs of this population.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research was chosen for this research study due to the researcher's desire to explore the lived experiences of rural, school counselors through a theoretical framework that informed the research study problems by addressing the meaning the participants ascribed to a specific social issue. This was accomplished through data collection with a sensitivity to the individuals under study and data analysis that was both inductive and deductive and established themes in the data. This approach was chosen with the intention of providing a written report that included the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, detailed, complex interpretations of the problem being studied, and a contribution to the professional literature (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher chose this method of research because of interest in an in-depth exploration of the research topic rather than focusing on breadth. This was achieved through choosing a small number of research participants with the intent of preserving the individuality of each research participant during analysis rather than collecting data from a large sample (Maxwell, 2013). The inquirer chose this approach to provide rich, thick descriptions of the experiences of rural school counselors who have experienced the particular phenomenon of working with children and adolescents in a high poverty setting (Creswell, 2013).

Rationale for Phenomenological Inquiry

For this study, the researcher chose the qualitative methodology of transcendental phenomenology. Phenomenology describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The research was informed by transcendental phenomenology which focuses on descriptions of the lived experiences of participants and the process of epoch/bracketing where the researcher sets aside her own experiences as much as possible to provide a fresh perspective of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). These procedures as outlined by Moustakas (1994) included the researcher identifying a specific phenomenon for study, bracketing out her own experiences; collecting data from those who have experienced the phenomenon; analyzing data collected through interviews; and reducing collected information into significant quotes or statements. The quotes and statements are further reduced into themes. Then the researcher develops a textural description of what was experienced by the research participants and a structural description of how they experienced the phenomenon. The combination of textural and structural descriptions results in a description of the essence of the experience. The purpose of this approach is to, "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76).

As the researcher, the rationale for choosing the phenomenological approach is a desire to provide a rich, thick description of the lived experiences of rural school counselors who work with children and adolescents living in poverty (Creswell, 2013). These experiences cannot be quantified with numbers but are best presented through a composite of the lived experiences offered through a detailed description of what the

research participants experienced and how they experienced it in their roles as rural school counselors (Creswell, 2013). The use phenomenological qualitative methodology allowed the author to move beyond mere snapshots of "what" and "how many?" to "why and "how" things happen as they do (Miles, & Hubberman, 1994). This was accomplished through interviews with the intent of giving a voice to rural school counselors who work with children and adolescents living in poverty.

Following the interviews, the researcher used epoche (bracketing), which is a term that originates from Husserl's work and is also used by Moustakas (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher attempted to set aside her own experiences and assumptions developed as a rural school counselor and to be open to how the research participants experienced the phenomenon explored in this study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher sought to understand her own biases and perspectives at each step of the research process. The researcher then analyzed data to find significant quotes and statements from transcribed phone interviews and then combined the statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the researcher developed textural descriptions of what participants experienced and structural descriptions of how they experienced the phenomenon. The combination of these descriptions provided the essence of the experiences of those who participated in the study (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

In the study, the researcher sought to answer the central research question, "What are rural school counselors' perceptions of children and adolescents living in poverty?" This inquiry was designed to explore the lived experiences of rural school counselors and the challenges they face in meeting the needs of students living in poverty.

Interview Protocol

Recruitment

The first step of the research process was to submit the research proposal to be reviewed by the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (AU IRB) for the use of human subjects in research (Refer to Appendix A). After approval was granted, the researcher began the recruitment process. Criterion sampling was used to ensure participants had experienced the phenomenon explored in the qualitative study. A recruitment email was disseminated to recruit potential research participants, (Refer to Appendix B), via an email on a state level counseling association list serve and to a compiled list of public email accounts of public school counselors in the state where the study was conducted. This email invited all school counselors meeting the criterion of the study to participate. As an incentive to participate, all qualified participants who completed the study were placed in a drawing to win a fifty dollar Amazon gift card.

The recruitment email inviting participants outlined the criteria for participation, the risks and benefits of participation, and information about how to contact the researcher to participate in the study. Qualified research participants were identified as school counselors in rural, non-metropolitan areas where seventy percent or more of the students were on free or reduced lunch. Interested participants were asked to contact the researcher through email. Next, the researcher responded to each interested participant by providing the informed consent which they could sign and return if they wished to participate in the study. Interested potential research participants signed informed consent forms and emailed them back to the researcher. Further attempts to find research

participants eligible to participate were made through snowball sampling prior to the beginning of each taped interview.

Screening/Exclusion Protocol

The researcher used two types of data collection for this study. After the informed consent was returned to the researcher via email, the Survey Monkey demographic survey was sent to the participants to collect demographic information about each research participant for the study as well as information to be used to set up phone interviews with the participants (Refer to Appendix C). The survey consisted of four multiple choice questions and four fill then the blank items. The survey began with a question designed to determine if research participants self-identified as meeting the criteria of the study. If potential research participants answered "no" to the first Survey Monkey demographic question which asked, "Are you employed as a school counselor where 70% or more of the students are on free and reduced lunch?" they were exited from the survey and not able to continue to participate in the study. Eight research participants who met the criteria of the study completed the survey. The researcher used contact information from the completed surveys to compile demographic information and to set up phone interviews at the convenience of the research participants.

Phone Interviews

Each phone interview was digitally audio recorded. The phone interviews were conducted in the researcher's home office to ensure both privacy and an environment free of distraction for the audio recorded sessions. Prior to beginning digital audio recording of each session, specific details of the study were reviewed including informed consent to ensure that the research participants were comfortable with participating in the study and understood both the risks and benefits of participation. Five semi-structured research questions were used to guide the interview (Appendix D). The use of semi-structured research questions allowed flexibility for the researcher to ask the pre-drafted research questions and also allowed for the introduction of new questions based on responses from interviewees. To ensure security and confidentiality of notes and recordings made during the interviews security measures were taken, all hand written notes were secured in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home and digital recordings were uploaded to the researchers' laptop computer that had password protection and was then stored in an encrypted file. The recorded interviews were transcribed by the transcription service, Rev.com. After the phone interviews were transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy by the researcher, each research participant was sent an email containing his or her transcript to review for accuracy before data analysis of transcripts began. Four of the eight participants responded to this email. Only one participant asked for minor grammatical changes to be made to the returned transcript. All other respondents did not ask for any changes to be made to the transcription.

There were minimal risks associated with participation in the study. Research participant agreement to informed consent was confirmed both through completion of an

informed consent form and verbal re-affirmation at the beginning of each individual

phone interview before taping began (Refer to Appendix C). Participants were able to

withdraw at any time during the research study.

Interview Questions

The pre-drafted research questions consisted of the following questions:

1. How do you define poverty?

2. What are the challenges you face in meeting the needs of students living in poverty?

3. What recommendations do you make concerning the preparation of new counselors to work with students living in poverty?

4. What are the perceived attitudes of educational professionals in schools toward students living in poverty?

5. What are the challenges faced by high poverty schools that are different from low poverty schools?

Participants

The population studied was rural school counselors employed at high poverty schools.

The number of research participants was determined based on recommendations from the

professional literature. Creswell (1998) suggested five to twenty-five participants, Morse

(1994) suggests at least six, and Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested the use of saturation

which is the practice of collecting data until new data does not shed any further light on

the investigation being conducted. The researcher collected data until saturation was

achieved. This was determined by the recognition that no new data was emerging that

contributed to the study. All participants were school counselors employed at rural, high

poverty schools. The researcher sought to have representation of school counselors from the elementary, middle/junior high school, K-12, and high school levels. As recommended by Creswell (2013), the researcher chose criterion sampling to ensure that all research participants had experienced the phenomenon being explored in this research study.

Recruited research participants met the criterion for inclusion in the study by self-identifying as being employed as school counselors at rural, high poverty school systems where seventy percent or more of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The research participants were recruited from a state in the Southern region of the United States through the use of a counseling association list-serve, recruitment emails sent to public school counselor email accounts, and snowball sampling. Two requests for research participants were posted on the state level counseling association list-serve, recruitment emails were sent to school counselors with public emails, and snowball sampling was used in an attempt to recruit more research participants from those already participating in the study.

The following participant demographic information was collected through an on-line Survey Monkey demographic survey. These data have been compiled to provide detailed demographic information for each of the research participants in Table 1 and also in brief descriptors for each individual research participant. Research participants have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities in this study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Years as Counselor	Type of School	Grades served
Beverly	White (Non-Hispanic)	Female	4	Elementary	K-2
Amelia	White (Non-Hispanic)	Female	4	Elementary	Pre-K-2
Cindy	White (Non-Hispanic)	Female	11	K-12 School	7-12
Jessica	Black/African American	Female	5	K-12 School	K-8
Allison	White (Non-Hispanic)	Female	3	Middle/Junior High	7-8
Madison	White (Non-Hispanic)	Female	14	High School	10-12
Katherine	White (Non-Hispanic)	Female	8	High School	6-12
Paige	White (Non-Hispanic)	Female	3	Elementary	K-6

Beverly. Beverly served as a school counselor at an elementary school. She provided counseling services for kindergarten through second grade and had four years of experience as a counselor. She identified her gender as female and her race as White/Non-Hispanic.

Amelia. Amelia served as a school counselor at an elementary school. She provided counseling services for pre-kindergarten through second grade. Amelia had four years of experience as a counselor. She identified her gender as female and her race as White/Non-Hispanic

Cindy. Cindy served as a school counselor at a kindergarten through twelfth grade school. She provided counseling services for seventh through twelfth grade. Cindy had 11

years of experience as a school counselor. She identified her gender as female and her race as White/Non-Hispanic.

Jessica. Jessica served as a school counselor at a Kindergarten through twelfth grade school. She provided counseling services for seventh –twelfth grade. Jessica had 5 years of experience as a school counselor. She identified her gender as female and her race as Black/African American.

Allison. Allison served as a school counselor at a high school. She provided counseling for seventh through eighth grade. Allison had three years of experience as a school counselor. She identified her gender as female and her race as White/Non-Hispanic.

Madison. Madison served as a school counselor at a high school. She provided counseling services for tenth through twelfth grade. Madison had eight years of experience as a school counselor. She identified her gender as female and her race as White/Non-Hispanic.

Katherine. Katherine served as a school counselor at a high school. She provided counseling services for sixth through twelfth grade. Katherine had eight years of experience as a school counselor. She identified her gender as female and her race as White/Non-Hispanic.

Paige. Paige served as a school counselor at an elementary school. She provided counseling services for kindergarten through sixth grade. Page had three years of experience as a school counselor. She identified her gender as female and her race as White/Non-Hispanic.

Role of the Researcher

The primary researcher for this study has served as a rural school counselor in a high poverty school for fifteen years. Her attitudes and perceptions related to serving children and adolescents living in poverty have been shaped by the experiences she has had in this role and her efforts to uphold ASCA Ethical Standards (2016) as a practicing school counselor. In her own personal experiences, she has found value in reflecting on her attitudes toward the students she served and how her own perceptions impacted the delivery of a comprehensive counseling program to students in a rural, high poverty setting.

In addition, reflection on the role of the researcher as a professional school counselor led to the development of an advocacy mindset with a commitment to connecting students with resources key to student success. The preamble of the ASCA Ethical Standards (2016) describes school counselors as leaders, advocates, consultants, and collaborators in student success who work to create systemic change through delivery of equitable educational access. It also states that all students have the right to be treated with dignity and have access to a comprehensive counseling program that affirms and advocates for students from diverse populations. Due to the researcher's reflections of her own experiences as a rural school counselor working in a high poverty setting, she has felt compelled to explore experiences of others working in similar settings. She felt exploration of the lived experiences of rural school counselors would contribute to the professional literature,

Through this process of self-reflection, the researcher has developed a set of questions related to the perceptions of rural school counselors working with children and

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adolescents living in poverty. The process of having an experience that leads one to pause and reflect is how phenomenological questions arise. Through exploration of her own experiences the researcher used epoche (bracketing) in an effort to set aside her own experiences (Creswell, 2013) and take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon being examined in this study. The researcher also aims to give a voice to rural school counselors working with children and adolescents living in poverty which at the current time is not adequately represented in the professional literature as evidenced in chapter one.

Theoretical Framework for Procedure and Analysis

The researcher used the phenomenological procedures outlined by Creswell (2013). These procedures included in the following (Creswell, 2013):\

> 1. determining that the research problem is best explored using the phenomenological approach, 2. collecting data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon , 3. asking a broad central question and open ended questions to collect data that will lead to being able to provide textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon, 4. use of horizontalization which involves transcribing the data, and then highlighting the significant statements or quotes related to the experience of the phenomenon, 5. development of structural and textural descriptions from these significant statements and themes present in the data, (6) and a written description of my own experiences as a researcher during this study (Creswell, 2013, pp, 81-82).

Epoche/Bracketing

Throughout the research process, epoche/bracketing was used. According to

Moustakas (1994), epoche, also often referred to as bracketing, is the process of setting

aside prejudices, predilections, and predispositions. It is the allowing of events, things,

and people to enter into one's consciousness and to look and see them as if for the first

time. Epoche is an unfettered stance which allows the researcher to see just what is there

and to allow it to linger (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher conducting the study used

this approach to position herself within the research.

Data Analysis

Triangulation

The researcher used triangulation to strengthen the validity of this study. Triangulation

is the process of using multiple and different sources, investigators, methods, and theories

to provide corroborating evidence in a research study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher

outlined each of the steps taken to achieve triangulation through the process of data

analysis at each step of the process. Documentation of each step taken in research process

strengthens the validation of the research process. The researcher engaged in the

following areas to increase the validation of the study through triangulation: she kept a

detailed audit trail of her decision making process during each stage of the study, she

used member checking to determine the accuracy and credibility of the research with

participants, looked for emerging themes in individual interviews and across interviews,

and engaged an eternal auditor to examine whether or not the themes and findings were

supported by the collected data.

Audit Trail

The process of data analysis was documented in an audit trail to increase the validity and the reliability of the study. Through the use of an audit trail, rigor was achieved by outlining decisions made at each step of the research process to provide rationale for the interpretive and methodological judgements of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Documentation through the use of an audit trail is a method of improving the immediate task which is being carried out in the research process, which can later advance the sophistication of analyses and deepening of confidence in final conclusions of the research study (Miles, Hubberman, & Saldana, 2014). The researcher meticulously documented her thoughts and reflections, and took notes at each step of the research process. The researcher enhanced the reliability of the study by developing detailed field notes from quality recordings, transcription of the interviews, and keeping of detailed documentation throughout the research study (Creswell, 2013). After recording phone interviews, the researcher listened to digital recordings prior to transcription as this was another opportunity for analysis, where notes were made of what was heard and development of tentative themes were formed (Maxwell, 2013). As the researcher, the keeping of meticulous notes, and documentation at each step of the data collection and analysis process was paramount to conducting a quality phenomenological study. It was essential to not only observe what was shared by research participants but to be mindful of the researcher's perceptions at each step of the research process. The use of the audit trail, was a measure that assisted the researcher in ensuring that all significant data was included in the study

The researcher used the stance related to validation taken by Creswell (2013) as the standard used for the data analysis process. Creswell (2103) described the strength of

validation of qualitative research being the extensive time spent in fieldwork, the detailed, rich thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to those participating in the study. Due to time constraints and distances, phone interviews were conducted. Due to not getting to meet the research participants in person, the researcher took time in the beginning of each interview to answer all questions research participants had related to the study and also made efforts to put participants at ease before beginning the actual interviews. The author carefully documented each step of the process of data collection and analysis in the audit trail. After each interview, detailed notes were made to assist the researcher in documenting the interview. Then documentation continued with the researcher listening to audio recordings of interviews and taking extensive notes as part of the audit trail. Next the audio recordings were sent to Rev.com to be transcribed in preparation for further data analysis.

