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LICSW's Perspectives on the Causes of Community Violence

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LICSWs' Perspectives on the Causes of Community Violence

Submitted by Krista Churness

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present their findings. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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Introduction

Much research has been devoted to the prevalence of community violence, especially in urban areas. Community violence can be defined as "violence between individuals who are unrelated and who may or may not know each other, usually taking place outside the home" (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg & Zwi, 2002). Violent crime, according to Vanderschueren (1996) is any act that causes a physical or psychological wound or damage. David Kennedy, in his 2011 book *Don't Shoot; One Man, a Street Fellowship, and the end of Violence in Inner-City America,* analyzes violence that is caused by the presence of gangs and drugs in a community. Kennedy's recommendations for eradicating violence will be addressed later in this paper; however, research examining the reasons why certain communities are more plagued by violence will be discussed here. The micro, mezzo and macro influences on community violence will be explored, using the ecological perspective. The interplay of micro, mezzo and macro influences combine to make a community more susceptible to violence. Vanderschueren (1996) states that,

> Violent crime affects individuals, families and communities. It contributes to the disintegration of the social fabric and slows down economic development. Within any city with high rates of violent crime, public areas are used less and less, businesses fail, the value of property falls, services deteriorate, residents move more frequently and tourism declines. These factors, in turn, further undermine the cohesion of communities and seriously damage informal mechanisms of social control. (p. 97)

Violence does not occur in a community solely because of problems within an individual's family, nor of a poor school system or judicial system alone. Rather, the interplay of many causes working together makes a community more susceptible to violence.

This research will examine clinical social workers (LICSWs) perspectives on the causes of community violence. It is important that clinical social workers have an understanding of the interplay of causes that converge to make a community prone to violence. LICSWs are trained to have an understanding of the ecological perspective and when looking at community violence from this perspective, they can then work towards holistic solutions in their labor with individuals, families, and communities. There are micro, macro, and mezzo causes of violence in communities, therefore, ideally, clinical social workers should work to address the causes at each level.

Conceptual Framework

The ecological model is used as a conceptual framework for this research paper. The ecological model examines the relationship between micro, mezzo and macro causes of community violence (Forte, 2007). In this model, the individual and the environment are analyzed simultaneously because most human behaviors are influenced by both (Forte, 2007). It is important to understand that there are micro, macro and mezzo influences for human behavior and that our behavior is always being influenced by our environment. "Ecological theorists assume that individuals transect with many environmental contexts over a life span" (Forte, 2007, p. 133). This paper suggests that the many environmental contexts influence the prevalence of violence within a

community. According to Broffenbrenner, an ecological theorist, community violence, like all other things in a society must be analyzed in context (Forte, 2007, p. 134). "Human behavior evolves as a function of the interplay between the person and the environment" (Forte, 2007, p. 135). Because we are influenced by our environment, the ecological method suggests that those who live in a violent community are naturally affected by it.

As noted by Hepworth and Larsen (1993) the concepts of habitat and niche are key to the ecological theory. Habitat is the physical and social setting in which a human lives and niche refers to the status or role that he or she has in a community (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993). The ecological model asks that human problems be examined by looking at the person and their role within their habitat (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993). When a problem exists in a community, such as violence, ecological theory states that there are many causes for the problem and the solution involves interventions aimed at all the causes of that problem (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993).

Literature Review

Micro Level Influences on Community Violence

The ecological model of human development identifies systems in a person's immediate environment as micro level systems (Forte, 2007). These immediate systems are factors such as the family, the home, and how a child is reared (Forte, 2007). Kramer (2000) examines what happens when children do not have the support of their family and how this affects the likelihood that they will engage in crime. Families have a reduced

ability to support their children when they are facing some kind of stress, such as living in poverty (Kramer, 2000).

A person cannot parent well if they are overwhelmed by distress (Gondoli & Silverberg, 1997). If parents do not discipline and monitor a child's behavior due to their distress, it is possible that the child will exhibit more delinquent behavior (Capaldi & Patterson, 1996). Also, Estevez, Emler, and Wood (2009) note that children who report a negative relationship with their parents may be more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. Behavioral problems can stem from not having a positive role model or from lacking the opportunity to spend leisure time with a parent (Estevez, et al. 2009). It has been shown that if a son did not have the opportunity to engage in leisure time with his father he may be more likely to be convicted of a violent offense later in life (Hawkins et al. 2000). Thus, early onset of behavioral problems in children and a lack of positive role models can be an indicator of later delinquency (Tolan, Gorman, Smith, & Loeber, 2000). Tolan et al. (2000) note as well that if serious behavioral problems grow quickly, this can indicate that a child will engage in criminal activity later in life. Hawkins et al. (2000) noted the same; aggressive behavior in younger children is often a predictor of later violence. If behavioral problems can be addressed at home early on by parents, it is likely that there will be a reduction in community violence later on.

However, as mentioned earlier, if a family is living in poverty, the caregivers may be less able to intervene when their children exhibit delinquent behaviors (Kramer, 2000). A caregiver living under the stress of poverty may not be able to effectively parent or be able to offer a child an optimistic worldview. "The family is the child's first experience and a socially vulnerable family may be incapable of offering a positive social outlook

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and balanced family atmosphere" (Vanderschueren, 1996, p.100). Poverty can weaken a

family's structure and diminish the capacity of parents to prevent their children from

engaging in community violence (Kramer, 2000). Huff-Corzine, Corzine, and Moore

(1991) note the correlation between families living in severe poverty and the prevalence

of violence. Living in poverty can cause stress which can lead to conflict in families

(Wadsworth et al. 2008). Wadsworth et al. (2008) highlight frequent moves,

discrimination, poor physical health, and poor academic achievement as possible

consequences of living under the stress of poverty. Caregivers struggle with the daily

hassles of living in poverty and therefore may not be able to mediate in preventing their

child's delinquent behavior (Wadsworth et al. 2008).

Along with family poverty, family violence can also lead to community violence.

When children witness violent conflict between their father and mother, they may be

more likely to engage in violence later in life (Wallach, 2000). Wallach (2000) notes that

children who have witnessed violence or who have been victims of abuse may have

difficulty learning how to get along with others because of anger that has been built into

their personality structure. Children who are victims of physical abuse or neglect in their

family also may be more likely to commit a violent crime in their community (Windom,

1989). Children who have been abused may have a more difficult time understanding

empathy, because they have not been shown it themselves (Wallach, 2000). While

Windom (1989) notes that not every child who has been abused or neglected will commit

violent crime outside the home, it is particularly children who have been victims of

physical abuse who may be likely to do so.   If a child's parents separate before the child

grows up, the child may more likely to commit violent acts (Hawkins et al. 2000).

Family and community violence are not mutually exclusive (Garbarino, 2001). Often, if family violence is present, there will be community violence as well. Clearly children are affected by the presence of violence in their own family.

Individuals who come from fractured homes or who have a mentally impaired or substance addicted caregiver are more likely to be negatively affected by living in a violent community (Garbarino, 2001). According to attachment theory, children depend on their caregivers to protect them and provide them with a sense of security. When caregivers are unable to protect their children from an especially violent community, children are that much more vulnerable (James, 1994). Children who grow up on a violent community with little or no protection from caregivers are more likely to feel hopeless and believe they have no resources to escape their situation (Wallach, 2000).