Member Checking

The researcher reviewed the transcripts after transcription was completed for accuracy and emailed each individual participant a copy their transcripts. Research participants were offered the opportunity to review their transcripts and check them for accuracy to provide member checking as part of the validation process (Creswell, 2013). The process of respondent validation through member checking occurred when research participants were given the opportunity to review collected data and either confirm or challenge their validity and these responses were included in the research findings (Johnson, & Waterfield, 2004). This process was included in the study to add to the credibility of the data collected and to build trust with those participating in the study.

Development of Themes through Data Analysis

Once member checking was complete, the researcher began analysis of the content of interview transcripts. Data was examined closely to identify themes of meaning (Creswell, 2013). The data analysis for this study followed the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method which was addressed by Moustakas (1994) and adapted by Creswell (2013). To begin data analysis, the researcher described her own experiences with the phenomenon using epoche/bracketing in an effort to set aside her own personal experiences (Moustaka 1994). Then she read and re-read transcriptions both individually and across transcriptions to develop a list of significant themes using horizontalization. The researcher then grouped the significant statements into larger meaning units which had emerged as themes in the data. Then she wrote a textural description of what the participating rural school counselors experienced and how they experienced the phenomenon in structural a description. Finally, the researcher wrote a composite description which combined both textural and structural descriptions to capture the essence of the experience in the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013).

External Auditor

To further determine the validity and reliability of the research findings a counselor education doctoral candidate in the same program as the researcher served as an external auditor. She has experience related to this area from course work related to qualitative methodology. The external auditor was provided three of the eight transcripts from the study and was asked to identify themes in both individual transcripts and across the transcripts reviewed. This process provided the researcher with information that assisted in accessing the accuracy of the themes emerging in the research study. The external auditor provided detailed notes to the researcher which she used to compare with her own

emergent themes in the study. The role of the external auditor served to assist the researcher in determining if the study's "findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252).

Operational Definitions

Rural

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) defines rural as all population, housing, and territory not included in an urban area.

Urban

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) defines urban clusters of areas consisting of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.

Poverty

Following the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy, the Census   Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds varied by family composition and size to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is lower than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered to live in poverty. The official poverty thresholds are not varied geographically, but they are updated to reflect inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI- U). The official poverty definition uses money income prior to taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as Medicaid, public housing, and food stamps) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Relative Poverty

The economic status of a family with an income insufficient to meet the average standard of living in the society which they live (Jenson, 2009).

High Poverty Counties

According to the 2006-2010 American Community Survey (ACS), high poverty counties are defined as having at least 20 percent of the population living below the Federal poverty threshold   (U.S. Census Bureau).

Free Lunch Eligibility

A student from a household with an income at or below 130 percent of the poverty income threshold is eligible for free lunch (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015).

Reduced Lunch Eligibility

A student from a household with an income between 130 percent and up to 185 percent of the poverty threshold is eligible for reduced price lunch (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015).

Title I Program

Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA) is designed to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high percentages or high numbers of students from low-income families to ensure all children are prepared to meet rigorous state academic standards. Federal funds are allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on the cost of education in each state and Census poverty estimates. Local education agencies are to target the Title I funds they receive to public schools with the largest percentages of children from families with low income. Unless a participating school has a schoolwide program, the Title I funds and services must be focused on children who are failing, or at risk of failing, to meet academic standard (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Title I School Wide Program

Schools with enrollment of at least 40 percent of students from low-income families meet   eligibility requirements to use Title I funds for schoolwide programs which can be used to upgrade their educational programs to improve achievement for all students, particularly the under-achieving students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015)

High Poverty Schools

For the purpose of this study, high poverty schools will be defined as schools with 70% or more of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

Summary

The chapter provides a description of the research methods and the procedures to be used in this research study. The researcher provides a rationale for the choice of qualitative study and transcendental phenomenological methodology. Also provided, are explicit descriptions of the steps taken to ensure that the phenomenological study was trustworthy.

Chapter 3

Findings

This chapter presents the themes that emerged from this phenomenological research study. The findings were identified based on responses across the five semi- structured research questions. The themes that emerged in the study were parental involvement, lack of resources, and recommendations (See Table 2).

The eight school counselors interviewed self-identified as working in rural school systems where seventy percent or more of students qualified as being on free and reduced lunch. They were all employed as school counselors in settings ranging from elementary to high school, providing perspectives from different grade configurations and school settings. The research participants were open and candid about their lived experiences as school counselors in rural, high poverty settings.

From the five semi-structured interview questions, three themes emerged. These themes were developed using the Stevick-Colazzi-Keen method of analysis which involved the researcher describing her personal experiences with the phenomenon, developing a list of significant statements, grouping significant statements into themes or meaning units, writing textural and structural descriptions of the experience, and concluding with a composite description of the experience which provides the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). The following data is provided to present the findings in this study.

Table 2

Emergent Thematic Categories

	Themes
Theme One	1. Parental Involvement
Theme Two	2. Lack of Resources
Theme Three	3. Recommendations

Theme One: Parental Involvement

The first theme that emerged from the semi-structured interview questions was **parental involvement**. This theme emerged in data from both question two, "What are the challenges you face in meeting the needs of students living in poverty?" and question five, "What are the challenges faced by high poverty schools that are different from low poverty schools?" Findings revealed research participants faced challenges related to reaching parents living in poverty by phone, and parental access to transportation within this population, Most of the participating school counselors found these issues related to poverty contributed to a lack of parental engagement in the school setting. The participants also viewed lack of parental engagement as a significant difference between low poverty and high poverty schools.

Beverly shared that one of the biggest challenges faced at her school was making parent contact. She expressed frustration that many parents did not have working numbers or did not answer the phone when the school attempted to make contact. She expressed concern throughout her interview about the need for more parental presence in the educational experiences of her students.

I guess maybe the biggest thing for us is getting in touch with those parents

sometimes. I think sometimes we try really hard to meet the needs of students, but we don't have working phone numbers. Even sometimes we have parents that won't answer the phone. That's a challenge.

Later in response to this same question Beverly expanded on the challenge of contacting parents and provided her understanding of why this challenge existed for both her and the families living in poverty. "A lot of times when money ran out, you couldn't get ahold of the parents because there wouldn't be minutes on their phones. Those types of things where the phone had been cut off."

When asked about the challenges faced meeting the needs of students living in poverty, Katherine expressed similar concerns to those of Beverly. She also, seemed to be frustrated by not being able to reach parents by phone to discuss the needs of students.

A lot of times getting in contact with them [parents], maybe they don't have a phone, or we try to call a relative if it's something like discipline, or just in general trying to call them to see what we need to find out, what to do if the child needs to ride somebody else's bus, whatever. It's just the fact that we can't contact the parents of students with low income a lot of times due to not having good phone numbers, etc.

Paige also expressed that reaching parents of students living in poverty was often a challenge for her as well. She attributed this issue to frequently changing family contact numbers. "The other thing is sometimes it is difficult to get into contact with families, the parents or guardians, because the phone numbers change frequently."

Interview responses related to making parental contact by phone revealed both frustration with not being able to engage parents in phone conversations related to the students they serve and also understanding for the barriers that might impede that contact

from being successful. The research participant responses appear to demonstrate that they understood the challenges connected to parental phone contact but also identified frustration in not knowing how to address this problem for the purpose of improving parental engagement in student learning.

Some of the interviewed research participants revealed that they not only had difficulty reaching parents of high poverty students by phone, they also encountered parents who faced barriers in finding transportation to the school. These two issues potentially limited parental involvement in the education of high poverty students so it is extrapolated that these two issues may have contributed to the focus participating school counselors placed on this theme.

Katherine reported that getting parents in to meetings due to transportation issues was a significant issue at her school at the time of her interview due to trying to meet with parents about grades and planning student schedules for the next school year. She reported that meetings sometimes had to be postponed due to parents not having access to transportation to the school.

> This is fresh for me because we've been doing this the last few weeks, just trying to get parents to come to the school, talk to us about student grades, and making their schedules for the next school year. Transportation is a huge issue for them. We've had to postpone several times for several people because of their transportation. That is one of the big deals in getting them here to do that kind of thing.

Madison also reported that both parents and students living in poverty were faced with transportation challenges. She also shared some of her knowledge of how families in poverty worked to address their transportation issues. Madison shared, "A big problem is

transportation in our area." The researcher then asked Madison to expand on this issue further.

Many of our parents and students don't have cars, and transportation, and when they do have to get a ride somewhere, they usually have to end up paying someone, which they don't have the money to do. If they don't have a car, you know, they try to get a ride with someone else, and they expect them to pay them for the ride.

Allison also addressed that transportation is an issue for parents when addressing this question. She summed up the struggle of families living in poverty, "Often times, they [families] just don't have the resources, transportation sometimes might be an issue."

The participating counselors expressed both interest in making parental contact and concern about not being able to reach parents by phone or have them attend conferences. Even though they expressed frustration with sometimes facing limited parental involvement, they seemed to understand the reasons for these limitations.

Participating counselors attributed the cause of low parental involvement to different sources but it resonated as a concern in effectively meeting the needs of students and was perceived as a difference between the high poverty schools where they worked and low poverty schools.

Beverly disclosed in her interview that she left a position as a school counselor at a low poverty school to work at her current school. She was able to draw specific comparisons between the two situations based on her personal experiences in the two different school settings. She first described what it was like in a low poverty setting.

When you are in a low poverty school, most of the time you have kids that are coming in ready to learn. Their needs are met. Their parents are very involved, their clothing

fits, and their bellies are full. You can get a whole lot more accomplished if the

children come in that way.

Beverly then contrasted her past experiences with the challenges she faced working at

a high poverty school. She viewed lack of parental involvement as being a significant

challenge to the success of students living in poverty.

When you have students from high poverty situations, you have so much more you

have to tackle before you can get the day even started. That seems to be a big, huge

difference to me. When you have a lack of parental involvement, when you have no

one at home that is able to care or discipline bad behavior, or you've got no one at

home who is going to make sure you have what you need for the next day at school it

can be a huge challenge.

Amelia also discussed the challenge of lack of parental involvement at the high

poverty school where she worked. She expressed belief that some parents did not want to

come and others could not due to their work. She also felt that sometimes there was a

lack of understanding about why parents where not more involved in their children's

education.

In high poverty schools it's hard to get parents to have the time to come in. It's

sometimes because they don't want to come but sometimes it's because they have to

be at work. If they don't come in, I mean, if they come to school instead of being at

work, they're gonna get a point, and if you get three points, you get fired and that

kind of stuff. You have kids that are coming to school and their parents are coming

through the car line late because they got off from work at 7:00, ran home to get the

kids, and are bringing them to school, and they are barely making it before the time.

So it, parental involvement is a big deal. That is something people just do not try to understand.

In this passage Amelia addressed the issue of parents working in settings that do not allow for parents to be at the school during the traditional school day. If they miss work the parents are potentially at risk for losing their jobs. At her high poverty school this served as a barrier to some parents being able to be more involved in their children's education.

Allison also saw parental involvement as being a challenge for high poverty schools, based on her experiences as a school counselor.

Those parents [high poverty]…their involvement, I don't know if it's because they're ashamed, embarrassed, or they may just be working because they are just making ends meet but I have noticed our parental involvement is very low. So, I think if we had more parents involved, then they might see that we are here to help them and we want to help them but it is just hard to get them up to the school.

Allison did not seem to know what to attribute to low parental involvement and named different potential reasons for lack of involvement. Finding out the reasons for low parental involvement would serve as a way to increase parental engagement.

Even though parental involvement emerged as a key difference between high and low poverty schools, the attribution to the cause of lack of parental involvement was varied. The reasons offered for lack of parental involvement at high poverty schools presented included lack of desire on the part of parents, work conditions that served as a barrier to being able to be involved, and shame and embarrassment on the part of parents. Within this theme there was divergence in responses related to the attribution to the cause of low

parental involvement. Earlier in response to question two, parental phone contact and

parental barriers to transportation to the school also emerged as part of the theme of

parental involvement. These findings indicate that the role of parents in the education of

students is of significance to the research participants in this study. There was an

expressed need for working parent contact numbers, and parental availability to attend

meetings to increase engagement in student success. The responses also reflect a lack of

knowledge of how to increase the parental involvement of families living in poverty.

Theme Two: Lack of Resources

The second emergent theme in the study was **lack of resources**. When research

participants were asked, "How do you define poverty?" in the first research question,

every participant defined poverty as a lack of resources. In question two this theme re-

emerged when participants were asked, "What are the challenges you face meeting the

needs of students living in poverty? The issue of lack of resources emerged as a

significant concern for rural school counselors as they discussed the challenges of

meeting student needs when the resources they had available were limited. The theme

emerged again in the final research question, "What are the challenges faced by high

poverty schools that are different from low poverty schools?", when counselors discussed

the lack of resources available to support school success from both parents and the

community in high poverty settings.

In the first interview question all participating school counselors were asked, "How is

poverty defined?" This question was posed to explore how school counselors attributed

poverty based on their own experiences. Every participating school counselor attributed

poverty to a lack of resources. What they identified as the gap in resources attributed to

poverty had some variation but it was clear that this was a shared theme across all interviews. Some defined poverty generally, where others specified their definition to students, parents, or families. However, all counselors provided in their definition an observation of a gap between need and resources available. Areas of need identified included the issues of food insecurity, clothing issues for students, housing issues for families, lack of parental availability due to transportation issues, lack of parental knowledge, difficulty paying utilities, lack of access to educational opportunities, need for school supplies, lack of access to medical care, and lack of funds for student extra-curricular activities. This theme of lack of resources was found across interviews with counselors from eight different schools and a variation of grade level configurations

Beverly began her definition of poverty by saying it had different meanings to different people and then narrowed her definition based on what she felt it meant to her in relation to her own school system. Her definition was based on her own observations of what would define student poverty.

Well let me see, I think maybe it looks different for different people, but in our system, I would say poverty is, we have kids who can't afford lunch at school or breakfast at school. Those are the kids we feed a lot of times. Poverty is also those kids in our school who don't have transportation. We have a lot of times parents that can't be maybe as involved as they want because they don't have transportation. They [students] sometimes don't have clothing that fits. They maybe are in our backpack program at school, where they receive food. A lot of times those parents are unemployed, just some examples of what I've seen in our school as far as poverty goes.

Beverly's definition was based on her observations in the school where she worked and provided insight into how she defined poverty based on her experiences with student poverty in her school setting.

Paige provided a definition of poverty that was based on observation of several different factors. She suggested that poverty was defined as an examination of socio-economic status, and the environment in which students lived. She also defined students living in poverty as those who qualified for free or reduced cost lunches. Paige then discussed school screening for homelessness based on a federal law as another way to screen for poverty. She defined poverty through factors that could be measured through the use of existing school data. Paige provided some insight into how her definition of student poverty was shaped by her experiences as a practicing school counselor.

Um, well that's a good question. I guess you know, you look at several different areas. One is you know, their [students'] economic status, I suppose and then, I guess that's the biggest way to define it, but you know, when we're looking at kids we're looking at the environment they're living in and the socio-economic status, that kind of thing.

In the interview with Paige, the researcher asked her to expand on her definition of poverty and she provided specific ways to define what poverty might look at for students based on what was done in the school where she worked.

Well, I guess what we see the most of, you know, and one of the ways we kind of define, you know, if our kids are in poverty or not is, one free and reduced lunch. We look at that. We have a lot of students that come in if they don't have a home of their own we have the McKinney-Veto Act to help determine if they are homeless or not.

Paige continued the theme of students having needs that are not being met with her definition of poverty. She provides a definition with specifics of what her school uses to determine those who are living in poverty. Paige looked to her school data to determine if students were in need of services provided for students in poverty and students who were homeless. This helped her to determine the specific supports needed to help students to achieve success. Her approach appears to be informed by the American Counselor Association Model (2012) which calls for school counselors to use student and school data to monitor student progress and determine what is needed for students to achieve success.

Jessica defined poverty as low income or a need for assistance. She seemed to struggle at first with finding the words to describe her personal definition of poverty but when asked to expand on her definition, she was able to provide a definition along with some of her personal attributions to what the experience of poverty might involve for students and their families. "Poverty, the way I would define it is a level of low income meshed together with, actually low income basically, low income to where you would have to be in need of assistance."

The researcher observed that Jessica was still working to fully construct her definition and asked her to expand upon her thoughts.

That is a tough one. How would I define poverty? Well low income and then of course, I'm seriously thinking on that one. Personally, to me, poverty is when of course like I was saying, low income or maybe at a point where there is a lack of or trade off or something, hand-me-downs in clothing, and always there is a lack of knowledge too. Where they're [students] in a home of parents or even extended

family members, but the knowledge of the family is not what it could be. That to me

is what I'm thinking of as poverty.

Jessica provided a definition that indicates she views poverty as a lack of things

needed where families might have to make decisions about what is most important to use

their limited resources on to meet the needs of the family. She attributes lack of

knowledge in families as a contributing factor to poverty as well.

All eight rural school counselors interviewed defined poverty as the state of not

having basic needs met due to a lack of resources. What they observed as being the

needs not met varied, but this theme was very clear as an agreed upon definition of the

state of being in poverty. However those interviewed had variation in their assumptions

about poverty and the values of those living in poverty. These issues could shape how

school counselors view the delivery of counseling services to students living in poverty.

In question two, when asked. "what are the challenges you face in meeting the needs

of students living in poverty?", most of the participating counselors reported being

challenged in meeting the physical, and social/emotional needs of their students and the

impact these factors had on student success. Most of the participating counselors were

cognizant of the lack of resources of students living in poverty and discussed their efforts

to close this gap for students. The following responses provide an overview of the

challenges related to a lack of resources encountered by research participants.

Cindy responded to this question by sharing some of the challenges faced by her

students and how she perceived their impact on student focus on school work and

academic performance. She talked about how those who do not have their basic needs

met struggle to focus on school work because it is not the largest concern facing students in poverty.

> Because they don't have their basic needs met, sometimes there are more important things for them, so they are academically challenged because they may not be able to have the supplies they might need, the clothing they might need, etc. Sometimes they're more worried about being able to sleep somewhere, or eat somewhere, than they are about making sure they've got their homework done.

Then the interviewer summarized what Cindy shared and then she continued to expand on this issue.

> Right, it's like the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs. If those basic needs are not met, then it's hard for you to focus and do anything else until you know that there's security and those basic needs are met. You know, the food, the shelter, the clothing, if you don't know where you're going to sleep every night or you're moved from place to place, which some of our students do, because the family can't secure a home, they really are not able to function because they have not got sleep that they need at night. Why study and learn about what they're learning if it doesn't seem as important as trying to find a place to live, and to eat and to function.

> In the researcher's interview with Allison, she expressed frustration with the school dress code and students in poverty not being able to meet the expectations of the dress code. She reported that she provided clothing for students in an effort to keep them compliant with the dress code. Specifically, she was concerned that they had to wear the same clothes repeatedly to meet the dress code policy.

> This year, it seems like a lot of our students are coming to school and they're wearing

the same hoodies or the same jackets over their t-shirts because they don't have the money to go out and buy t-shirts that are in dress code. So, I've tried to provide clothes for them, but it seems one of the biggest, I guess, obstacles this year that I have faced has been that they don't have the means to go and afford belts, t-shirts, that are solid colors, or t-shirts without writing on them or pants that don't have holes in them. Because they wear their pants so much they get worn, or they have frayed edges, or they get holes in the knees, and they still continue to wear them, and then of course, our dress code policy says they can't wear that kind of stuff.

Allison reported seeing an unmet need and was challenged in meeting the needs of students who were outside of the school dress code. She tried to keep students from receiving punitive action from the school administration by providing the clothing students needed to be in accordance to the school dress code.

Amelia, who worked with early elementary students, discussed being challenged by students' basic needs not being met in the areas of food insecurity, poor living conditions in the home, and due to working with four, five, and six year olds struggling to understand their particular needs. She also expressed that the young students she served did not seem to be aware of the poverty conditions in which they lived.

Our kids, they don't, some of them, come in, and they don't, we don't know they get any good food, other than the ones that… other than the food that we send home with them. [inaudible] I think that sometimes we do home visits, and their [students'] living conditions are just inhumane by our standards. It's all they've [students] have ever known, and they're happy to show you their house, and there's no beds in it and there's no food in the cabinets, or anything like that, but they don't know any better.

It's hard at my school because I do four, five and six year olds, well, sometimes seven year olds at the end of the year. Like right now. They don't understand their needs are not being met, because that's, so I ask them specific questions, sometimes they don't know that they need to tell you things.

The interviewer then stated, "So, you feel like sometimes it's hard to draw students out and to find out what they do need?" After this summary checking for understanding, Amelia continued to expand on this particular challenge.

Right, you have to ask them very specific questions, "Did you eat last night?" You can't just say "yesterday", or "last week", or anything like that because a lot of times our pre-k and kindergarten students don't have a concept of time. So they don't understand that they didn't eat. It has to be very specific…sometimes we use holidays. "When was the last time you got new shoes? Was it before or after Christmas?" Things like that. So, it's difficult at this age to figure out the things we need to know, because they just don't know what everybody else has.

Amelia, reported trying to find out more about the needs of the young students she served through specific questioning, appropriate to their developmental levels in trying to address what their needs might be.

The theme of lack of resources emerged again in question five when research participants were asked, "What are the challenges faced by high poverty schools that are different from low poverty low poverty schools?" Nearly all of the research participants discussed the challenges their schools faced due to a lack of resources from community, and parents. Respondents also indicated that their schools struggled to meet student needs even in communities where efforts of support were made. Community and parental

poverty as well as the challenges of being in a rural area were perceived to affect the sources of support for these particular high poverty schools. Comparisons were also made related to the level of support available at high and low poverty schools. There was a recognition that communities and parents in rural high poverty areas did not have access to the same resources as metro low poverty schools.

Beverly, who once worked in a low poverty school, drew comparisons between the level of resources available in her low poverty school and compared it to the challenges of working in a high poverty school. She praised the efforts of her community to meet student needs but she expressed that even with support meeting student needs was difficult.

Now I feel like when I was in an area of low poverty, we had families who had the means an the ability to just bring extra things up to school and pay for children who needed things or whatever. I think it was different of course. Here we have a large number of kids in poverty. Sometimes it is harder to meet those needs, well because there are so many, but I think our community does a really good job of trying to do that.

Cindy drew comparisons between the ability of parents at high and low poverty schools to network and find resources for their schools and students.

Well, at schools that I have worked at before, you have got parents that will come in. They see a need. Instead of asking the school system, they can go out and they ask friends, and maybe get help from the community to meet that need. The PTO's are more actively involved and they raise money to help support the school with what they may need. Where at a high poverty school you may not have parents with the

leadership ability or have the ability to network with other parents to provide things for

the school.

Katherine shared that she felt her students lacked in support from the community to

meet the educational needs of her students. She discussed how being in a rural area with

only a few local businesses, it was difficult to find resources to support the school outside

of state funds and how this was different for wealthier schools in metropolitan areas.

As far as education goes, I think there is a need for better resources, technology for

one thing, up-to-date technology., and that kind of thing that students could use. In

our rural area we do not have industries that might be able to donate money to provide

things beyond state funding which is never enough to keep up.

When asked to expand on this response, Katherine provided more insight into her

observations.

We have, I think, two businesses here in our community. One is a gas station, and one

is a garage to get your oil changed. Of course they help the school, but if you were in

say, Birmingham, Alabama, where you've got all these mass businesses, and

everything, property taxes and everything that money comes from for schools, they

probably have more than, well lots more than we have. Also, with poverty, as far as

having resources, what we have here at school related to technology is what many of

our students have access to because they may not have it at home.

The research participants provided descriptors of how their high poverty schools did

not have the same resources as low poverty schools. Each counselor interviewed faced

different circumstances at their schools but were faced with the common issue of having

a lack of resources to meet all the needs at their school. There was a common theme of

being faced with more need than resources available. The tone in the responses to this research question voiced the frustration of school counselors with the lack of resources available and the desire to have more to offer students in their schools.

The emergent theme of lack of resources was an issue that faced participating school counselors as the student, school, and community level. They perceived a lack of resources in meeting the needs of students and families, and also recognized that both parents and communities in high poverty areas did not have access to the same resources to support schools as one might find in a low poverty setting. The participants seemed to struggle with how to best address the issue of lack of resources when working with students and also when seeking support from parents and the community to foster student success.

Theme Three: Recommendations

The third theme to emerge from the data was **recommendations** for mew school counselors. This theme emerged in both question three, "What recommendations do you make concerning the preparation of new counselors to work with students living in poverty?" and question four, "What are the perceived attitudes of educational professionals in schools toward students living in poverty? Most research participants made recommendations for practicum, professional development, and community experiences specific to working with students living in poverty to prepare new counselors to work with students living in poverty. Most participants perceived that attitudes of school counselors could possibly be changed through both experiential learning and professional development experiences.   In response to question three there

were also recommendations related to developing relationships with both students and parents.

In question three the following responses provide examples of recommendations for both practicum experiences, professional development, and community experiences. The importance of professional development emerged again related to changing educator attitudes toward poverty in question four and further supported this theme. Respondents also made recommendations for taking the time to develop relationships with students and parents to open up the lines of communication.

Amelia shared that she had completed her internship at her place of current employment which is a high poverty school but she felt that if she had not had that experience she would not have been as prepared to meet the needs of high poverty students. She suggested practicum experiences at high poverty schools, volunteer work in programs that serve the poor and the preparation of a notebook of resources for new counselors.

> The best preparation that I can think of that they could have, is they have to do some sort of practicum in an impoverished area. Because I did my internship and everything in this school system that I'm at. So, I knew what I was coming into but if I had gotten, if I had done my, all my internships and everything at a place that never sees need, or rarely sees need, I won't say, never, but rarely sees need, and then I got a job at an impoverished place, I wouldn't have this prior knowledge and it would be a big culture shock. Other than that, I mean, would have them volunteer at Salvation Army, and you know do volunteer work.

After the researcher summarized Amelia's suggestions related to practicum and volunteer experiences, Amanda made another recommendation for new counselors related to the development of resources. "Yes, at least discover the resources, and maybe leave with a notebook or something of all the resources they could call upon if they needed help." Amelia felt that if new counselors had never worked in high poverty areas before there would benefit from practicum training in high poverty schools and volunteer work at an agency that serves those with low income and she also thought that development of a notebook of resources would be useful to those new to working with students in poverty.

Beverly suggested that new counselors learn from real life situations by visiting the communities in which their students live to increase understanding of student circumstances. She believed that this experiential activity could change perspectives of new counselors.

I think real life situations and even something that would be good for new counselors, if they knew where they were going to be working, is to drive around. Just take a look at where some of their kids live in the community that they serve. That will even open your eyes to a lot I think.

Paige, based on her own experiences as a counselor, discussed the value she found in a professional development training related to poverty. She felt that this type of training was informative and described it while sharing it as a recommendation for preparing new counselors for working with students in poverty.

I went to this workshop summer before last and it was on working with children in poverty, and one of the things I learned is the way those in poverty process

information differently. You know we did this little survey, and you had to answer as many questions as you could and they were all, there was a list under poverty, there was a list under middle class, and there was a list under, like the rich. And it was simple things like, "Do you know where to get the best clothing deals?", "Do you know where to get this or that?" And then when I answered all of those questions, I was clearly a middle class person. I could answer every one of those questions but you put me in poverty and I might know two or three things on that list.

In response to question three, Paige expressed belief that counselors and other educators could potentially have perceptions changed by participating in activities that make individuals think about what it is like to live in poverty.

In question four, a majority research participants perceived that most educators recognize that students living in poverty need extra support but that sometimes they are not sure how to deliver the needed student support. Respondents once again recommended that professional development was a way to potentially change the quality of student support services provided to students living in poverty.

Allison responded to this question by sharing that she felt attitudes toward students living in poverty changed after her school participated in a poverty simulation. Her response offers the perspective that training could potentially change the level of awareness and response of educators to students living in poverty.

So, I think that really opened up the eyes of our teachers that we really do live in a high poverty area and that we've got to provide other ways. You know, if a student is not doing their homework, then they [teachers] might have to provide some kind of remediation or an opportunity to be doing homework during the school day rather than

sending everything home. Because like I said, these children may be going home and

they may be doing other chores and not be able to get to their homework.

Paige responded to question four by sharing that she believed most educators wanted

to respond to students in poverty but sometimes the help also came with judgment of the

circumstances of students living in poverty.

Well. I mean, living in the South, you have a lot of Christian people and they really do

want to help people and they care…but at the same time they don't understand it

[poverty]. And, so they'll give freely, but then there's criticism that goes along with

it.