Wallach states that "children growing up with violence are at risk for pathological development" (2000, p. 1). Exposure to violence at home can lead to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Thompson & Massat, 2005). Frequent exposure to family violence also can lead to children exhibiting more behavioral problems in school (Thompson & Massat, 2005). Violence in the home and community can cause children to display symptoms of depression, aggression, feelings of loneliness and at worst, suicidal ideation (Aisenberg & Mennen, 2000). Symptoms of PTSD due to exposure to violence may mirror those of depression, but have longer lasting consequences that affect the child's development and view of the world (Aisenberg & Mennen, 2000). Whether one is affected by trauma inside the home or outside of it, the effect represents a challenge to a child's understanding of the meaning of life (Garbarino, 2001).

Mezzo Level Influences on Community Violence

The mezzo level in the ecological theory is represented by relationships that individuals have with community organizations and their neighborhood (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993). Mezzo systems are those that are beyond a person's intimate connections and refer to their connections with others outside the home. According to the ecological model, mezzo level systems can also refer to the interaction between micro level systems (Forte, 2007).

Schools, and how youth relate with other students and their teachers, also represent the mezzo level in the ecological model (Forte, 2007). Schools also may play a part in preventing community violence (Furlong, Felix, Sharkey & Larson, 2005). As Furlong et al. (2005) suggest, "Schools are in a unique position to identify violent behavior among students early and to implement prevention strategies that affect the entire community" (p. 11). When students feel safe at school, they have better academic outcomes (Grogger, 1997). According to Grogger, if students do not feel safe at school, they may find it difficult to concentrate or worse yet, may avoid attending school all together. When students do better at school, they are less likely to become engaged in violence activities outside of school (Furlong et al. 2005). Schools can train staff to intervene when students are exhibiting negative and violent behaviors. Cooper, Lutenbacher and Faccia (2000) found that an effective violence prevention program involves classroom teaching first and foremost. Schools can offer anger management courses and skill building programs that help students learn how to deal with negative emotions in a constructive way. Schools are in a position to be able to recognize at-risk youths and intervene before their behavior spreads to the community. According to

Fowler and Braciszewski (2009), when school personnel are educated on identifying violence and how to intervene, numbers of reported incidents drop. Grogger (1997) notes that violence in schools often reflects violence in the community. When schools can garner parent and community support to address violence, they sends a powerful message that violence will not be tolerated anywhere in the community (Furlong et al. 2005). Schools represent part of the mezzo structure in a community and like other organizations, a school can both help to increase or decrease the occurrence of violence within their community.

The interplay between individuals and the criminal justice system also represents the mezzo level of the ecological model. Vanderschueren (1996) argues that when community members have no respect for the criminal justice system, violence may be more prevalent. To some people, reports Vanderschueren (1996), the criminal justice system is perceived as more symbolic than real and as an institution that holds little actual power. In order for the system to be seen as a real and relevant source of social control, it is important that communities see their police in action. Police methods that involve making their presence known in a community and working to win back trust have proven effective in lowering violence in communities (Winship & Berrien, 1999). In order for communities to remain safe, cooperation between community members and the police is important (Vandersahueren, 1996). Furthermore, when police fail to respond to violence in communities, victims are left feeling insecure and abandoned (Vandersahueren, 1996). The lack of response reinforces the impression that anti-social behavior, such as community violence, will go unnoticed, and it thus continues (Vandersahueren, 1996).

Communities can also take on informal social control as a way to manage community violence (Burchfield, 2009). Social control is defined as "the willingness of neighborhood residents to intervene in local problems", such as community violence (Burchfield, 2009, p. 45). When neighbors are more familiar with one another and have identifiable ties, they are more likely to feel responsible for the overall safety and wellbeing of the community (Burchfield, 2009). In addition to neighborhood connectedness, there are certain factors that make a neighborhood more susceptible to crime and violence. "Neighborhoods characterized by greater socioeconomic disadvantage, immigrant concentration, residential instability and a higher crime rate exhibited less social control" (Burchfield, 2009, p. 50). When communities are plagued by adverse social conditions, their ability to work together to promote social control is eroded, and therefore the community is more at risk for violence (Burchfeild, 2009). Where there is an overabundance of violence, families and communities are harmed (Wall & Levy, 2005) and if a culture of violence is accepted within a community, it is likely that the cycle of violence will continue. A community can show that they will not accept a culture of violence by banding together and organizing. "Communities need to be organized to reduce risk factors for delinquency and increase protective factors. Parents, schools, and neighborhoods are the primary socializing agents for children and therefore constitute the prime resources for preventing juveniles' escalation to serious and/or violent offending" (Bilchik, 1998).

Peer groups may affect others' involvement in violence and the neighborhood a person lives in may also influence his or her involvement in community violence as well. Earlier, post-traumatic stress disorder was examined when children are exposed to

violence in the home but, post-traumatic stress disorder can also be developed by those

living in violent communities (Wood, Foy, Layne, Pynoos, & James, 2002). Individuals

can be exposed to community violence in a number of forms. Wood et al. (2002) note

that people living in violent communities may have witnessed rape, know someone who

was killed, have seen a dead body, have been shot or shot a gun themselves, have been

beaten or jumped, witnessed someone being killed, know someone who committed

suicide, or saw someone commit suicide (p. 138). Being a witness to any of these

horrific events in a community can cause an individual to become more irritable, hyper-

vigilant or have a blunted affect (Wood et al. 2002). The *Diagnostic Statistical Manual*

of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition (DSM IV) states that PTSD is;

> The development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to and extreme
>
> traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an even that involves
>
> actual or threatened death or serious injury, other threat to one's physical
>
> integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury or a threat of death or
>
> injury of another person. (p. 462)

Witnessing violence in the community has been linked to the development of

PTSD symptoms (Wood et al. 2002). Exposure to community violence also leads

individuals to take on aggressive behaviors of their own (Veenema, 2001). Community

violence and "early childhood victimization has demonstrable long-term consequences

for delinquency, adult criminality, and violent criminal behavior" (Windom, 1989,

p.184). Thus, when individuals are exposed to violence in their community, it is possible

that they may develop symptoms of PTSD and are then more likely to engage in

community violence themselves (Windom, 1989).

Macro Level Influences on Community Violence

Political and economic factors are considered macro causes of violence (Forte, 2007). Hepworth and Larsen highlight mass media, laws, values and customs as other macro influences on a community. Earlier, the effect of poverty on individuals and families was examined as a micro cause of violence in a community, and here, poverty will be analyzed as a macro level influence (Kramer, 2000). The capacity of a community to fight back against violence is diminished as a result of the destructive presence of poverty (Kramer, 2000). The ecological model emphasizes that each individual in a community has a role and poverty can diminish an individual's abilities to carry out their role (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993). Vanderschueren (1996) states;

> Poverty may not automatically lead to violence but may favor it in certain circumstances. Violence is not a spontaneous phenomenon but, above all, the product of a society characterized by inequality and social exclusion. It is a distortion of social relationships generated within social structures – family, school, peer group, neighborhood, police, justice –which can no longer fulfill their role. (p. 93)

Not only is poverty itself a risk factor that can lead to community violence, but the concentration of people living in poverty together also increases its likelihood (Krivo & Peterson, 1996). Such a concentration of people living in poverty also means that people share the same constraints and influence one another's behaviors and customs (Krivo & Peterson, 1996). As mentioned earlier, if people in a community are influencing one another with negative behaviors and values, such as resolving conflict

with violence or drug abuse, these behaviors become more widespread (Kramer, 2000).

Additionally, social support and community cohesion may be diminished by the

economic state of a neighborhood. These factors may make a community more

susceptible to violence (Schiadeh & Steffensmeier, 1994).