After the researcher summarized what Paige shared, she expanded on how she

perceived the differences in attitudes sometimes attached to providing help to students in

poverty. She also shared that she felt that it is important not to look at those in poverty as

one large group and that there was value in looking at poverty on an individual basis.

I mean, people just judge. You know? So I think people in poverty, should not be

looked at as one big group that is the same. I think you have to isolate it. I don't think

you can use the broad term of poverty and apply it to everyone. I think you have to

look at it on an individual basis, but often times I hear comments like, "Well, you

know, we've done this and we bought this and they don't even wear it." Just things

like that and you have some that don't. You have some that'll just continue to give as

much as they can but there's a stigma attached to it I'm sure.

Most of the respondents also perceived that building relationships with parents and

students were essential to student success. In question three recommendations were made

by most participants related to the importance of relationship building with both students and parents. The following responses provide examples of participant responses.

Allison recommended making efforts to build relationships and open up communication with both parents and students. She responded to question three by suggesting that listening to parents was essential to identifying the needs of families. Allison suggested the following for new counselors, "A recommendation for new counselors, I would definitely say is just listening to what the parents need, what they want the most."

When making recommendations to new counselors, Allison also shared the importance of making sure students knew the counseling office was a safe place and that students could come in to get things they needed or talk about the issues they faced. She suggested to new counselors to, "Just let them [students] know that you are there to listen to them if they want to talk to you or just provide something they don't have."

Katherine also recommended to new counselors the value of developing relationships with parents. She said, "For new counselors, I think that meeting the parents, whether it be at a community function or church function, or whatever, that just meeting them would be helpful in learning about their lifestyles and that kind of thing." Katherine recommended that new counselors get out in the community to meet the parents of students and try to understand their circumstances.

Katherine drew on her own experiences of being new in a high poverty community and her own struggle to build relationships with parents and students so that they would open up to her.

If you don't know the parents or the situations of the students, it can sometimes be

hard to get them to open up. I have struggled with this myself because of being new

to this school and community. I don't know everybody that walks in the door like

most people around here do. I feel like I'm an outsider at times. I've tried to get to

know students and families, to gain their trust so they'll at least talk to me about any

of their needs or whatever. So, I feel that it is important to get to know students and

families, not so much so you know everything about students and families. However,

it is important to know enough for them to feel comfortable to come to you and say,

"Hey, can I talk to you about this?

Summary of Findings

Three themes emerged during data analysis from this exploratory qualitative

phenomenological study. Through this process of data analysis, the researcher used the

themes presented in the data to compose a textural description of what research

participants experienced and a structural description of the settings or contexts that

influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). From the

structural and textural descriptions, the researcher wrote a composite description which

presented the essence of the experiences of rural school counselors serving students in

high poverty schools (Creswell, 2013).

Textural Description

The researcher examined the themes that emerged in the data to provide a description

of what research participants experienced (Creswell, 2013). Each of the eight rural school

counselors that participated in this study provided in-depth descriptions of what they

experienced serving children and adolescents in high poverty school settings. They all

provided a definition of poverty based on their experiences as counselors. This thematic

definition provided insight into what they perceived as being the state of living in poverty. Though there was variation across

descriptions of what constituted poverty, the theme of lack of resources was found in every definition for poverty. All research participants perceived poverty as not having basic needs met. Based on what was experienced as school counselors, this textural description resonated across interviews.

The research participants also described what they experienced as challenges serving students living in poverty and the challenges they faced that were specific to working in a high poverty setting such engaging in parental involvement, and a lack of student, parental, and community resources.

The participating school counselors also made recommendations of what they felt would assist new counselors in meeting the needs of students living in poverty. Over half of participants felt that professional development, experiences in the communities in which students lived, and relationship building with parents and students were what would best prepare new counselors to serve students living in poverty. What they perceived as needs and what was recommended for meeting the needs of children and adolescents had some variation due to the unique lived experiences of each research participant.

The research participants also addressed the perceived attitudes of educational professionals toward students living in poverty in their responses. They described both negative and positive educator attitudes toward students living in poverty. However, most research participants held the perception that professional development and training help promise in changing educator attitudes toward students living in poverty.

The participating school counselors also described what they perceived as differences in challenges faced at their high poverty schools in comparison to low poverty schools. Across interviews the themes that emerged included low parental involvement and a lack of resources in their high poverty schools due to community or parental poverty. These were the two significant areas viewed as the key differences in what high and low poverty schools faced as challenges.

They all provided detailed descriptions of what they experienced as rural school counselors in high poverty schools. These rich, thick descriptions provided a lens through which to see what the commonalities of their lived experiences were in meeting the needs of children and adolescents. Though they worked in different settings and in different schools, there were commonalities that resonated across their lived experiences providing a textural description of their lived experiences as rural school counselors serving students in high poverty settings.

Structural Description

The structural description provided gives insight into how the research participants experienced the phenomenon of serving as rural school counselors in high poverty schools. The participating school counselors in this study described the challenges faced in meeting the needs of children and adolescents living in poverty. They also described how barriers to parental involvement and lack of resources made their work as school counselors difficult. All research participants based on their experiences had different perceptions of how they experienced the phenomenon of serving as rural school counselors in high poverty settings but they shared commonalities in how they faced these challenges. They shared commonalities in recognizing a lack of resources for both

students and parents in their schools and communities, and most recognized the challenges of parental involvement even though they had different attributions assigned to what caused low parental involvement. They addressed most of the challenges they faced through building relationships with parents, students and community members. How they embarked on addressing these challenges varied based on their unique stakeholder resources and worldviews but there was a common theme of interest in making a difference for both students and families living in poverty

The researcher examined the textural and structural descriptions and developed a composite which presents the essence of the lived experiences of rural school counselors serving children and adolescents in high poverty schools (Creswell, 2013). The descriptors of "what" was experienced by rural school counselors serving students in high poverty setting and "how" they perceived these experiences has contributed to the knowledge available to practicing school counselors.

The textural and structural descriptions from the study revealed that research participants agreed upon a definition as to what constitutes living in poverty across interviews. The themes also revealed that participating school counselors are faced with some common challenges in serving students living in poverty such as a lack of resources and low parental involvement. They also provide recommendations for the preparation of new counselors to work with students living in poverty. Most research participants placed value on professional development, community experiences, and relationship building with students and parents as ways to prepare new counselors for the challenges of serving students living in poverty.

They expressed variation in what they perceived as the attitudes of educational professionals toward students living in poverty. However, most expressed that despite differences in attributions to poverty, most educators recognized that students in poverty were in need of extra support. In their responses to this there was a recognition that professional development had the potential to change educator attitudes toward students living in poverty. They also recognized how the setting of their school impacted the particular challenges they faced. Most research participants recognized that their high poverty schools were more challenged with parental involvement and lack of community and parental resources than low poverty schools. They provided rich thick descriptions of both what they lacked in these areas and how it impacted their schools. Due to the findings and rich, thick description of themes, the field of school counseling will benefit from this exploratory phenomenological study that provides a place to begin a discussion related to meeting the need of children and adolescents living in poverty and implications for the practice of school counselors

Chapter 4

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to explore the phenomena of rural school counselors' perceptions of children and adolescents living in poverty. The research question, "What are rural school counselors' perceptions of children and adolescents living poverty?" was the focal point at each stage of the research process. Phenomenological inquiry was used to find the essence of the lived experiences of the research participants through emergent themes presented in the data (Creswell, 2012). This chapter will provide a discussion of research findings, the limitations of the study, the implications of the research, and recommendations for future research related to this topic and conclusions.

Three emergent themes were identified in this study in response to the five semi-structured research questions poised in this study. Research participant responses provide a snapshot of the lived experiences of these research participants. These lived experiences are presented in the three themes that emerged from research participant interviews.

The first emergent theme from the study was **parental involvement**. This theme emerged in both question two and question five. Most of the participating school counselors believed that parental involvement was a key component of student success. They discussed two significant factors they felt impeded their ability to establish relationships with families living in poverty which were making parental contact and lack of parental access to transportation.

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The professional literature supports the supposition that phone contact is essential to engaging parents in the education of their children. Grant and Ray (2010) emphasized the importance of making phone contact with parents when possible as part of being a culturally responsive school. They cautioned educators to be aware that families living in poverty may not have phones or may frequently have their phone service terminated. Most of the research participants expressed understanding and empathy for the circumstances to why parental contact with families living in poverty was difficult. However, they did not seem to have answers as how to bridge the communication gap.

Most of the participating school counselors also expressed concerns about lack of parental access to transportation to the school for parents living in poverty. They expressed both frustration and concern that families living in poverty often did not have available transportation to attend school functions and meetings to discuss the academic and social/emotional needs of their children. The participants placed great value on parental engagement in the educational decisions for their children. The participants had varied responses to why parents were unable to be more present for school functions and meetings, but over half expressed understanding and empathy for why they might not be able to attend citing issues such as not being able to get off work, not having access to dependable transportation, and the long distances some parents live from the school in rural areas.

Government data related to rural poverty indicates that those living in rural areas face challenges related to transportation. Those living in high poverty, rural areas face challenges of potentially living long distances from schools and other agencies that can offer support. Transportation to the school may serve as a barrier to parents being able to

become actively involved in the education of their children. According to the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services (2009) rural families have less access to services due to farther distances to travel and geographic isolation. Rural areas are also less likely to offer access to public transportation. According to the American Housing Survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau (2008) responses indicated that the availability to public transportation diminished as communities became smaller. In this report, findings found that only 11% of rural survey respondents had public transportation near their homes. The school counselors who recognized parental access to transportation as a significant barrier for those living in poverty may be more cognizant of the reasons why parents are not present at meetings and other parental involvement activities at the school. This understanding might also lead to school counselor efforts to provide alternate means of engaging parents living in poverty in the education of their children.

The theme of parental involvement first emerged when participating school counselors were asked about the challenges they faced in meeting the needs of students living in poverty in question two and again in question five when they were asked what challenges were faced at high poverty schools that differed from low poverty schools. It is logical that this theme would re-emerge when discussing differences between high and low poverty schools. The barriers to phone and transportation access faced by families in high poverty schools are less likely to issues for families with more plentiful resources. The emergence of this theme perhaps indicates that research participants were thinking of this issue on both the student and the school level. Use of the ASCA National Model (2012) could assist in planning how to address the issue of parental involvement in schools. In

schools where this is a significant issue, school counseling plans could address ways to close the parental involvement gap through development of strategies to increase parental engagement of families living in poverty.

The second theme to emerge in the research study was **lack of resources**. This theme emerged in responses to questions one and five. In response to question one, all participating school counselors defined poverty as a lack resources. This provides information about what these particular school counselors attribute as being the source of poverty. They saw a gap between need and resources as what constituted students and their families living in poverty, Developing an understanding of what research participants perceived as being the state of poverty was essential to understanding how they would address issues related to poverty.

Then in question five most participating school counselors addressed the topic of lack of community and parental resources. These research participants expressed both frustration and understanding related to their experiences with a lack of community and parental resources for their schools. They recognized that both parental and community poverty contributed to the lack of outside resources provided to their schools. There was also a perception that being in a rural, high poverty areas offered more challenges than being in a metro high poverty area. Reasons contributed to this included lack of local businesses in the community to provide extra support to their schools and parental poverty which resulted in limited parental resources both in the form of material support and time to volunteer at the school. They perceived these two areas addressed in this theme to be significant differences between their high poverty schools and low poverty schools.

The third theme to emerge in the research study was **recommendations** for new

school counselors working with students living in poverty. These recommendations

emerged in question three when participants were asked to make recommendations for

preparation of new counselors to work with students living in poverty. The

recommendations made by the research participants included practicum, professional

development and community experiences specific to working with students living in

poverty. In response to question four which asked participants about the perceptions of

educational professionals toward students living in poverty, research participants

recommended that professional development and poverty simulations could potentially

assist in changing educator attitudes and skills related to addressing the needs of students

living in poverty. Many also expressed that professional development could perhaps

change attitudes toward students living in poverty and how student needs were met. The

research participants reflected that most educators wanted to help students in poverty but

perhaps educators were lacking in the skill set to know how to meet the needs of students.

These reflections are supported by the professional literature related to educators working

with students living in poverty. Jenson (2009) shared the following related to the

uncertainty of educators in meeting the needs of students living in poverty:

> Many nonminority or middle class teachers cannot understand why children [from
>
> poor backgrounds] act the way they do at school. Teachers don't need to come from
>
> their students cultures to be able to reach them, but empathy and cultural knowledge
>
> are essential (p. 11).

The supposition by Jenson, supports the recommendation by participating research

participants that continued professional development offers hope for improving educator

delivery of services to student living in poverty. Through this process school counselors and other educators, could potentially offer better support to students living in poverty.

In response to question three research participants also made the recommendation that new school counselors work to foster relationships with both students and parents. Participants in the study made suggestions of how to prepare new counselors to meet the needs of students living in poverty. The recommendations for professional development, and relationship building with parents made by research participants aligned with the American School Counselor Association Competencies found in the ASCA National Model (2012) which were designed to assist school counselors in self-assessment of their counseling competencies and the development of individual professional development plans. These interviewees recognized the need for specific professional development related to school counselors working in high poverty settings. ASCA School Counseling Competency III.B.1G recommended that school counselors develop a yearly professional development plan which demonstrates how individual school counselors plan to advance relevant skills, knowledge, and dispositions. The research participants' view that professional development was key to preparation for working with students living in poverty is supported by the ASCA Model (2012). New school counselors should develop yearly professional development plans specifically designed to meet the needs of the students they serve. Counselor education programs involved in the preparation of school counselors should focus on explicit training related to development and implementation of comprehensive school counseling plans so that new counselors will be cognizant of the best practices of their profession.

The recommendation to take the time to explore the communities in which their students live was also made for new counselors. Steen and Noguera (2010) stated that schools that are successful in educating low income students and minorities explore both internal and external factors. The recommendation to explore the communities where students live showed recognition on the part of the research participants that student issues cannot be addressed within the school alone, but also requires an understanding of where students live outside of the school setting. This practice would also be part of development of a school counseling plan based on the ASCA National Model (2012) which calls for the engagement of community stakeholders, and well developed school counseling plans that consider the unique qualities of the school and community.

Research participants also made the recommendation for building relationships with parents and students. The research participants felt that new counselors needed to know that there is value in taking the time to build relationships with both students and parents living in poverty. They expressed that taking time to nurture these relationships would result in a better understanding of student and family needs. The participating counselors expressed the belief that both parents and students would be more open if they felt time was taken to get to know them. This recommendation would be supportive of both meeting student needs and increasing parental engagement in the schools.

The research participants expressed an awareness that they had a role in closing the gap for students and had made efforts to address the specific needs of their students. They valued training and experiential learning for new counselors to assist in their preparation to work with students living in poverty. They also felt that communication with both parents and students were essential to school success. Their response indicated that

school counselors have a role in student success. According to the American School Counseling Association (2012) school counselors, as educational leaders, are poised to serve as advocates of student success. These school counselors demonstrated an awareness of student needs and most participants addressed how they advocated on behalf of their students to help meet their basic needs.