Exposure to violence comes in many forms (Fowler & Braciszewski, 2009). One

can be exposed to it by hearing about a violent event, witnessing a violent event or being

the victim of the event (Viosin, 2007). Violent gang activity, robberies, and shootings are

all violent events that can happen in a community and have an impact on others (Fowler

& Braciszewski, 2009) Furthermore, violent events tend to be highly publicized, which

means more individuals are affected than just those who live in the community (Voisin,

2007). Repeated coverage of such violent events overtime gives a community a

reputation for being dangerous.

Families and children who live in violent communities face a chronic stressor that

leads to increased fear and anxiety (Aisenberg & Mennen, 2000). Youths who grow up

in a community where violence is prevalent may take on the behaviors around them

(Wall & Levy, 2005). Behaviors, either positive or negative, that are condoned within a

community or even encouraged set an example for the youths growing up in that

community. If a child is a witness to aggression in their community, they may come to

believe that such behavior is acceptable. Wall and Levy (2005) write,

In communities where violence is common, some members may develop

narratives in which violence is perceived as normative. When this occurs,

violence may be viewed as acceptable or inevitable. Some may construct

narratives that portray violence as inevitable and represent themselves as unable

to change this situation. When parents and community members construct such

disempowering narratives, they are less able to provide a safe environment for

their children. (pg. 8)

Social learning theory suggests that youths who are continually exposed to

violence begin to understand it as the only way to resolve conflicts (Garbarino, 2001). In

addition, the continual exposure to violence affects an individual's world view. Those in

violent communities begin to view others in the community as powerless, unreliable, or

as a threat. Having these feelings towards neighbors fosters a subculture of violence

(Garbarino, 2001).

The relationship that a community has with police and the judicial system can

influence the propagation of violence. How a community views the law is considered a

macro level influence on community violence. When communities do not trust the

judicial system to protect them or fairly represent them, crime persists (Rottman, 1996).

Beyond feeling misrepresented, if communities feel that they cannot understand the

judicial system, it is then viewed as mysterious and possibly as an enemy (Rottman,

1996). Many people who are already marginalized by society have stories of being

mistreated by police and the judicial system.

For example, in Boston in 1993, the Anti Gang Violence Unit was revamped in

recognition of the mistrust and feelings of disconnection that the community felt with

their judicial system (Winship & Berrien, 1999). In 1989, Boston police had developed a

riot-like response to the sharp incline of crack cocaine sales and related gang activity.

The mentality that police could and should do anything to prevent violence got out of hand (Winship & Berrien, 1999). Because of bad press and a negative community response to police violence, they reformed their practices. It is important that police focus their attention on those who are the main source of violence in a community, rather than giving a blanketed response. Furthermore, police need the cooperation of the community in order to be effective (Winship & Berrien, 1999).

Another macro factor that affects community violence is accessibility of fire arms and the laws and politics associated with guns. Policies regarding access to and availability of guns affects the prevalence of community violence (Reich, Culross, & Behram, 2002). In the United States half of the households contain at least one firearm (Garbarino, 2001). While some argue that gun ownership is a right, many others state that youths and other vulnerable individuals should not have easy access to firearms (Reich et al., 2002). Reich et al. (2002) have noted that when the numbers of homicides increase in a community, it is because youths have had freer access to guns. Youths who grow up in violent communities begin to believe that they must carry a gun for protection (Reich et al., 2002). According to Reich et al (2002), the federal government, state government and local communities need to work together to agree on policies to limit gun access to vulnerable individuals. Guns themselves do not cause community violence, but vulnerable individuals having easy access to firearms may increase community violence. If policies are put in place to prevent easy access to firearms, hostile encounters do not have to end in death.

Convergence of Risk Factors

While some researchers focus on one factor as the main cause for community violence, others have come to see that the convergence of several risk factors makes a community more at risk (Fowler & Braciszewski, 2009). Understanding the convergence of risk factors is vital for understanding why violence is prevalent in certain areas (Garbarino, 2001). Certain individuals are more at risk than others to engage in violent activities because they live in a community that hosts many risk factors.

> The larger the number of risk factors to which an individual is exposed, the greater the probability that the individual will engage in violent behavior. Multi-component interventions targeting identification of shared predictors and constellations of risk factors may be more effective in preventing violence than those that target single risk factors. (Hawkins et al., 2000, p. 7)

Interventions directed at only one source or factor that contributes to violence in communities will most likely not be successful. Efforts that use the public health approach and involve the home and school are often most effective (Bilchik, 1998). According to Calonge (2005), the three most effective approaches for violence prevention address firearm laws, early childhood visitation and therapeutic foster care. Holistic interventions that involve parents, children, schools and the community are needed to effectively intervene and prevent community violence.

Violence occurs in communities for a variety of reasons, and the convergence of causes for violence makes a community more susceptible. According to the ecological perspective, there are micro, mezzo and macro explanations for community violence

because there are multiple causes for community violence according to the ecological theory, there must be a multi-level response. Social workers can use research on community violence to inform their practice. As Thompson and Massat state (2005),

> These findings can assist social workers in their positions as advocates, case managers, mediators, clinicians and service providers. Appropriate models for change must be identified in the following areas: assessment and treatment for children at risk, collaboration and communication between agencies, the need for early intervention programs and violence prevention programs, and continued psychotherapeutic services for families and children, especially those affected by post-traumatic stress disorder. (p. 388)

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to investigate what LICSWs who practice in the metro area view as the causes of violence and how their perspectives relates to what the literature identifies as causes. This section addresses the methods used to conduct the research.

I, the researcher for this study, have worked for more than 5 years in a community clinic in North Minneapolis, and as a result, have met many individuals who have been affected by the community violence there. This exposure prompted an interest in the causes of violence in a community and how LICSWs identify causes of violence. This study investigated how clinical social workers view causes of community violence.

It is important to investigate what clinical social workers view as the causes of community violence because knowing what they see as causes sheds light on what they see as possible solutions to ending community it. LICSWs work with individuals, families and communities in addressing many different kinds of human suffering, and because they have such a broad understanding of the issues that affect people, they can offer informed solutions to working towards ending community violence and other social ills.

Research Design

This study was designed to explore clinical social workers' perspectives on the causes of community violence. It was mainly a qualitative research study.   Qualitative research involves the analysis of participants' words and narratives that attempts to tell a personal story about a given topic. (Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 2005). This research asked clinical social workers why they believe violence exists in communities. The respondents were asked to answer four open-ended questions in an on-line survey format. The questions were open-ended to allow the respondents flexibility (Monette, et al., 2005). They were also be asked to answer two closed questions that inquired whether they practice in the inner city or the suburbs and what percentage of their clientele they believe have been personally affected by community violence. Those questions gave the researcher a better understanding of where the clinical social workers were practicing and the frequency with which issues related to community violence were addressed in their work with clients. It was important to know where they were practicing because it highlighted whether clinicians practicing in the inner city or suburbs are working more or less with clients who are affected by community violence. Community violence is often

thought to be an issue facing primarily inner city areas, but the responses from the clinical social workers might reveal that the effect of community violence spreads further out of the city as well.

The cause for violence in communities was identified through a review of the literature. Then, this literature was compared with data gathered from the clinical social workers to determine their perception of why violence occurs.

Sample and Data Collection

Clinical social workers providing services to clients in the metro area were the target population for this study. Research was be conducted by requesting a list of clinicians who work in the metro area from the Board of Social Work website. I purchased a list containing the email addresses of 999 social workers practicing in the metro area. An email was then sent out to the social workers asking about their perspective on the causes of violence in communities. (See *Appendix A* for a copy of this email.) Social workers were asked to fill out a questionnaire that was available by clicking on a link. Participants had one month to complete the questionnaire. Two weeks after sending out the original email, a reminder email was sent out asking clinicians again to consider filling out the questionnaire if they had not already. (See *Appendix B* for a copy of this reminder email.)

The questionnaire consisted of two closed questions and four open ended questions. (See *Appendix C* for a copy of the questionnaire.) The questionnaire was created using Qualtrics, an online survey software. The survey was distributed using the

email list of social workers from the Board of Social Work upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board of St. Catherine University.

The email to the social workers had a link to the questionnaire. When the social workers clicked on the link to begin the questionnaire, they consented to participate in the research. The following questions were asked in the questionnaire that was emailed to social workers:

1) Where do you work/practice as a Social Worker?
   a) Inner-city?
   b) Suburbs?

2) What do you believe is the percentage of your clientele that have experienced and been affected by community violence?

3) As a Social Worker, what do you view as the micro causes of violence in a community?

4) As a Social Worker, what do you view as the mezzo causes of violence in a community?

5) As a Social Worker, what do you view as the macro causes of violence in a community?

6) Based on your experience working with clients who may have been affected by community violence, what causes of violence do you see that converge to make a community more susceptible to violence?

7) What is the affect of trauma on community violence?

8) What informs your practice as a Social Worker? What do you see as your role in combating community violence?

Protection of Human Subjects

Clinical social workers working in the metro area were specifically targeted for this study. The identity of the clinical social workers was anonymous; the researcher did not know the names of those who complete the survey. The names and email addresses from the list were not be used in this research paper. The responses were collected using the secured software, Qualtrics. The social workers were notified that their responses to the questionnaire would be used in a research project. (See *Appendix D* for a copy of the consent that the clinicians received.) The IRB reviewed the parameters of this research to ensure the protection of human subjects and approved the study.

Data Analysis Plan

The questionnaire was created from questions that were generated through the literature review process and was reviewed for content validity by my Chair, Sarah Ferguson and my committee members, Rosemary Froehle and Marcus Pope. The IRB gave final approval of the questionnaire before the research was conducted. Because the questionnaire asked six open ended questions, the results from those questions were analyzed quantitatively.

Common responses on the micro, macro, and mezzo perspectives on why violence occurs were compared using the categorizing strategy. This strategy attempts to "generalize and abstract by generating concepts and even theories from raw data" (Monette et al. 2005, p. 430). Words, phrases, and descriptions were gathered from the social worker's responses to determine what they believe causes community violence (Monette et al., 2005). Open-coding was used when looking for similarities that emerged

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in respondents answers. Open-coding allows the data to be "opened-up" to see what is there, rather than looking for absolute answers (Monette et al., 2005). I expected to find that the clinical social workers agree with the researchers; community violence is caused by a convergence of factors.

Strengths and Limitations

One strength of this research design is that the confidentiality of the clinicians was maintained. LICSWs were assured that their responses would be kept confidential, which may ensured more honest reflections on causes of violence. Also, the time commitment required of the clinicians was short, which may have increased the number of responses. Because the LICSWs were asked what they perceive to be the causes of community violence and did not have to research the causes of violence in communities they may have been more likely to respond.

Six open-ended questions were used in the questionnaire, which asked the social worker to write their own responses (Monette et al., 2005). A strength of this research using open-ended questions is that it places fewer restrictions on respondents (Monette et al., 2005). However, the wording of the questions may have influenced their responses (Monette et al., 2005). The questions that asked about where the social workers practice and the percentage of clients they have worked with that have been affected by violence may also have influenced the social workers' responses. They may have assumed that because they practice in a certain area, they had not worked with clientele who had been affected by community violence.

An overall strength of the research and research question is that community violence and its effect has only been recently explored (Muller et al., 1999). It is important that LICSWs have an understanding of how community violence affects clients so that they can use the information to inform their practice. This research is relevant as it is not a topic that has been thoroughly analyzed.

One of the limitations of this study is that only social workers who practice in the metro area of the Minneapolis/St. Paul were asked about their perceptions of the causes of community violence. This limited scope means that the results gathered from the study do not necessarily reflect what is happening in the rest of the nation or the world. The study was conducted under time constraints; therefore respondents did not have much time to respond to the questionnaire. As a result, this may have limited the number of responses. One final limitation to the study is that the results are based on LICSWs' perceptions of why violence occurs in a community and is not based on statistical results.

Findings

Description of Participants

An on-line survey was emailed to a list of LICSWs practicing in the metro-area to determine what they believe to be the causes of community violence. While 33 LICSWs opened the survey to complete it, only about 20 completed the survey in full. Several of the respondents answered only certain questions and left others blank. This is a limitation to the study.

The survey collected qualitative responses from the participants by asking six open-ended questions. The first question on the survey asked the participants, "Where do you work/practice as a LICSW?". Of the respondents, 68% stated they worked/practiced in the inner-city and 32% stated they worked/practiced in the suburbs. The respondents work in varying areas of social work as well. While the survey did not ask specifically, several of the respondents stated what kind of social work they practice. The settings in which some of the respondents practice are; schools, hospitals/clinics, MICD programs, nursing homes and non-profit organizations. Because the survey was anonymous, personal information about the respondents such as their age, gender, race or socioeconomic status was not revealed.

The participants were then asked, "What do you believe is the percentage of your clientele that have experienced and been affected by community violence?" The respondents who work in the inner-city stated that 53% of their clients have been affected by community violence. The respondents that practice in the suburbs reported that perhaps 15% of their clientele had been affected by community violence.

The respondents were then asked to expand on the causes of community violence. The respondents were asked to comment on what they believe to be the micro, macro and mezzo causes. Each LICSW surveyed voiced their opinions by answering six open-ended questions. The following gives an overview of their responses and their beliefs on the micro, mezzo and macro causes of violence in communities.

Overview of Themes – Micro Causes

The purpose of this research was to explore LICSWs perceptions of why violence occurs in communities and what the micro, macro and mezzo causes are. The LICSWs were first asked about the micro causes. They were informed that for the purpose of this research, micro level refers to an individual's immediate setting such as their family and the home they are raised in. The results of the survey revealed several micro-level related themes. The three main micro level influences that LICSWs highlighted were violence in the home, drug use and poverty.

Most LISCWs reported that community violence is primarily caused by growing up in a violent home. One participant noted the strong influence of where a child grows up:

> *If an individual grows up in a violent home, it is more likely that they participate in violent acts in their own communities. The home is a place that highly influences individuals and their outcomes.*

Violence in the home can then make a child feel fear and rage because they cannot process what they are experiencing, stated the respondent. This feeling of fear and rage can cause a child to turn away from their caregivers and seek out peer relationships, sometimes in gangs. The respondent addressed the cyclical nature of violence that can start when there is violence in the home.

One LICSW reported that not only can the effect of violence at home cause violence to continue in a community, but it seems to create a generation of violence:

I see the cycle of violence brought down from generation to generation.

Another elaborated on the cycle of violence looking at the effect that generations of violence can have on individuals:

Generations of violence [can cause] people [to] feel the need for survival and to fight back due to living in dangerous situations. [It is] difficult to get out of the cycle of violence.

Many respondents stated how a parent using alcohol or drugs can lead to violence in the home, which then could spread to violence in the community. However, none of the LICSWs explained further in depth how alcohol and drug use can cause violence in a community.