Limitations of Study

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection (Hayes & Sigh, 2012). Therefore it was essential that the researcher write about her own experiences and the situations and contexts that have influenced her experiences (Moustakas, 1994). It ensures the researcher's self-awareness throughout the research process, an audit trail was kept that documented each step of the research process and her musings and thoughts related to the study. The researcher also included the use of an external auditor in the process of data analysis to confirm emerging themes in the research. Finally, the researcher conducted in member checking. Research participants were emailed a copy of their individual transcripts for review. The purpose of this process was to ensure that their interviews were representative of their perceptions and views related to the research topic.

Selection of research participants was limited to rural school counselors serving at high poverty schools in one state in the Southern United States. The sample was small, consisting of eight research participants. Other limitations for the study was the lack of diversity in gender and racial representation among research participants. All eight participants identified as female. The racial representation of research participants consisted of seven White participants and one African American/Black participant. This

lack of diversity in gender and race does not accurately represent those serving as school

counselors and potentially limits the transferability of the research study findings.

A final limitation for this study is the use of phone interviews. Due to time constraints

and an effort to make participation more accessible to the schedules of practicing school

counselors, the researcher chose to conduct semi-structured phone interviews. The

researcher was not able to build rapport in person with the participants or observe body

language in relation to their responses to the research questions and this may have limited

the rich, thick description of collected data. However, the use of phone interviews may

have made research participants more at ease than face to face interviews.

Implications for Practice

The emergent themes in this small study imply that school counselors are needed to

serve as advocates, leaders, and systemic change makers. School Counselors are poised

to collaborate with stakeholders in meaningful ways to change both educator perceptions

of poverty and the services offered to students living in poverty. These challenges facing

students that emerged in this study indicate a need for school counselors to serve as

intentional leader advocates who in their leadership role seek to change educator attitudes

and school climate to positively impact the delivery of student services. This can be

accomplished through the development and implementation of a comprehensive school

counseling program that engages all stakeholders in the success of all students. The

emergent student issues presented in this study touch on many of the national issues

facing students living in poverty addressed in the literature review such as food

insecurity, barriers to parental involvement, unmet student needs, and attitudes toward

those living in poverty. School counselors can improve the delivery of services to

students and the climate of their schools by bringing educators, students, parents, and community leaders together to examine school data with the purpose of developing a school counseling program that promotes the success of all students. Since comprehensive school counseling plans are developed by data collection and stakeholder input, programs at rural, high poverty schools would be designed to meet the unique needs of the school and community where school counseling services would be delivered. The school counselor as a leader advocate can serve to engage all stakeholders in the development and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program designed to foster student success. These efforts in turn could potentially increase the advocacy efforts for children and adolescents by concerned stakeholders invested in student and school success.

The American School Counselor Association National Model (2012) already has a blue print in place to guide school counselors in how to develop a comprehensive school counseling program designed to meet the needs of all students. The themes of the national model include leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) calls for the development of a strong foundation for a school counseling program which requires a collaborative effort with parents/guardians, staff, and community to determine what every student will receive as the benefits of the developed school counseling program. This process calls for an examination of the beliefs of the school counselor and those serving on the school counseling team. The ASCA National Model (2012) states, "It is clear that school counselor beliefs about students, families, teachers, and the educational process are crucial in supporting student success. Open, honest dialogue is required to ensure

school counseling teams and departments explore complex issues from many points of view." The national model places value on exploration of attitudes and beliefs. This is a beneficial process in improving delivery of school counseling services and provides school counselors with a way to assist through program development and implementation in improving school culture and delivery of counseling services for all students. According to the ASCA National Model (2012) the process of developing school vision statements to guide the future of school counseling programs and the development of mission statements designed to align with the school district and school mission statements, can lead to development of school counseling programs that meets student needs and also nurtures their growth. From school vision and mission statements, program goals are developed to guide the development of school counseling curriculum for counseling and "closing-the-gap" action plans. School Counseling program goals address specific student outcomes related to areas such as student attendance, student achievement, behavior and school safety through the domains of career, academic, or personal social development (ASCA Model, 2012).

As evidenced in the emergent data in this study, the participating school counselors were aware of student needs from their own interactions with both students and parents, their own observations in the school and community and feedback from other educators in their buildings. They also made efforts to meet student needs and advocated on their behalf. The researcher asserts that through examination of personal beliefs of school stakeholders, collection and examination of data related to the school and community, and development and implementation of intentional comprehensive school counseling plans based on the national model, rural school counselors can effect systemic change

through leadership and advocacy. The findings of this study indicate that the participating rural school counselors in high poverty settings are cognizant of the challenges facing their students, and the importance of the attitudes and supportiveness of parents, educators, and community members in the success of students. School counselors cannot address the needs of students in poverty or effect systemic change in their school settings alone. Reaching out to other stakeholders invested in the school and the community to develop a comprehensive school counseling program is the most effective way to support the success of all students and lead to effective advocacy efforts that can assist in bridging the gap of student needs in rural, high poverty settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research on the perceptions of rural school counselors toward children and adolescents living in poverty is needed. Since this study had a small sample size and research participants were from a limited geographic area, there would be benefit to extending this study to include all Southern States to further explore perceptions in this region. An expanded study would also offer the opportunity for a more diverse sample of participants in the areas of racial and gender representation. Also asking if comprehensive school counseling plans are in place at the research participants' schools would also provide further information about program delivery.

Conclusion

The research participants were aware of the challenges facing students living in poverty. The participating school counselors addressed challenges in meeting the needs of students such as lack of student and community resources and a need for more parental and community involvement. With the apparent need for more support in the

implementation of counseling services, none of the participants discussed the development of a comprehensive school counseling program even though some mentioned the value of professional development and community experiences in preparing new counselors and changing educator attitudes. The researcher asserts that this could indicate a need for professional development related to development and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs with advocacy for high poverty populations in mind. Training related to American Counseling Association Advocacy competencies for school counselors would also be beneficial. This type of training would benefit both practicing school counselors and school counselors-in-training. More training in these areas could potentially serve to improve the delivery of school counseling services in rural, high poverty areas and also prevent rural school counselors from feeling overwhelmed and isolated delivering services to children and adolescents living in poverty where there is great need, limited resources, and geographic barriers to community support services

Chapter 5

Manuscript

Significance of Poverty for Children and Adolescents

Poverty affects a significant number of individuals in the United States. Currently 45 million individuals live at or below the poverty line (Gongloff, 2014). Even though poverty has fallen from 15 percent since 2012, the poverty rate is still higher than it was at the beginning of the recession (Gongloff, 2014). Only 47.7% of adults in the United States have full-time employment and even though the rate of unemployed has fallen, many new jobs available are part-time which means diminished benefits, lower pay, and lack of job security (Zuckerman, 2014). The number of individuals unemployed for more than six months is approximately three million, which is above the historical average (Zuckerman, 2014). According to the Urban League, poverty is high among the unemployed (Nichols, & Callen, 2011). Many children and adolescents in the United States are living in homes where parents are struggling to find employment. The number of children living in homes with parents who have been unemployed at least six months has tripled since the beginning of the recession in 2007. Without at least one parent employed at a fulltime job, children have an increased chance of experiencing poverty (Mitchell, 2014). However, many parents lack the skills and education to secure full-time employment and instead have to seek part-time employment that does not provide stable and adequate income (Kids Count Data Book, 2014). In the current economic climate,

many families are struggling to meet basic needs and this results in children and adolescents living in poverty.

Defining Poverty

There is not an agreed upon definition of poverty offered to create a comprehensive picture of this complex issue. The U.S. government uses the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy to define poverty. This definition is based on a set of money income thresholds varied by family composition and size to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is lower than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered to live in poverty. The official poverty thresholds are not varied geographically, but rather are updated to reflect inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition uses money income prior to taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as Medicaid, public housing, and food stamps),   (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This definition offers a standard for measuring family poverty income. When addressing poverty in the school setting free and reduced lunch eligibility is often used as data to identify students potentially living in poverty. Free lunch eligibility is defined as students from households with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty income threshold. Reduced lunch eligibility is defined as students from households with an income between 130 percent and up to 185 percent of the poverty threshold (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). These free and reduced lunch definitions are often used when identifying students with low socio-economic status when looking at standardized assessment data and school attendance.

The aforementioned definitions provide an economic snapshot of what poverty looks like but it does not provide a complete view of what living in poverty encompasses. The definition used by (Jenson, 2009) provides a descriptive of what poverty encompasses. Jenson describes poverty as a debilitating and chronic condition that results from multiple synergistic risk factors and impacts the body, mind and soul.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (2015), poverty is defined as having income which is below a federally determined threshold. These poverty thresholds were developed during the 1960's and are annually adjusted to reflect inflation. The thresholds represent the Federal Government's estimate of the point below which a family of a given size has total income that is not sufficient to meet basic needs. Income amounts necessary to meet basic needs are set by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides examples of what the poverty line would be for different family configurations. For example a family of five with two adults and three children would be at the poverty line at $28,252 annually. These poverty thresholds are set for families based on size and composition. Those who work with the homeless, hungry, under-paid and uninsured know this is an insufficient measure of poverty (Abramsky, 2013). Individuals below these thresholds are faced with economic challenges in meeting their basic needs to live.

Poverty is particularly pervasive for certain populations and regions. The groups most impacted by poverty are women, where 15.8% live in poverty compared to 13.1% of men, Blacks and Hispanics, with 27% of Blacks and 23% of Hispanics living at or below the poverty line, and children with 19.9% living in poverty, and Southerners and Westerners who have the highest regional poverty rates (Cook, 2014). According to the

U.S. Census Bureau, the South had the largest proportion of people living in poverty at 27.4% (Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013.)

Children and Adolescents Living in Poverty

Poverty affects a significant number of children and adolescents in the United States. Children comprise 24% of the population but make up 34% of all the individuals living in poverty. One in five children come from poor families. Nineteen percent of adolescents aged 12 to 17 also come from poor families (Addy, Englehardt, & Skinner, 2013). These numbers have the potential to be even more significant in areas of high poverty concentration. Students living in poverty are more likely to attend schools offering poorer quality instruction and teachers with less experience. (Ametea, & West-Olatunja, 2007). Thus, students who already are in need of extra support have less positive resources available to them.

High rates of poverty within communities increases the likelihood of students dropping out of school. In communities with high poverty there are significant levels of unemployment, poor health, substance use, family instability, welfare dependency and crime. Disadvantaged neighborhoods influence the development of children and adolescents due to a lack of resources such as playgrounds, parks after school programs, and negative peer influences (Rumberger, 2013). Issues such as transportation, family care, and health care, often lead to high tardy and absenteeism rates for students with low income putting them at rick academically (Jenson, 2009). Low income neighborhoods are also more likely to have lower quality municipal, social, and local services (Jenson, 2009). Children living in high poverty neighborhoods do not have the same access to services and community support as their more affluent peers and these deficits have the

potential to impact performance in school and long term success. School counselors

working with children and adolescents must be cognizant of the needs of students living

in poverty. Perceptions of children and adolescents living in poverty has the potential to

affect the delivery of services.

Rural Poverty

Rural poverty presents different issues than urban poverty. Those living in poverty in

urban settings often have more access to support services. According to the National

Advisory Committee on Rural Health (2009), rural families have less access to services

due to farther distances to travel and geographic isolation. The American Housing Survey

conducted by the United States Census Bureau (2008) found that availability of public

transportation diminished as communities became smaller. Only 11% of rural survey

respondents indicated they had public transportation near their home. The isolation of

rural areas and distances to services might serve as barriers to those living in poverty.

Perceptions and Practice

The American School Counselor Association National Model (2012) calls upon

school counselors to develop school counseling programs based on the themes of

leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change. Development and

implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs assist in fostering

academic, career and personal/social success for all students. Negative perceptions of

school counselors toward children and adolescents living in poverty could negate the

effectiveness of counseling program delivery so there is a need to explore the attitudes of

educators toward this underserved population. Cole and Grothaus (2014) conducted a

phenomenological study related to the perceptions of urban school counselors toward

low-income families. There were ten participants in the study with experience ranging from elementary to the high school level. In the finding of this study six themes emerged from the data that consisted of:

   (a) perceptions of family characteristics and environment, (b) perceptions of family attitudes and actions regarding education, (c) awareness of obstacles and challenges for families, (d) Struggles with empathizing with low-income families, (e) choice of roles working with low income families, and (f) personal feelings and reflections in response to experiences with low income families.

  The authors reported that all participants in the study recognized a need for more reflection and self-awareness in regard to their work with low-income families. They also reported negative perceptions related to low-income characteristics, their environments and/or children's academic success and growth. The majority of participants negatively described the environmental conditions of low-income families and perceived families as lacking in parenting skills. The study also revealed that over half of participants had perceptions that family members of students were unmotivated. The authors shared these findings and expressed that the participating counselors at urban schools felt rewarded by their work but were also frustrated with low-income families. They discussed how the internal and external struggle of these school counselors could be due to a lack of knowledge of best practices in the literature related to working with low-income families. The authors recommended further research and training in the areas of self-awareness and multicultural competencies.

   In a review of the professional literature, little has been written to examine the perceptions of rural school counselors toward children and adolescents living in poverty.

In an extensive review of the literature the only qualitative study related to the experiences of rural school counselors explored the lived experiences of rural school counselors as social justice advocates (Grimes, Haskins, and Paisley, 2013). In this study, exploratory qualitative phenomenological research was conducted to examine the perceptions of rural school counselors toward children and adolescents living in poverty. This study provided an opportunity to better understand the lived experiences for rural school counselors working in high poverty settings (Creswell, 2013).

Research Design

Phenomenology was chosen as the methodical approach to guide this study. The research study was designed to describe the common meanings for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The researcher collected data from school rural school counselors who worked at high poverty schools. She chose this approach because of interest in moving beyond the questions of "what" and "how many" to explore "why" and "how" things happen as they do (Miles, & Hubberman, 1994). This approach was chosen to understand how rural school counselor perceive children and adolescents living in poverty in their natural setting. The aim of the study was to, "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2013).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to answer the central research question, "What are rural school counselors' perceptions of children and adolescents living in poverty? Inquiry into the lived experiences of rural school counselors was conducted using a sub-set of five semi-structured research questions which included: 1. How is poverty defined?, 2. What

challenges are faced in meeting the needs of students living in poverty?, 3. What recommendations do rural counselors make concerning the preparation of new counselors to work with students living in poverty?, 4. What are perceived as the attitudes of educational professionals in schools toward students living in poverty? , and 5. What are the challenges faced by high poverty schools that are different than low poverty schools?

Method

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of eight rural school counselors employed at high poverty schools in a state in the Southern region of the United States. The United States Census Bureau (2010) defines "rural" as all population, housing, and territory not included in an urban area. The number of research participants that completed the study fell within the suggested range of five to twenty-five participants (Creswell 1998). Data was collected until saturation of themes was achieved (Glaser, & Strauss, 1967). The school districts employing the participating school counselors had at least 70% of students receiving free or reduced lunch.

Of the school counselors who participated in the study, three were elementary counselors, two were K-12 counselors, one was a middle/junior high school counselor, and two were high school counselors. All of the participants were female. Seven of the participants were White (non-Hispanic and one was Black/African American. The years of experience as school counselors ranged from 3 to 14 years. Criterion sampling was used to ensure that all research participants were rural school counselors in school systems where 70% or more of the students received free or reduced lunch and snowball sampling was used to identify cases of interest from other research participants (Creswell,

2013). Research participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities in this study.

Data Collection

Two types of data collection were utilized in this study which consisted of use of a Survey Monkey survey to collect demographic information and semi-structured phone interviews to address the research question. Research participants were recruited using a state level counseling list-serve to and emails were also sent to public emails of school counselors in the state where the study was conducted. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit other qualified participants. The demographic survey was used to determine if the research participants' self-identified as meeting the criterion of the study, the race and gender identification of the research participants, the number of years employed as a school counselor and the grade level classification of the school where the counselors worked. The second form of data collection was audio-taped semi-structured phone interviews with research participants. Phone interviews were conducted and transcribed. Then research participants were offered the opportunity to complete in member checking to ensure the accuracy and credibility of their accounts (Creswell, 2013). Participants were provided the opportunity to email the researcher any changes they felt needed to be made to their transcripts. Four of the eight participants responded to the email to verify they completed in member checking. Only one participant requested some minor grammatical changes to her transcript. The requested changes were made to the participant's transcript.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study followed the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method which was addressed by Moustakas (1994) and adapted by Creswell (2013). To begin data analysis, the researcher described her own experiences with the phenomenon using epoche/bracketing in an effort to set aside her own personal experiences (Moustaka 1994). Then she read and re-read transcriptions both individually and across transcriptions to develop a list of significant codes using horizonalization. The researcher then grouped the significant statements into larger meaning units which had emerged as themes and sub-themes in the data. Then she wrote a textural description of what the participating rural school counselors experienced and a structural description of how they experienced the phenomenon. Finally, the researcher wrote a composite description which combined both textural and structural descriptions to capture the essence of the experience in the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013).

The external auditor also reviewed transcriptions to identify themes and sub-themes in both individual interviews and across interviews. The external auditor assisted in confirming the finding in the study.

Strategies to Increase Trustworthiness

The researcher used triangulation to increase the validity of the study. This process involved corroborating evidence from multiple sources to shed light on a perspective or themes (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used two sources of data collection, a demographic survey and phone interviews to collect meaningful data from participants.

A second strategy used to increase the credibility of the study was in member checking. Research participants were given the opportunity to review collected data and

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either confirm or challenge their validity and their responses (Johnson, & Waterfield, 2004).

The researcher also used an audit trail to increase the validity of the research findings, An audit trail was used to outline decisions made at each step of the research process and to provide a rationale for the interpretive and methodological judgements made by the researcher (Creswell, 2013.) The researcher meticulously documented her thoughts and reflections and took notes throughout each step of the research process.

Findings

Through the data analysis process six themes and eleven sub-themes emerged from the data collected. These emergent thematic categories are provided in chart three.

Chart 3

Emergent Thematic Categories

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Definition of poverty	1.a Lack of resources
2. Challenges related to serving students living in poverty	2.a Meeting student needs 2.b Making parental contact 2.c Parental access to transportation 2.d Student awareness of poverty
3. Recommendations for new counselors	3.a Recommendations of professional development and community experiences 3.b Recommendation of relationship building with parents and students
4. Perceived attitudes of educational professionals toward students in poverty	4.a Students in poverty need extra support
5. Perceived challenges of high poverty schools that differ from low poverty schools	5.a Low parental involvement 5.b Lack of resources
6. Pride in Advocacy	

Theme One: Poverty Defined

In the first semi-structured interview question, all participating school counselors were asked to define poverty. This question was posed to explore how school counselors attributed poverty based on their own experiences. From this line of inquiry, the sub-theme of lack of resources emerged. All eight school counselors perceived poverty as a lack of the basic resources needed. What they identified as the gap in resources attributed to poverty had variation but it was clearly a shared sub-theme across all interviews. Some defined poverty generally, where others specified their definition to students, parents, or families. These differences may be accounted to the different schools and communities in which the participating school counselors worked. This sub-theme of lack of resources

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was found across definitions provided by all eight research participants from different schools and grade level configurations. Beverly's response provides an example of lack of resources as a common theme in the interview responses.

Well let me see… I think maybe it looks different for different people, but in our system. I would say poverty is… we have kids who can't afford lunch at school breakfast at school. Those are the kids we feed a lot of times. Poverty is also those kids in our school who don't have transportation. We have lots of times parents that can't maybe be as involved as they want because they don't have transportation. They [students] sometimes don't have clothing that fits. They maybe are in our backpack program at school, where they receive food. A lot of times those parents are unemployed… just examples of what I've seen in our school as far as poverty goes.

Paige provided a definition of poverty based on observation of several different factors. She perceived that poverty was defined as an examination of socio-economic status and the environment in which students lived. She also defined students living in poverty as those who qualified for free or reduced cost lunches. Paige then discussed school screening for homelessness based on federal law as another way to define poverty. She defined poverty through factors that could be measured through school data.

Um, well, that's a good question. I guess you know, you look at several different areas. One is you know, their [students] economic status, I suppose and then I guess that's the biggest way to define it, but you know, when we're looking at kids, we're talking about you know…if our kids are in poverty or not is…one free and reduced lunch We look at that. We have a lot of students that come in... if they don't have a home of their own we have the McKinney-Vento Act to help determine if they are homeless or

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not.

Paige continued the sub-theme of students with a lack of resources in her definition of poverty. She provided a definition with her school used to determine those who were living in poverty. Paige looked to her school data to determine if students were in need of services provided by looking at who received free or reduced lunch and screened for students who might be homeless. This helped her to determine the specific supports needed to help students to achieve success. Her approach appears to be informed by the American School Counselor Association National Model (2012) which calls for school counselors to use student and school data to monitor student progress and determine what is needed for all students to achieve success.

Theme Two: Challenges Related to Meeting the Need of Students in Poverty

In the second interview question research participants were asked, "What are the challenges you face in meeting the needs of students living in poverty?" Across responses most participating school counselors shared an interest in assisting students and families living in poverty in making connections to needed resources. They perceived the need of students and families to often be greater than the resources they had available. Some participants also perceived parental contact and parental transportation issues for those living in poverty as barriers to engaging parents in the education of their children. Some of the participating school counselors were also troubled by student awareness of their poverty situations in the school setting and expressed concern about what those experiences were like for students.

Three supporting sub-themes related to the challenges of meeting student needs emerged. These sub-themes included the following areas of challenge for rural school counselors in

high poverty schools: meeting student needs, making parental contact, parental access to transportation, and student awareness of poverty.

Most of the participating school counselors described **meeting student needs** as a significant challenge. These participants perceived the unmet needs of students as a challenge because of the gap between need and resources for their students. They also felt students were negatively impacted in the school setting due to unmet needs.

Cindy perceived that student success was negatively affected when the students had stressors related to their poverty situations. She was concerned as a counselor about how to help students with these issues that might be barriers to school success.

Right, it's like the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs. If those basic needs are not met, then it's hard for you to focus and do anything else until you know that there's security and those basic needs are met. You know, the food, the shelter, the clothing, if you don't know where you're going to sleep every night or you're moved from place to place, which some of our students do, because the family can't secure a home, they really are not able to function because they have not got sleep that they need at night. Why study and learn about what they're learning if it doesn't seem as important as trying to find a place to live, and to eat and to function.

Cindy spoke with passion about the challenges facing her students and later expressed uncertainty about how to best meet student needs. She saw the issues facing students and shared that she was not always sure how to best meet student needs.

Paige also perceived the unmet needs of students in poverty as a challenge. She also discussed how she had funds in place in anticipation of the needs of her students.

Well you know in the beginning of the school year, you know, school supplies. We

have a lot of students who need clothing, shoes…We have issues with kids that are not able to pay for field trips and stuff. We have a needy fund that we use funds from for things like that.

 Based on her experiences, Paige had a plan to address unmet student needs at the start of the school year. Not all of the research participants had these same resources available which served as a challenge in meeting student needs.

Madison, also viewed unmet student needs as a significant challenge. In her interview she described the challenges of the need of students being greater than the resources available. With a tone of frustration she said, "…There are just so many of them, and getting them connected to resources." Madison later state she had community support but not enough to offset student need.

Amelia, who worked with early elementary students, perceived that young children who have always lived in poverty might not understand that their needs are not being met. She also discussed having to ask very specific questions to check on the well-being of these students to determine if their basic needs were being met.

You have to ask them very specific questions, "Did you eat last night?" You can't just say "yesterday", or "last week", or anything like that because a lot of times our pre-k and kindergarten students don't have a concept of time. So they don't understand that they didn't eat. It has to be very specific…sometimes we use holidays. "When was the last time you got new shoes? Was it before or after Christmas?" Things like that. So, it's difficult at this age to figure out the things we need to know, because they just don't know what everybody else has.

Amelia made efforts to understand the needs of her students so she could further assist them. According to the American School Counselor Association National Model (2012) school counselors, as educational leaders, are poised to serve as advocates of student success. These school counselors demonstrated an awareness of student needs and several addressed how they advocated on behalf of students to address their unmet needs.

The third sub-theme that emerged from theme two was making **parental contact**. This sub-theme emerged as the data reflected perceived challenges on the part of the participating school counselors related to reaching parents of high poverty students by phone. Ray and Grant (2010) emphasized the importance of making phone contact with parents when possible as part of being a culturally responsive school. These authors cautioned educators to be aware that families living in poverty may not have phones or may frequently have their phone service terminated. Most of the participants perceived the challenge of making phone contact as a barrier to engaging parents in the education of their children.

Beverly perceived making parental phone contact as one of the biggest challenges she faced in meeting the needs of the students at her school and also recognized lack of funds made having phone service difficult for some high poverty families. "A lot of times money ran out, you couldn't get ahold of the parents because there wouldn't be any minutes on their phones. Those types of things where the phone had been cut off."

Katherine also perceived making parental contact by phone to be a challenge in meeting student needs.

A lot of times getting in contact with them [parents]…maybe they don't have a

phone or we try to call a relative if it's something like discipline or just in general

trying to call them to see what we can find out… what to do if the child needs to ride

somebody else's bus, whatever, It's just the fact we can't contact the parents of

students with low income a lot of times due to not having good phone numbers, etc.

For some of the research participants there was a shared perception that making

contact with the parents of students living in poverty was a significant challenge. Some

participants perceived this as an economic barrier for families in poverty. All who

addressed this challenge shared concerns about not being able to reach parents about

educational and other school specific needs of students.

The third sub-theme that emerged from the second research was the challenge of

parental access to transportation to the school. Limited access to resources for low

income families have been linked to parental involvement (Reglin, King, Losike-Sedimo,

& Ketterer, 2013; Williams, & Sanchez, 2013). Some of the interviewed research

participants revealed that school counselors had difficulty reaching parents of high

poverty students by phone, they also encountered parents who faced barriers in finding

transportation to the school. These two issues were perceived by some research

participants to limit parental involvement of high poverty families in the education of

their children.

Katherine who served as a high school counselor at a K-12 school, perceived parental

transportation as being a barrier to communication related to student planning.

This is fresh for me because we've been doing this the last few weeks, just trying to

get parents to come to the school, talk to us about student grades, and making their

schedules for the next school year. Transportation is a huge issue for them. We've had

to postpone several times for several people because of their transportation. That is one

of the big deals in getting here to do that kind of thing.

Madison, a high school counselor, also perceived transportation for both parents and students living in poverty as a significant challenge. She also shared her observations of how students and parents at her school struggled to find transportation.

Many of our parents and students don't have cars, and transportation, and when they do have to get a ride somewhere, they usually have to end up paying someone, which they don't have the money to do. If they don't have a car, you know, they try to get ride with someone else, and they expect them to pay them for the ride.

Families living in high poverty, rural areas face challenges of potentially living long distances from schools and other agencies that can offer support to their families. Some of the school counselors in the study faced challenges in meeting with parents due to barriers to transportation. According to the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services (2009) rural families have less access to services due to farther distances to travel and geographic isolation. The school counselors who recognize parental access to transportation as a significant challenge for those living in poverty may be more cognizant of the need to remove barriers to parental contact.

Student Awareness of Poverty

The fourth sub-theme to emerge was the challenge of **student awareness of poverty**. Some participating school counselors perceived meeting the social/emotional needs of students living in poverty to be a significant challenge in their work as counselors. Allison shared a story of the treatment of one of her students living in poverty, and how it opened her eyes to student experiences.

We even had a student this year, he was in tears one afternoon. So I called him down

and I was talking to him. I asked him what's wrong and he said, "the other kids were

talking about my clothes", and I said "What do you mean?" and he said that he was in

used clothes that were too tight for him and that was all he had in dress code and

also said, "They're talking about my clothes and saying look at him, look at what he's

wearing." He said, "But this is all I have." So this was eye opening for me.

Jessica expressed awareness that sometimes students in poverty are bullied by peers

due to differences in appearance, "Bullying comes along with it because it becomes more

of…even though our school is in uniform, they'll [students] talk about the shoes or their

hair or something of that nature." She felt that even though the uniforms were in place to

decrease student differences there were subtle differences that still set students apart. She

also later asserted that part of her role as a school counselor was to promote equity among

students.

A lack of basic resources may constrain the ability to purchase acceptable clothing and

to engage in peer activities. Students perceived as "different" may be stigmatized and

isolated by their peers. These experiences may decrease the opportunities for building

and maintaining peer relationships (Esmon, 2001). School counselors who advocate for

students in addressing their social/emotional needs can potentially help to change the

social experiences of students in the school setting.

Recommendations for New Counselors

The third semi-structured interview question asked counselors, What

recommendations do you make concerning the preparation of new counselors to work

with students living in poverty?' The emergent theme in the data was rich, thick, detailed

school counselor recommendations for new counselors working with students in poverty.

Two significant supporting sub-themes emerged from the data. The first recommendation was for new counselors to participate in professional development and to seek out community experiences where they work in an effort to understand the students they serve. The second recommendation to emerge as a sub-theme was engagement in relationship building with parents and students.