The third micro-level cause that was mentioned by LICSWs as a cause of community violence was poverty. Respondents highlighted poverty as being a "stressor" that causes "frustration." LICSWs alluded to poverty causing overcrowding in a home, which could lead to stress, then violence. Many LICSWs mentioned chemical use and poverty as the second and third leading micro level causes of violence, however, they did not elaborate further on either cause. Based on the survey results, one might assume why LICSWs see these two factors as having the greatest micro level influence on community violence, but it is not explained in their own words in the survey.

Other micro level causes that were mentioned by respondents were; incarceration, maltreatment, trauma, lack of options, caregiver stress, greed, racism, historical trauma, limited education, overcrowded homes, homelessness, single parent households, divorce, unemployment and illness. It is clear from these many and varied responses that

LICSWs see many micro level causes of community violence. These responses seem to highlight the complexity of what leads certain communities to be more violent than others, and presumably, it means that the solutions to resolve violence must be multi-faceted as well.

Overview of Themes – Mezzo Causes

Participants who answered the survey were then asked to comment on what they believe to be the mezzo causes of community violence. Mezzo level was identified as an individual's relationship to their community and neighborhood.

The major mezzo causes of that emerged as themes according to the LICSWs were, poverty, chemical use in the community, lack of good policing, lack of positive activities for youth to engage in and a culture of crime. Those who mentioned poverty as a mezzo level cause also highlighted that the stress of unemployment adds to the likelihood of violence. Further, others noted that the income disparity can cause an anger and resentment in a community that can result in violence.

Several respondents mentioned that a lack of strength and pride in a community can cause violence. LICSWs added that there are several problems that can weaken a community such as neighborhoods with transient populations, diversity, a lack of trust among neighbors and an unwillingness to "get involved in others' business."

One respondent stated:

I work in a largely immigrant community, and there is a high degree of social isolation created by law enforcement. In addition, the sheer diversity of the community, while sometimes a strength, can contribute to isolation due to prejudice or lack of a common language.

Another LICSW noted that a perceived lack of being valued and the overall

esteem of a community can influence the amount of violence that exists. They reported:

People see how they are/aren't valued and respond to that. Discrimination, racism, disparity in income levels [can cause violence in communities]. [Also]), kids [need to]) have something positive they are involved in [like]) clubs or organizations.

In remarks from a different clinical social worker, the importance of the esteem of

the community was echoed:

People who do not respect their community are not likely to care about contributing to violence in it. Neighborhoods with transient populations result in little pride for that community as people consider themselves temporary visitors rather than residents.

When there is a lack of respect for the community and its members do not have

resources to work towards solving problems, a culture of violence can be created.

Several respondents noted how living in a culture of violence breeds more violence on an

individual level and a community wide level:

If someone is a part of a gang or experience violence by way of being a victim of bullying [they are more likely to perpetuate violence]. Growing up in a community where violence is part of life will greatly impact one.

Further, communities that have more violence sometimes end up staying violent due to not having resource/tools to end it. Also, once violence occurs, It can perpetuate more violence and make it harder for the violence to end. If a community is violent, then sometimes law enforcement does not know how to handle it and almost does the opposite of what is should. If neighborhoods become more unsafe, it can make people more afraid and less likely to stand up against the violence.

The LICSWs noted that when a child or youth is bullied at school, their self-

esteem is weakened. A low self-esteem can lead to gang-involvement and acting out of

aggression. If the community that the youth lives in does not fight against the aggressive behavior of that perpetrator, the violence will continue. The respondents also noted that when law enforcement cannot react properly to the aggression of some people, it is more likely to continue and worsen in a community. According to the LICSW respondents, the mezzo level cause of violence are the cyclical nature of violence, the lack of respect and pride that one might have in their community and the overall sense of connection that a community feels. The respondents seemed to note that if a community is healthy, united and connected, and feels supported by schools and law enforcement, violence will not exist. Or, if violence does exist in a united community, the community has more power to come together and fight it.

Overview of Themes – Macro Causes

Finally, the LICSWs participating in the on-line survey were asked to look at the macro causes of violence in communities. The respondents were told that for this research, macro level refers to mass media, laws, values, cultures, and customs that influence individuals. One of the main themes that emerged from the responses of the LICSWs were that the sensationalism and glorification of violence in mass media play a big role in the perpetuation of community violence. Also, racism and racial profiling were blamed by several social workers as a cause of community violence. Laws that fail to protect and the availability of guns and weapons were mentioned by several LICSWs in their responses. Finally, they also blamed a lack of police response to chronically violent neighborhoods.

According to one LICSW, if we do not look at the systemic causes of community poverty, we are not going to easily find solutions to eliminate community violence. Further, the respondent talked about where we place the blame as a society and how that affects where we place our efforts in working to eliminate community violence.

> *The continued tendency of society as a whole to blame the poor for their misfortunes rather that looking at systemic causes such as employment practices, legal fraud, uneven access to educational resources and racism as contributing factors in the continuation of violence.*

Another LICSW stated that in addition to blaming the poor, society does not care for the poor as they should. Again, this respondent noted how the systems under which we operate as a society do not lead us to caring for the neediest of the needy. When we do not care for the needy as a society or allow people equal access to resources, community violence can be a consequence. The LICSW stated;

> *Society's values and belief systems and those that have the power to influence it [are to blame in perpetuating violence]. Not taking care of the neediest people and structuring a system in such a way that some cannot get ahead and where laws don't apply to everyone across the board. [Also, there we have a system where] some have access to resources that some don't have.*

Additionally, according to one LICSW, society does not offer enough support to communities that struggle with violence. Again, when we as a society to not acknowledge the needs of those that live in poverty, problems go unaddressed and can lead to more community violence.

> *I think that sometimes people who live in violent communities do not get as much support and assistance due to people being afraid or making judgments. Instead of using money to work on prevention, money is often taken away from these communities and used after the fact. It is harder to have others move in to communities where there is violence so only other violent people move in which keeps it going. Society sometimes seems to need some people to not do as well so others can look better. A lot of the time, lawmakers and police do not know what to do with violence and go about handling it the wrong way.*

One of the macro level causes of violence listed by social workers is the ways in which the media portrays violence. When the media gives communities the impression that violence is something to be admired, it is more likely that the cycle of violence will continue. Several LICSWs talked about the glorification of violence as a culture:

Often times our society endorses violence [(i.e. war and the death penalty]. Also media often glamorizes violence.

Other mezzo level causes of community violence that LICSWs mentioned were historical trauma, unjust immigration legislation, not enough respect for the elderly, affluence, prevalence of violent video games, a lack of role models and drug use. Again, even looking at macro level causes alone, it is obvious that LICSWs see a myriad of causes to blame when a community is plagued by violence.

Overview of Themes – Causes that Converge

It was noted in the literature review that often, several causes converge to make a society more susceptible to violence. In the on-line survey, the LICSWs were asked, "Based on your experience working with clients who may have been affected by community violence, what causes of violence do you see that converge to make a community more susceptible to violence?" The main theme that came forth from the responses of the LICSWs was poverty and its clash with affluence is the main cause that converges with others to create a community that is susceptible to violence. Further, the LICSWs noted that a lack of social support and social isolation, combined with a lack of resources, feelings of hopelessness, a history of dealing with problems by being violent, and drug use are all factors that come together to cause community violence.