The first sub-theme that emerged was the recommendation for **professional development and community experiences** for new counselors related to working in high poverty settings. Some of the participants in the study made suggestions of how to prepare new counselors to work in high poverty settings. These recommendation for professional development aligned with the American School Counselor Association Competencies found in the ASCA National Model (2012) which were designed to assist school counselors in self-assessment of their counseling competencies and the development of individual professional development plans. These interviewees recognized the need for specific professional development related to school counselors working in high poverty settings

The recommendation that new counselors explore the communities in which their students live was also suggested. Steen and Noguera (2010) stated that schools that are successful in educating low income students and minorities explore both internal and external factors. This recommendation indicated recognition on the part of some research participants that student issues cannot be addressed within the school alone, but also requires an understanding of where students live outside of the school setting.

The following respondents provided recommendations for new counselors related to the importance of community experiences and professional development.

Amelia suggested practicum experiences at high poverty schools, volunteer work in programs that serve the poor and the preparation of a notebook of resources for new counselors.

> The best preparation that I can think of that they could have, is they have to do some sort of practicum in an impoverished area. Because I…did my internship and everything in this school system that I'm at. So, I knew what I was coming into but if I had gotten… if I had done my, all my internships and everything at a place that never sees need, or rarely sees need, I won't say, never, but rarely sees need, and then I got a job at an impoverished place, I wouldn't have this prior knowledge and it would be a big culture shock. Other than that, I mean, have them volunteer at Salvation Army, and you know do volunteer work.

Amelia also made a suggestion for new counselors related to the development of resources. "Yes, at least discover the resources, and maybe leave with a notebook or something of all the resources they could call upon if they needed help." Amelia felt that if new counselors had never worked in high poverty areas before they would benefit from practicum training in high poverty schools and volunteer work at an agency that serves those with low income and she also thought that development of a notebook of resources would be useful to those new to working with students in poverty.

Beverly recommended visiting the communities in which your students live to increase understanding of student circumstances.

> I think real life situations and even something that would be good for new counselors, if they knew where they were going to be working, is to drive around. Just take a look at where

some of their kids live in the community that they serve. That will even open your eyes to a lot I think.

Paige attended a both a poverty simulation and professional development training related to poverty. She suggested both of these types of professional development opportunities for new counselors. She described what she perceived as the benefit of the poverty simulation and professional development experience. For the poverty simulation she described a mock situation where individuals at the training were given cards with the roles of different family members living in poverty and were then paired off into family groups. She described how each family in the simulation had try to make a limited budget work with barriers to doing this built into the simulation. Paige described this experience as beneficial, "The training was great… I think all schools should have it. It makes you think about the students you work with that live in poverty and what they are faced with at home." Paige perceived that this type of training held the potential to change the perspective of those working with students living in poverty and explained what she saw as the value of the training.

Well, you know, I think a lot of times, sometimes, you see teachers and they get really frustrated, they…in their minds think, well parents aren't doing anything to help their kids and they're not helping them study at night and they're [students] not getting this. But really it's a little more in-depth than that. You know, we often just want to blame parents for the problems, but sometimes they are just doing the best they can and I think getting a different perspective and seeing things differently is very helpful.

Paige also discussed the value of professional development related to poverty based on her own learning experiences.

I went to this workshop summer before last and it was on working with children in

poverty and one of the things I learned is the way those in poverty process information

differently. You know we did this little survey, and you had to answer as many

questions as you could

and they were all, there was a list under poverty, there was a list under middle class,

and there was a list under, like the rich. And it was simple things like, "Do you know

where to get the best clothing deals?", "Do you know where to get this or

that?"…And then when I answered all of those questions, I was clearly a middle class

person. I could answer every one of those questions… but you put me in poverty and I

might know two or three things on that list.

Paige expressed belief that counselors and other educators could potentially have

perceptions changed by participating in activities that make individuals think about what

it is like to live in poverty. "But it [the training] really helps you to understand how

people process information. You know a lot of times we want to punish those who are

poor or who are in poverty, and that's not really the best approach."

Most of the research participants asserted that new counselors would either benefit

from community experiences or professional development specific to working with

students in poverty.

The second sub-theme that emerged was the recommendation to take time **building

relationships with parents and students**. Relationship building was recommended by

half of the research participants. The importance of collaboration with both students and

parents is emphasized in the ASCA National Model (2012) which calls for school

counselors to collaborate with stakeholders both inside and outside of the school. The

ASCA model places value on school counselors understanding the needs of both students and their families as part of the development of a comprehensive school counseling plan.

Jessica spoke about the importance of opening the lines of communication with both parents and students.

Well the recommendations I would probably make or that we do from time to time is actually, the main one is really parent contact. Trying to open up parent contact and just letting them know that we're [counselors] are there for them for anything. Not even just the parents but in the counseling lessons, letting the kids know if they're in need they can come to you.

Katherine also recommended to new counselors take the time to build relationships with parents. She said, "For new counselors, I think that meeting the parents, whether it be at a community function or church function, or whatever, that just meeting them would be helpful in learning about their lifestyles and that kind of thing." Katherine recommended that new counselors get out in the community to meet the parents of students and try to understand their circumstances.

Katherine further expanded on her perception that there is value in taking time to build relationships with both parents and students.

If you don't know the parents or the situations of the students, it can sometimes be hard to get them to open up. I have struggled with this myself because of being new to this school and community. I don't know everybody that walks in the door like most people around here do. I feel like I'm an outsider at times. I've tried to get to know students and families to gain their trust so they'll at least talk to me about any of their needs or whatever. So, I feel that it is important to get to know students and families,

not so much so you know everything about students and families. However, it is important to know enough for them to feel comfortable to come to you and say, "Hey, can I talk to you about this?"

Katherine then expanded upon her response and made the recommendation that counselors should be there for their students. "Just being there for students for whatever reason. If they just want to sit and talk, it doesn't have to be a problem just be there for them. I, guess, just communicate with them, not so much about problems but about their everyday life. "

Some research participants recommended building relationships with both parents and students. With these participants, value was placed on making connections with students and their families. The school counselors participating in the study wanted to pass their lived experiences and knowledge on to new counselors.

Theme Four: Attitudes of Educational Professionals Toward Students Living in Poverty

Question four asked research participants what is perceived as the attitudes of educational professionals toward students living in poverty. Across interviews there was divergence as to whether attitudes of other educational professionals were positive or negative. Interestingly, despite the perceived differences in what might be attributed as the specific attitudes toward those in poverty, a majority of research participants reported that most educational professionals recognized that **students in poverty needed extra support**. These research participants also expressed belief that most educators provided support to students living in poverty whatever their personal attitudes toward poverty might be. These findings may indicate a perception among participants that most

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educators want to serve students in poverty but may not know how to best meet their needs. Jenson (2009) said many middle class or non-minority teachers do not understand why poor students act the way they do at school. He asserted that cultural knowledge and empathy were essential to being able to reach these students. These findings indicate a belief among participants that most educators try to meet student needs but may need training to be more effective in delivering services in a way that is sensitive to student needs.

Paige expressed concern that sometimes when help is offered to students it comes with judgement of the students receiving help.

Well I mean, living in the South, you have a lot of Christian people and they really do want to help people, they care but at the same time they don't understand it [poverty]. And so they'll give freely, but then there's criticism that goes along with it.

Paige expanded on how she perceived the differences in attitudes sometimes attached to providing help to students in poverty.

I mean, people just judge. You know? So I think people in poverty, should not be looked at as one big group that is the same. I think you have to isolate it. I don't think you can use the broad term of poverty and apply it to everyone. I think you have to look at it on an individual basis, but often times I hear comments like, "Well, you know, we've done this and we bought this and they don't even wear it." Just things like that and you have some that don't. You have some that'll just continue to give as much as they can but there's a stigma attached to it I'm sure.

This response provided is an example of how educators may need training related to best practices for working with students living in poverty.

An example of this is provided by Allison. Her school participated in a poverty simulation training and after the training she observed a change in attitudes among the educators at her school.

> After the poverty simulation, I noticed the teachers were coming to me and asking, "Ok, I think this student is in poverty, I think they don't have anybody helping them at home, what can I do to help them?" One of our teachers would stay after school and help the students that might be living in poverty. He would help them because he knew they were probably not getting that help at home. And he would stay and sometimes he would stay till 4:30 or 5:30 just to try to help them get their homework up. He would even help them with history and he was a math teacher and he helped them with history, language, and science if they needed it.

Allison continued to share in her response how the poverty training helped the educators at her school to realize there was a need to provide extra support for students living in poverty.

> So, I think that really opened up the eyes of our teachers…that we really do live in a high poverty area and that we've got to provide other ways. You know, if a student is not doing their homework, then they [teachers] might have to provide some kind remediation or an opportunity to be doing homework during the school day rather than sending everything home. Because like I said, these children may be going home and they may be doing other chores and not be able to get to their homework.

Some of the research participants in this study perceived that most educators despite their personal beliefs about poverty want to help students. Training and school culture

building are perhaps ways to change both individual and systemic attitudes toward students living in poverty and in turn improve delivery of student services.

Theme Five: Perceived Challenges Facing High Poverty Schools that Differ From Low Poverty Schools

  Question five in the study asked participants what were the challenges facing high poverty schools that were different from low poverty schools. Most research participants expressed belief that they faced more difficulties in meeting the needs of their students than schools that were not experiencing parental and community poverty. Two sub-themes emerged in the data related to the perceived differences between high and low poverty schools.

  The first sub-theme to emerge was the perception that high poverty schools had more challenges with low **parental involvement** than more affluent schools.

  Beverly disclosed in her interview that she left a position as a school counselor at a low poverty school to work at her current school. She was able to draw specific comparisons between the two situations based on her personal experiences in the two different school settings. She first described what it was like in a low poverty setting.

  When you are in a low poverty school, most of the time you have kids that are coming in ready to learn. Their needs are met. Their parents are very involved, their clothing fits, and their bellies are full. You can get a whole lot more accomplished if the children come in that way.

  Beverly then contrasted her past experiences with the challenges she faced working at a high poverty school. She viewed lack of parental involvement as being a major challenge to the success of students living in poverty.

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When you have students from a high poverty situation, you have so much more you

have to tackle before we can get our day even started. That seems to be a big, huge

difference to me. When you have a lack of parental involvement, when you have no

one at home that is able to care or discipline bad behavior.

Amelia also discussed the challenge of lack of parental involvement at the high

poverty school where she worked. She expressed belief that some parents did not want to

come and others could not due to their work. She also felt that sometimes there was a

lack of understanding about why parents where not more involved in their children's

education.

In high poverty schools it's hard to get parents to have the time to come in. It's

sometimes because they don't want to come but sometimes it's because they have

be at work. If they don't come in, I mean, if they come to school instead of being at

work, they're gonna get a point, and if you get three points, you get fired and that kind

of stuff. You have kids that are coming to school and their parents are coming

through the car line late because they got off from work at 7:00, ran home to get the

kids, and are bringing them to school, and they are barely making it before the time.

So it, parental involvement is a big deal. That is something people just do not try to

understand.

In this passage Amelia addressed the issue of parents working in settings that do not

allow for parents to be at the school during the traditional school day. If they miss work

the parents are potentially at-risk of losing their jobs. At her high poverty school this

served as a barrier to some parents being able to be more involved in their children's

education.

Madison also briefly touched on the issue of parental involvement at her school. She said,

"The parents are not normally involved. And some of them [parents] cannot help them [students] with their homework." She also talked about how she could not even imagine what it would be like to work at low poverty school. Her impressions of what that would be like seemed to be shaped by information shared from others.

> I mean I have worked at another school, it was around 90% free or reduced lunch. It was almost total poverty, so that's what I've worked with. I can't imagine what it would be like to work in a low poverty school. Now, I hear from some of my friends working in low poverty systems that the student's aren't, sometimes the students are disconnected in low poverty schools, but their parents are more connected, like where you have helicopter parents.

She had the perception that in low poverty schools the parents might be more engaged and involved than the students. Even though parental involvement emerged as a key difference between high and low poverty schools, the attribution to the cause of lack of parental involvement was varied. In this study reasons offered for lack of parental involvement at high poverty schools presented included lack of desire on the part of parents, work conditions that served as a barrier to being able to be involved, and shame and embarrassment on the part of parents.

The second sub-theme to emerge from the data was **lack of resources**. Nearly all the participating school counselors perceived a lack of resources to be a significant difference between high poverty and low poverty schools. Respondents indicated their schools struggled to meet student needs even in communities where there were efforts of support.

Community and parental poverty as well as the challenges of being in rural communities were perceived to affect the sources of support for high poverty schools. Katherine shared that she felt her students lacked in support from the community to meet their educational needs. She discussed how being in a rural area with only a few local businesses, it was difficult to find resources to support the school outside of state funds and how this was different for wealthier schools in metropolitan areas.

As far as education goes, I think there is a need for better resources, technology for one thing, up-to-date technology., and that kind of thing that students could use. In our rural area we do not have industries that might be able to donate money to provide things beyond state funding which is never enough to keep up.

When asked to expand on this response, Katherine provided more insight into her observations.

We have, I think, two businesses here in our community. One is a gas station, and one is a garage to get your oil changed. Of course they help the school, but if you were in say, Birmingham, Alabama, where you've got all these mass businesses, and everything, property taxes and everything that money comes from for schools, they probably have more than, well lots more than we have. Also, with poverty, as far as having resources, what we have here at school related to technology is what many of our students have access to because they may not have it at home.

Beverly, who once worked in a low poverty school, drew comparisons between the level of resources available in her low poverty school and compared it to the challenges of working in a high poverty school. She praised the efforts of her community to meet

student needs but she expressed that even with support she still struggled to meet student needs.

Now I feel like when I was in an area of low poverty, we had families who had the means an the ability to just bring extra things up to school and pay for children who needed things or whatever. I think it was different of course. Here we have a large number of kids in poverty. Sometimes it is harder to meet those needs well because there are so many, but I think our community does a really good job of trying to do that.

The research participants provided descriptors of how their high poverty schools did not have the same resources as low poverty schools. Each counselor interviewed faced different circumstances at their schools but were faced with the common issue of having a lack of resources to meet all the needs at their school. There was a common theme of being faced with more need than resources available. These responses voiced the frustration of school counselors with the lack of resources available and the desire to have more to offer students in their schools.

Pride in Advocacy

The final emergent theme in this study was pride in advocacy. The rural school counselors who participated in this study shared the challenges of working in high poverty settings, but they also showed tremendous pride in advocacy for students and families living in poverty. This theme of **pride in advocacy** provided insight into the ways these school counselors worked to meet student needs despite underfunding and lack of resources. They shared their lived experiences as counselors working with stakeholders to improve the circumstances of their students and their school's efforts to engage parents. The counselors also described networking with community members, and

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the programs their schools have in place to address specific student needs. In their reflections the counselors shared insights such as the need to be flexible in scheduling parent events to meet the needs of all families, and the importance of community support to meet student needs.

Beverly shared how her school engaged in conversations about getting all parents more involved with the school. She shared approaches tried by her school to make parental involvement more assessable to parents. She seemed hopeful that her school system was becoming more engaged in discussing how to address poverty.