Several LICSWs mentioned a lack of social support and social isolation as one of the converging causes, such as living in a community with transient populations. Another mentioned that people do not have enough interaction with their neighbors and from this lack of interaction, people are less likely to feel supported. A LICSW mentioned that this lack of connection between neighbors makes change in a community difficult. Another named this problem as,

"a lack of connections of the heart."

A community that has a lack of social support and is isolated also seems to be one that is less able to fight back against violence. A LICSW mentioned that an environment of violence that exists can cause more violence in a community:

An environment of violence that has existed for many years with no support from outside the community [makes a community more susceptible to violence].

When a community has no support from the outside and has become weakened by violence, there may be nowhere to turn for help. One LICSW noted that,

Some cultures are more likely to seek out help than others.

When the community is isolated and weak, it becomes difficult for community members to help themselves. If communities do not feel that they can reach out beyond themselves for help in reducing community violence, it is likely that the violence will be perpetuated. Living in a violent community can breed more violence. According to one LICSW;

People and neighborhoods that have a history of dealing with problems by using violence [are more likely to continue to perpetuate violence].

Finally, one LICSW summarized by stating that the while many causes to converge to make a community more susceptible to violence, a lack of access to resources may be at the center of it all.

Really, if you narrow it down to the bare bones, it's about resources, how are they distributed, how much is distributed, to whom are they distributed. I realize we live in a capitalistic and democratic society, which is fine with me, but when there becomes such a disparity between those who have and those who don't, it's no longer a democratic society, it becomes a dictatorship only not as a single person, but a group of people.

According to the literature and the LICSWs surveyed, many causes converge to make a community more at risk for violence. Overall, when a community faces poverty, it also lacks resources which increase the likelihood of violence. Once a community becomes violent, its members are then affected by the trauma of witnessing violent events.

Overview of Themes – Effect of Trauma on Community Violence

The LICSWs were then asked to weigh in on how trauma affects community violence. Several noted how being exposed to violence in communities is traumatic and that the exposure greatly affects individuals who have suffered through that violence. One respondent mentioned the "neurobiology of trauma" and how it "wires" us in a way that interferes with regulation. Another LICSW echoed this remark by noting that those who have been affected by trauma have less control over their actions. When trauma victims' needs go unmet, said another LICSW, they are often unable to learn coping skills to become healthy and productive adults.

My belief is that survivors of trauma, either in the family system or in the community, are more likely to become either perpetrators or victims of further trauma or violence.

Another LICSW seemed to agree with this remark by noting that when people have been victims of violence themselves, they begin to see the world differently and may be more likely to victimize others. Being traumatized by violence can make one more likely to traumatize those around them.

> *I believe the degree of trauma to the individual likely lowers their threshold for violence and consideration of the rights and happiness of others.*

One LICSW who practices in a school noted that students who grow up in violence learn from what they see in their community. Not only is violence a learned behavior, but according to this LICSW, violence seems to stunt the social and emotional growth of young people.

> *I can tell you based on the meltdowns some of my students have, when they stopped growing socially and emotionally because of violence they were exposed to. Children learn by observation, they take in information by observations. They live what they learn unless they are taken out of that environment or taught a different set of skills to live by.*

Children learn by observation and go on to influence their siblings or classmates with their own behavior. The LICSW who works in a school noted the cyclical nature that violence in a community can have. If no one intervenes to teach a child that violence is not the way to resolve conflict, than it is possible that violence will continue. In addition, a community that is ravaged by violence can become traumatized. The effect of trauma from violence influences the whole community:

> *The impact of trauma [untreated]) on community violence cannot be exaggerated. One way of describing community is that it is an external enactment of trauma experienced by perpetrators previously. The experience of violence and trauma, then tends to beget more experiences of trauma and violence.*

The effect of frequent violence in the life of a community can cause PTSD. Untreated PTSD causes people to feel distrustful of their neighbors and to be on constant alert. Living this way in a community is not likely to give one a sense of hope and security. One LICSW noted that PTSD causes,

Hypervigilence, increases irritability, always expecting bad things, feelings of hopelessness, lack of concentration and re-experiencing the trauma.

When people in a community live in fear and worry that they will be harmed, it is likely that they will do whatever is necessary to protect themselves and their families. Further, living in a state of hopelessness and violence can lead to a lack of respect for life. When violence goes unaddressed in a community it will likely lead to those most affected by it having symptoms of PTSD. According to one LICSW,

"Violence is untreated PTSD."

Another respondent stated that the image of the community is shaped by traumatic events. When individuals within the community and from outside of the community begin to see a community as violence ridden, this can lead to more violence.

Traumatic and violent incidents in neighborhoods often perpetuate perceptions that certain neighborhoods are more violent than others.

When violence is normalized within a community, it can be perceived as an acceptable way to resolve conflict or seek out revenge. Violence breeds more violence and the effect of violence in a community leads to many people experiencing PTSD. Untreated PTSD can lead to more violence, and the cycle simply continues.

One LICSW mentioned the importance of addressing the trauma of living

in violence by stating,

It can be very traumatic for people to experience community violence. This is often overlooked which can make it even more difficult to deal with.

The LICSWs highlighted the cyclical nature of violence in a community and the

role that PTSD has in keeping that cycle going. Therefore, when working with a

community to resolve community violence, it is clear that symptoms of PTSD need to be

addressed as well.

Overview of Themes – The LICSW's Role in Combating Community Violence

Lastly, the LICSWs were asked to comment on what informs their practice and

what they see their role in combating community violence. Some respondents saw their

role as an individual to combat community violence through advocacy or being a good

role model. Other LICSWs saw their role as working through their agency or

organization by educating or offering resources to prevent community violence. Several

of the respondents touched on both their personal and professional roles.

Some LICSWs felt their role was to work to promote mental health for those

affected by community violence or suffering from the trauma of living in a violent

community. It was mentioned that it is especially important to help individuals access

trauma informed care, so that they are receiving mental health services that will be

beneficial. Teaching meditation and other methods of self-regulation were mentioned as

interventions that could be used by LICSWs in a mental health setting. Another reported

on the importance of advocating for mental health needs at the community and legislative

level:

> *Advocacy for individuals in need of mental health treatment, advocacy at the community and legislative level for improvement in services to combat violence which includes not only treatment services but equal protection from violence by law enforcement, and finally education to individuals and the community as a whole about the causes and prevention of violence.*

Other respondents stated the importance of teaching about the effect of trauma

and also teaching non-violence and other forms of conflict resolution. Providing a space

for trauma victims to heal and get involved in the community in healthy ways was

mentioned by an LICSW as their role in combating community violence. Further,

another LICSW talked about the importance of instilling self-confidence in those that

they work with:

> *And telling them from the day I meet them how they can do anything and I believe in them and will support them.*

One LICSW talked about the importance of educating themselves on current

events involving violence to get a perspective of what is happening locally and

nationally. They went on to highlight what other social workers had said about the

importance of teaching non-violence and alternative ways to deal with anger.

> *Many things inform my practice as an LICSW; in combating community violence I watch the news, read the newspaper, talk to students and talk to parents to get their perceptions of the violence in the neighborhoods. My primary role in combating community violence is teaching students and parents' healthy ways to deal with anger and frustration. I also teach students about breaking the cycle of violence in their communities.*

Other respondents mentioned other ways that they see they have a role in

combating community violence. Some LISCWs spoke of personal experiences, such as

being a victim of bullying that compelled them to want to fight against violence in

communities.

> *This is an ongoing process beginning with begin a victim of bullying in childhood and a member of a people who in the last century were threatened with extinction; growing up in a family with roots in the labor movement; getting active in politics and lobbying human rights; attending a synagogue which is openly supportive of GLBT persons and now learning Buddhism. My role is modeling those values in m y work and social life.*

Others spoke of their specific roles at their agencies and how they could combat

violence from an organizational standpoint. As a mandated reporter, one LICSW

mentioned they are doing their part in combating violence by reporting it to authorities.

Through this process, the message can be communicated that violence is not an accepted

way of dealing with conflict, nor is it a way to treat others. Social workers spoke about

the importance of consulting with colleagues in working with clients who have been

affected by community violence. This consultation can help LICSWs to form a united

front. This united front can help LICSWs in their individual work with clients. As one

respondent noted,

> *I see my role as working with one individual at a time to help them deal with their own situation as well as helping the community as a whole by working in a non-profit in the inner city offering valuable services to help people not be as violent and realize the violence around them and how it affects them.*

One LICSW highlighted the importance of learning and understanding the history

of African-Americans in the United States. This social worker noted that having an

understanding of this history can help understand why violence can be more pervasive in

the African-American community. Historical trauma can lead to more community

violence.

Finally, one respondent mentioned that they did not have much personal experience in combating violence, but they stated they felt compelled to seek out ways to put a halt to community violence.

> *I am not engaged in combating [violence], but try to open my heart to those in need. This [survey] triggers my wish to do more.*

Discussion

The intent of this research was to learn about LICSWs' perspectives on the causes of community violence. Given what existing literature states about the subject, it was anticipated that LICSWs would perceive there to be a convergence of causes to ignite violence in a community, and their responses validated this hypothesis.

Micro level Causes of Community Violence

According to the LICSWs who responded to the survey, they believe that violence in the home is the most influential micro-level factor in determining the prevalence of community violence. Violence in the home was also highlighted in related research as a major influence on violence in the community (Wallach, 2000). Researchers noted that what a child witnesses at home, they may be likely to replicate outside the home (Wallach, 2000). Further, if children experiences abuse themselves, it is possible that they may act out in the community as a way to express their own anger and hurt (Aisenberg & Mennen, 2000).

The second most frequently mentioned influence on community violence was drug abuse. The literature on community violence did not seem to echo this theme.

However, the research literature did talk about the influence of having a parent whose attention is compromised, perhaps by a drug addiction (Garbarino, 2001). When a parent or caregiver is stressed, has a mental illness, or is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, it affects their ability to care for their children (Gondoli & Silverberg, 1997). When children are not cared for, disciplined, and guided, they may be more likely to engage in violence in the community (Capaldi & Patterson, 1996).

Finally, the third most often highlighted micro-level influence on community violence was poverty. The related research does state that poverty has an effect on community violence. Again, living in poverty can cause caregiver stress, which can affect a parent's ability to parent well (Gondoli & Silverberg, 1997). Poverty may stem from illness, inability to work, mental illness, a single parent household, or lack of education. All of the mentioned items cause more stress in a household and lead to possible violence within the home as a result (Wadsworth et al., 2008).

Mezzo level Causes of Community Violence

As a mezzo level cause for community violence, the LICSW respondents highlighted poverty as the largest contributing factor. In the literature review, poverty was mentioned as a mezzo level cause of community violence due to its weakening effects on a community (Burchfield, 2009). Poverty erodes a community's ability to have social control. "Neighborhoods characterized by greater socioeconomic disadvantage, immigrant concentration, residential instability and a higher crime rate exhibited less social control" (Burchfield, 2009). Poverty therefore weakens community cohesion, leading to a greater likelihood of violence within the community. While

poverty was not directly mentioned in the literature as a mezzo level cause of violence, it was mentioned as a deteriorating force that makes a community more susceptible to violence.

The LICSW's highlighted a lack of police presence in a community as a mezzo level cause of community violence, because how the community views police and the criminal justice system can make cause violence to increase. The researched concurred that the interplay between individuals and the criminal justice system can influence violence. If individuals and groups of people do not have confidence that the police are on their side, they may be less likely to report crime or obey rules. In order for communities to remain safe, cooperation between community members and the police is important (Vanderschuren, 1996), and it is important that police respond appropriately to violence and that individuals and groups are reprimanded fairly for their actions in order to maintain stability and safety in a community.

The survey results indicated that LICSWs attributed a lack of positive activities for youths as a cause of community violence. While the literature did not necessarily highlight this as a cause of violence, it did mention how schools can intervene to address violence. Furlong et al. (2005) stated, "Schools are in a unique position to identify violent behavior among students early and to implement prevention strategies that affect the entire community". Grogger (1997) also mentioned that when students succeed in school they are less likely to engage in violent activities outside of school. While the LISCWs did not mention the importance of school involvement in preventing community violence, their responses mirror what the literature states about ensuring that youths are engaged in positive activities.

Finally the LICSWs highlighted abuse of drugs and alcohol as a mezzo level cause of violence in communities. According to the literature researched, alcohol and drug use was not mentioned as a mezzo level factor contributing to community violence.

Macro level Causes of Community Violence

LICSWs mentioned several macro level factors as causes of community violence when surveyed. They responded that sensationalism and glorification of violence, racism, racial profiling, availability of guns, and lack of police response are all influential predictors of community violence.

The literature review also revealed that sensationalism and glorification of violence may be a cause of community violence. Also, the repeated coverage of violence by the media gives an impression that a community is more violent and may normalize violence for that particular community. This type of coverage gives community members the impression that violence is an acceptable way for conflicts to be resolved.

The research indicated that poverty and the concentration of people living in poverty may be a cause of community violence. While the LICSWs mentioned poverty as a micro and mezzo level cause of violence, they did not mention poverty as a macro level cause. The research literature addresses how poverty in a community reduces its capacity to fight against its destructive forces. Poverty in concentration also means that people share the same constraints as their neighbors; living close to others who share the same stressors means that when violence causes stress, it has cyclical consequences.

Finally, both the LICSWs and the literature on community violence state that the availability of guns and a lack of police response in a community can cause more

violence. As the literature states, half of U.S. households have at least one firearm (Garbarino, 2001). Reich (2002) noted that youths who grow up in a crime ridden community believe that they need to carry a gun in order to keep themselves safe. Vulnerable individuals having easy access to firearms can be a cause of community violence.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This research on causes of community violence has implications for LICSWs. It is evident by looking at the responses from the LICSWs that they believe there are many, multi-layered causes of violence in communities. Therefore, the response to community violence from LICSWs and others must be multi-layered. In addition to a multi-layered approach to address each of the contributing causes of community violence, it is important that there be a united community response to combat violence. Communities need to band together to fight against violence and to send empowering messages to the younger generations, which sends a message to youths that violence will not be tolerated (Wall & Levy, 2005). Community violence certainly represents a challenging phenomenon for those who are working to prevent it, which all the more necessitates a united front to combat it.

This necessity for a united front is emphasized in Kennedy's 2011 book, *Don't Shoot; One Man, a Street Fellowship, and the End of Violence in Inner-City America.* In the 1990s, Boston police joined forces with social services agencies and churches to address violence in the community. Police, social service agencies, and churches banded together to send a message to gang members that violence would not be tolerated in the

community. Further, if gang members expressed an interest in getting away from violent

activity during these interventions, the group would provide services and opportunities

that would enable a transition from gang life (Winship & Barrien, 1999).   They named

their approach "Operation Ceasefire" and it was responsible for a two-thirds drop in

youth homicide in the late 1990s (Winship & Barrien, 1999). It was noted that as long as

the clergy, youth workers and probation officers involved in Operation Ceasefire

continued to put pressure on the youths to abstain from violence that the violent activity

would stay in check. However, once these groups retreated and ceased placing

significant pressure on gang members, violence resumed. This case highlights the

importance of organizations working together to prevent community violence.   When

several organizations band together to collectively say no to community violence, it sends

a strong message to those who are causing the violence.