We've had a lot of conversations about that [parental involvement] this year. We've actually tried to just spread the word that parents could come sit in at the school any time they needed to. We've extended hours at school as far as for math night and different things, offer meals at things. I just think that realizing everybody is not on the same schedule Even making ourselves available for when our parents are available. I think has helped us some this year at school. Going out to their jobs, we've had conversations about going out to their [parents'] job sites to offer certain types of registration things. We've had lots of discussions about that. That's been a big buzz this year in the school system, actually figuring out how to reach those parents who are living in poverty.

Amelia described how her school partnered with an organization called the Christmas Coalition to provide Christmas gifts for students in need. She shared, "We have a Christmas Coalition that works in conjunction with the schools. We tell parents to go sign up with them and then they provide presents".

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Amelia also shared how her school system addressed food insecurity by providing free breakfast for all students.

>We have free breakfast for every student in our school. I think it's just the elementary School, it might be the whole system. I think it's just elementary school right now though .every day, every kid gets breakfast no matter if they can pay or not, but we don't have that for lunch. I know some school systems around our area are doing both breakfast and lunch free for every kid. I'm hoping we're working toward that.

Paige shared the programs her school has developed to meet student needs. She was particularly concerned with student food insecurity and shared how her school and community worked together to meet student needs. "Well, one of the programs that we've started this year is a back pack program, On Fridays, we identify kids pretty much through the… sorry I can't think my mind just went blank." The researcher then expressed understanding to the research participant and she regained her thoughts and continued to share.

>Free lunches, that is how we identify most of them. And we send a bag of food home in their [student] backpacks every Friday. We also have a program where we do a similar thing, but we tried to open it up so it doesn't appear to be on a prejudice basis. We have Food Share for our students where once a month we have a truck that brings food. You get one box full of like canned goods, and other non-perishable items. Then there's a bag of fresh vegetables or fruit sometimes and so once a month we call out send letters home to people who meet the criteria, and they come and pick up food.

Paige also talks about her school having a Big Buddy program where students get academic help at school. She perceived the need for this program being greater for students living in poverty.

> We have a Big Buddy program that I do that helps kids that are struggling academically. We just see more of our poverty kids in these programs than not. Just because, you know, you have a lot of these families who don't have educational backgrounds, and so those kids don't have support at home that you would get with more educated parents.

> Based on the specific needs of the schools and communities where the research participants served they took steps to meet the needs of the students and families living in poverty. They also engaged the community stakeholders available in the communities where they worked to support both students and their families. They provided detailed descriptions of how they worked with their stakeholders to bridge the gap between student need and the resources available. Their pride in advocacy emerged across all interviews. The participating rural school counselors voiced their determination to meet the needs of their students.

Limitations of Study

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection (Hayes & Sigh, 2012). Therefore it was essential that the researcher write about her own experiences and the situations and contexts that have influenced her experiences (Moustakas, 1994). To ensure the researcher's self-awareness throughout the research process, an audit trail was kept that documented each step of the research process. The researcher also included the use of an external auditor in the process of data

analysis to confirm emerging themes in the research. Finally, the researcher conducted in member checking. Also, all research participants were emailed a copy of their individual transcripts for review. The purpose of this process was to ensure that their interviews were representative of their perceptions and views related to the research topic.

Selection of research participants was limited to rural school counselors serving at high poverty schools in one state in the Southern United States. The sample was small, consisting of eight research participants. Other limitations for the study was the lack of diversity in gender and racial representation among research participants. All eight participants identified as female. The racial representation of research participants consisted of seven White participants and one African American/Black participant. This lack of diversity in gender and race does not accurately represent those serving as school counselors and potentially limits the transferability of the research study findings.

A final limitation for this study is the use of phone interviews. Due to time constraints and an effort to make participation more accessible to the schedules of practicing school counselors, the researcher chose to conduct semi-structured phone interviews. The researcher was not able to build rapport in person with the participants or observe body language in relation to their responses and this could potentially limit the rich, thick description of collected data. However, the use of phone interviews in turn may have made research participants more at ease than face to face interviews.

Summary of Study

The researcher examined the textural and structural descriptions and developed a composite which presents the essence of the lived experiences of rural school counselors serving children and adolescents in high poverty schools (Creswell, 2013). The

descriptors of "what" was experienced by rural school counselors serving students in high poverty setting and "how" they perceived these experiences have contributed to the knowledge available to practicing school counselors.

The textural and structural descriptions from the study revealed that research participants agreed upon a definition as to what constitutes living in poverty across interviews. The themes also revealed that participating school counselors were faced with some common challenges in serving students living in poverty such as meeting student needs, making parental contact, parental access to transportation to the school, and dealing with student awareness of living in poverty. They also provided recommendations for the preparation of new counselors to work with students living in poverty. Most research participants placed value on professional development, community experiences, and relationship building with students and parents as ways to prepare new counselors for the challenges of serving students living in poverty.

They expressed variation in what they perceived as the attitudes of educational professionals toward students living in poverty. However, most expressed that despite differences in attributions to poverty, most educators recognized that students in poverty were in need of extra support. In their responses to this there was recognition that professional development had the potential to change educator attitudes toward students living in poverty. They also recognized how the setting of their school impacted the particular challenges they faced. Most research participants recognized that their high poverty schools were more challenged with parental involvement and lack of community and parental resources than low poverty schools. They provided rich thick descriptions of both what they lacked in these areas and how it impacted their schools. The research

participants were also cognizant of the challenges they faced due to being in rural communities and had the perception that there was a disparity of resources between their rural setting and urban settings. The theme of advocacy for students living in poverty also emerged as the participating school counselors were not only eager to share the challenges they faced but also the specific programs and efforts that have been implemented in their schools while serving students living in poverty. Due to the findings and rich, thick description of themes, the field of school counseling will benefit from this exploratory phenomenological study that provides a starting point for a discourse in the professional literature related to rural school counselors' perceptions of children and adolescents living in poverty.

Implications for Practice, Training, and Research

The emergent themes in this small study imply that school counselors are needed to serve as advocates, leaders, and systemic change makers. School Counselors are poised to collaborate with stakeholders in meaningful ways to change both educator perceptions of poverty and the services offered to students living in poverty. The challenges self-identified by school counselors in this study indicate a need for school counselors to serve as intentional leader advocates who seek to change educator attitudes and school climate and to positively impact the delivery of student services. This can be accomplished by development and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs which engage all stakeholders in the success of students. The emergent student issues presented in this study touch on many of the national issues facing students living in poverty such as food insecurity, barriers to parental involvement, unmet student needs, and attitudes toward those living in poverty. School counselors can improve the delivery

of services to students and the climate of their schools by bringing educators, students, parents, and community leaders together to examine school data with the purpose of developing school counseling programs which promote the success of all students. Since comprehensive school counseling plans are developed by data collection and stakeholder input, programs at rural, high poverty schools would be designed to meet the unique needs of the school and community where school counseling services would be delivered. The school counselor as a leader advocate could work with all stakeholders to develop and implement comprehensive school counseling programs designed to foster student success. These efforts in turn could potentially increase the advocacy efforts for children and adolescents by concerned stakeholders invested in student and school success.

The American School Counselor Association National Model (2012) already has a blue print in place to guide school counselors in how to develop a comprehensive school counseling program designed to meet the needs of all students. The themes of the national model include leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) calls for the development of a strong foundation for a school counseling program which requires a collaborative effort with parents/guardians, staff, and community to determine what every student will receive as the benefits of the developed school counseling program. This process calls for an examination of the beliefs of the school counselor and those serving on the school counseling team. The ASCA National Model (2012) states, "It is clear that school counselor beliefs about students, families, teachers, and the educational process are crucial in supporting student success. Open, honest dialogue is required to ensure school counseling teams and departments explore complex issues from many points of

view." The national model places value on exploration of attitudes and beliefs. This is a beneficial process in improving delivery of school counseling services and provides school counselors with a way to assist through program development and implementation a part in improving school culture and delivery of counseling services for all students. According to the ASCA National Model (2012) the process of developing school vision statements to guide the future of school counseling programs and the development of mission statements designed to align with the school district and school mission statements, can lead to development of school counseling programs that meet student needs and also nurture their growth. From school vision and mission statements, program goals are developed to guide the development of school counseling curriculum for counseling and "closing-the-gap" action plans. School Counseling program goals address specific student outcomes related to areas such as student attendance, student achievement, behavior and school safety through the domains of career, academic, or personal social development (ASCA Model, 2012).

As evidenced in the emergent data in this study, the participating school counselors were aware of student needs from their own interactions with both students and parents, their own observations in the school and community and feedback from other educators in their buildings. They also made efforts to meet student needs and advocated on their behalf. The researcher asserts that through examination of personal beliefs of school stakeholders, collection and examination of data related to the school and community, and development and implementation of intentional comprehensive school counseling plans based on the national model, rural school counselors can effect systemic change through leadership and advocacy. This study indicates that the rural school counselor

participants were cognizant of the challenges facing their students, and the importance of the attitudes and supportiveness of parents, educators, and community members in the success of students. They also each described advocacy efforts made at their schools to meet the specific needs of students and families living in poverty within their communities. School counselors cannot address the needs of students in poverty or affect systemic change in their school settings alone. Reaching out to other stakeholders invested in the school and the community to develop a comprehensive school counseling program is an effective way to support the success of all students and lead to effective advocacy efforts that can assist in bridging the gap of student needs in rural, high poverty settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research on the perceptions of rural school counselors toward children and adolescents living in poverty is needed. Since this study had a small sample size and research participants were from a limited geographic area, there would be benefit to extending this study to include all Southern States to further explore perceptions in this region. An expanded study would also offer the opportunity for a more diverse sample of participants in the areas of racial and gender representation. Since research participants discussed the advocacy efforts at their schools and there was not a question to specifically address this issue, adding a question to address this topic would assist in learning more about what is being done to meet the needs of student living in poverty. Also asking if comprehensive school counseling plans are in place at the research participants' schools would also provide further information about program delivery.

Conclusions

The research participants were aware of the challenges facing students living in poverty. The participating school counselors addressed challenges in meeting the needs of students such as lack of student and community resources and a need for more parental and community involvement. With the apparent need for more support in the implementation of counseling services, none of the participants discussed the development of a comprehensive school counseling program even though some mentioned the value of professional development and community experiences in preparing new counselors and changing educator attitudes. The researcher asserts that this could indicate a need for professional development for both new and practicing school counselors related to development and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs with advocacy for high poverty populations in mind.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

AUBURN UNIVERSITY
Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and
Counseling INFORMED CONSENT
For a research study entitled:
Rural School Counselors Perceptions of Children and
Adolescents Living in Poverty: A Phenomenological Study

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine rural school counselors' perceptions of children and adolescents living in poverty. The study is being conducted by, Christi S. Jones, a doctoral candidate at Auburn University, under the direction of Jamie S. Carney, department head, in the Auburn University Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling. You were selected as a participant because you are employed as a rural, school counselor and are 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey, and participate in an audio recorded semi-structured interview. Your total time commitment will be approximately ten minutes to complete the demographic survey and 30 to 45 minutes to complete the phone interview. You will also be given the opportunity to review the transcript from your audio-recording for accuracy via email. This process should take approximately ten minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risk associated with this study is possible risk of breach of confidentiality since identifying information will be provided by participants in the demographic survey developed for this study and phone interviews will be audio-recorded. The demographic survey that will be used for this study will be sent over TLS connections, which protects communications by using both server authentication and data encryption. This is in place to safe guard participant demographic data. Audio-taped phone interviews will be stored on a password protected laptop that is only used by the researcher. Once audio-taped recordings have been transcribed, the audio recordings will be destroyed. All notes and materials related to the research study will be locked in a filing cabinet to ensure security of research materials. All identifying records will be destroyed the conclusion of the research study. Real names and identifying information provided by participants will not be used in the research study. Pseudonyms will be used in the study for participant names and schools will only be identified by their classification such as elementary, middle, or high school. These protections are in place to minimize the risk involved in participating in this research study.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? All individuals who meet the criterion of the study and complete the study, will be placed in a drawing for **a chance to receive a fifty dollar Amazon gift card.** We cannot promise you will receive any or all the benefits described.

Will you receive compensation for participating? All participants who complete the research study will be placed in a drawing for a chance to win a $50.00 gift card.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw from the study at any time. You participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as

1 Participant's initials ____

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It is identifiable, Your decision about whether or not to participate or stop participating, will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information/ data obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information collected in this study will be used to meet the researcher's dissertation requirements, and possibly be published in a professional journal or presented at a professional conference.

If you have any questions about this study, please ask them now or contact, Christi Jones at 256-786- 1972 or Jamie Carney, at 334-844-5690.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE

_____   _____
Participants Signature/Date   Investigator Obtaining Consent/ Date

_____   _____
Printed Name   Investigator/Date

_____   _____
Name printed   Investigator Name

Participant's initials___

Appendix B: Recruitment E-mail

Subject: Research Invitation for Rural School Counselors

 Dear Rural School Counselors,

    There is a paucity of research related to rural school counselor perceptions of children and adolescents living in poverty. If you are a school counselor in a rural area where 70% or more of the students at your school qualifies for free or reduced lunch, you are invited to participate in a research study. All individuals that meet the criterion of the study and complete the study will be placed in a drawing to receive a fifty dollar Amazon gift card. Participation in the study will consist of a brief Survey Monkey survey to collect demographic information which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and a phone interview that will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

    To participate in the study email the researcher at CZP0020@auburn.edu and a link to the Survey Monkey survey will be sent to you. In this demographic survey you will provide email and phone contact information that will be used to set up the phone interview. This study is part of a dissertation requirement for Counselor Education and Supervision at Auburn University, Alabama.

    Thank you for your time and consideration of participation in this study. Individuals like you who are willing to participate will make completion of this important study possible.

Sincerely,

Christi S. Jones, M.Ed.   Jamie S. Carney

Primary Investigator   Academic Advisor, Professor

Department of Counselor Education   Department of Counselor Education

and Supervision   and Supervision

Appendix C: Demographic Survey Questions

(1) Are you employed at a school were 70% or more of students are on free and reduced lunch??

(2) What do you identify as your race?

(3) What is your gender identification?

(4) How long have you been employed as a school counselor?

(5) Do you work at an elementary school, middle school, high school, junior high or k-12 school?

(6) What grade levels do you serve at your school?

(7) What is the best email to contact you at to set up a phone interview?

(8) What is the best phone number to reach you at for a phone interview? (You will not be contacted by phone until a date and time has been set via email.)

Appendix D: Phone Interview Questions

(1) What are the challenges you face in meeting the needs of students living in poverty?

(2) What recommendations do you make concerning the preparation of new counselors to work with students living in poverty?

(3) What is perceived as the attitudes of educational professionals in schools toward students living in poverty?

(4) What are the challenges faced by high poverty schools that are different from low poverty schools?

(5) How do you define poverty?