   This case example from David Kennedy relates to the research. When the

message is sent to a community that violence will not be tolerated, it is likely to influence

those who are instigating it (Furlong et al., 2005). Further, the research noted the

importance of a community having faith in their police and the criminal justice system.

When police can make their presence known in a community and when they are

perceived as effective, violence is less likely to run rampant (Winship & Berrien, 1999).

   The research also highlights the struggle that LICSWs face, as they may not be in

a position where their work affords them direct influence on the reduction of community

violence. The implication for LICSWs who want to work to combat violence is that they

may need to dedicate time outside of work to focus on the effort. If an LICSW is not

working in policy, they could dedicate some of their time to advocate for gun regulation or anti-poverty strategies that aim to reduce community violence.

Perhaps more research should be dedicated to the burn-out of LICSWs who are faced with working with individuals and families that are suffering from the affects of community violence. It may be possible that LICSWs feel overwhelmed and are therefore unable to address the many causes of community violence in their daily work. Secondary trauma of the LICSW may also prevent clinicians from working at their peak potential. These issues may require that LICSWs are taught more about the importance of self-care and how to prevent secondary trauma. Social work education may need to research more about how LICSWs can become more effective partners is working with other organizations to eradicate community violence.

Many LICSWs, especially those working in a school setting, emphasized their role in setting a positive example for youths. According to Garbarino, perhaps the most important thing that LICSWs and others can do is to stay positive and committed to the fight against community violence. "The greatest threat to young children comes when positive adults are defeated by the anti-social forces of community violence" (Garbarino, 2001).

Finally, implications for LICSWs working with those who have been victimized by community violence was addressed in the research. LICSWs recognized that the victims may have less ability to regulate their emotions or their actions. The respondents also noted that trauma and PTSD can breed more violence in communities. As a result, LICSWs talked about the importance of mental health services addressing

trauma and PTSD. Those surveyed saw a direct link between treating traumatized individuals and an overall reduction in community violence.

This study has several strengths. First, it is qualitative in nature, and therefore captures the feelings and opinions that LICSWs have in regard to community violence and its causes. The study also has implications for LICSWs working with communities that are plagued by violence. The study offers a voice of reassurance to LICSWs that the work of fighting community violence need not rest only on their shoulders alone; rather, the fight requires a collective effort.

The limitations of this study were; the small number of LICSWs who responded to the survey and that some did not answer all the questions on the survey. The small sample size means that the data collected may not necessarily be representative of what LICSWs nationally as the causes of community violence.

Conclusion

As noted, this research has certain limitations, such as the sample size and the number of unanswered questions in the survey. However, the findings suggest that LICSWs perceive a multitude of causes that converge to cause community violence. Some of these causes include poverty, drug use, lack of resources, the response of police and the judicial system, poor education, violence in the home, access to guns and the glorification of violence in our society. Many of what the LICSWs stated as causes echoed what the literature states regarding community violence.

The research also revealed that many LICSWs see poverty as a major cause of violence in communities. However, none of the LICSWs mentioned solutions to address

poverty issues, to reduce community violence. In the research, poverty was highlighted

as a stressor for parents and caregivers that distracted from their ability to parent well;

however, the LICSWs did not state in the survey that they wanted to work with parents

on eliminating stressors to promote better parenting. The research noted that not having

positive role models can lead to delinquent behaviors, such as participating in violent acts

in the community. The research also stated that a parent or caregiver living in poverty

may not be able to offer an optimistic and hopeful outlook to a child. Without hope and

optimism, the research also noted that a feeling of despair may lead individuals to a life

of violence. One LICSW did address the importance of instilling hope for clients and

letting them know that social workers have confidence in them to achieve whatever goals

they may have.   It seems that because community violence has so many causes, it was

difficult for the LICSWs to pinpoint any solution in their survey responses.

Violence has corrosive effects on a community. Returning to the quote from

Vanderschueren (1996) stated at the introduction to this paper,

> Violent crime affects individuals, families and communities. It contributes to the
> disintegration of the social fabric and slows down economic development. Within
> any city with high rates of violent crime, public areas are used less and less,
> businesses fail, the value of property falls, services deteriorate, residents move
> more frequently and tourism declines.

The task of addressing community violence and its causes need not rest only on

the shoulders of LICSWs; in order to eradicate community violence a united effort from

committed individuals and organizations is clearly needed.

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Appendix A

To whom it may concern:

My name is Krista Churness and I am a graduate social work student conducting research through the St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. My research investigates social workers perceptions of the causes of violence in communities. The questionnaire has two closed questions and four open-ended questions. You may answer the open-ended questions as briefly or as thoroughly as you would like. At the bottom of this email, you will find the questionnaire. The questionnaire can be accessed until February 17th, 2012. Feel free to contact me with further questions. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

Sincerely,

Krista Churness

Hello,

This email is a reminder regarding the questionnaire seeking your perception as a social

as to why violence occurs in communities. If you have already completed the

questionnaire, you participation is greatly appreciated. If you have not yet filled out the

questionnaire, please take a few moments to do so. The questionnaire can be found at the

link provided below. Your response will remain anonymous.

Thank you for your time,

Krista Churness

LICSWs Perceptions on the Causes of Community Violence Questionnaire

1) Where do you work/practice as a Social Worker?
   c) Inner-city?
   d) Suburbs?

2) What do you believe is the percentage of your clientele that have experienced and been affected by community violence?

3) As a Social Worker, what do you view as the micro, mezzo and macro causes of violence in a community?

4) Based on your experience working with clients who may have been affected by community violence, what causes of violence do you see that converge to make a community more susceptible to violence?

5) What is the effect of trauma on community violence?

6) What informs your practice as a Social Worker? What do you see as your role in combating community violence?

Consent Form

University of St. Thomas

LICSWs Perceptions on the Causes of Community Violence

This research project is being conducted to examine social workers perceptions on the causes of community violence. I would like to invite you to be a part of this research project. You have been selected as a participant because you are a social work clinician working in the metro area of the Twin Cities and you may have worked with clients who have been affected by community violence.

This study is being conducted by Krista Churness with Sarah Ferguson as supervisor.

Background Information:

The purpose of this research project is to investigate social workers perceptions on the causes of community violence. The micro, mezzo and macro causes of violence will be researched. It is hypothesized that clinician's will be able to identify possible causes of violence within communities based on their experience working with clients in the metro area of the Twin Cities.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this research project, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be sent to you via email. The questionnaire will have two closed questions and four open-ended questions regarding your perception on why violence occurs in a community. You will have one month to complete the questionnaire. After two weeks, a reminder email will be sent to you to remind you to complete the questionnaire.

Confidentiality:

Your response to the questionnaire will remain confidential. No identifiable information will be published in regards to your responses. I will store your responses on my personal computer and destroy the data on May 1st, 2012.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can decide if you are interested in filling out the questionnaire. Your decision will not impact your current or future relationship with the St. Catherine University. Further, after agreeing to participate, you have the option to withdraw from participation at any time.

Contacts and Questions:

My name is Krista Churness. If you have questions you may contact the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board at 651-690-6000.

Feel free to print this consent form if you would like a copy for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. By filling out the questionnaire, I am consenting to participate in the study.