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Narrative Communication of Teachers' Support Needs for Violence-Based Trauma in the Schools: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

Community violence is a serious public health problem, and research on community violence consistently documents a relationship between exposure to community violence and adolescents' psychological and behavioral challenges, which, when considered cumulatively, can be understood as collective trauma. Preventing and mediating exposure to community violence by local schools is, thus, an important part of efforts to promote healthy adolescent development. As a societal problem, community violence and its socio-psychological effects lend themselves to an interdisciplinary approach for researching the problem and possible intervention and mitigation in local schools. The integrative, interdisciplinary approach to problem analysis in this study provides a framework for addressing trauma due to community violence as it affects the school environment. Narrative analysis, as a method of discovery, reveals the struggles of high school teachers dealing with the effects of violence-based trauma on their students. Policy recommendations and implications for future research are included.

Keywords: community violence, schools, narrative analysis, adolsescents

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The narrative communication approach (Xu & Connelly, 2010) to problem analysis in this study provides a framework for addressing trauma due to community violence (Ross & Arsenault, 2018) as it affects the school environment. As a societal problem, community violence and its socio-psychological effects on both students and teachers lend themselves to a narrative communication approach for research and possible

intervention and mitigation in local schools. This pilot study explored the narratives of teachers in an inner-city school affected by community violence.

A narrative inquiry approach was part of an emergent qualitative design in this research project (Xu & Connelly, 2010) within a community in southwest Atlanta regarding how educators understand violence and its effects in the community. Many of the residents in southwest Atlanta neighborhoods marked by poverty and unemployment suffer the direct effects of collective trauma related to community violence, including increased gun violence. Gun violence is the leading cause of death for young black males, ages 15 to 24, and is an epidemic that disproportionately affects low-income communities and communities of color (Mora et al., 2022). The researchers used narrative inquiry to understand how study participants (educators) construct story and narrative from their personal experience (Xu & Connelly, 2010) with violence in their communities and schools. This approach proves useful in studying educator awareness of, understandings of, and attitudes toward this violence and its effects on students and their communities.

Community violence is a serious public health problem, and research on community violence consistently documents a relationship between exposure to community violence and adolescents' psychological and behavioral challenges (Gardner & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Maring & Koblinsky, 2013), which, when considered cumulatively, can be understood as collective trauma. Violence-based trauma in school environments "threaten the academic and socioemotional development of students, but also the well-being of teachers" (Maring & Koblinsky, 2013, p. 379). Preventing and mediating exposure to community violence by local schools is thus an important part of efforts to promote healthy adolescent development and teachers' mental health.

The following literature review describes the problem of community violence and its relation to trauma. It is intended that the narratives developed from the community-based research project will help develop strategies for some mitigative aspects of the problem as it relates to local schools and schooling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community violence is defined as interpersonal violence committed in public areas, including witnessing, learning about, or being the victim (Abdul-Adil & Suárez, 2021). There are three subtypes of community violence exposure (CVE): victimization, witnessing, and hearing about exposure (Fowler et al., 2009; Maring & Koblinsky, 2013; Pittman & Farrell, 2022). It is noted that continuous community violence exposure is distinct from single-incident trauma (Cole et al., 2020, p. 2518). CVE is highest in poor urban communities, and "a fractured social support network may contribute to one's engagement in violence perpetration as a way to cope with their experiences of CVE" (p. 1075).

Problem behaviors often relate to adverse mental health outcomes and prior research indicates an association between CVE and adverse mental health outcomes among Black, emerging adults, ages 18-29 (Motley et al., 2017; Pittman & & Farrell, 2022; Whipple et al., 2021), which highlights the importance of preventing community violence exposure. Symptomatically, there are several types of outcomes

related to community violence exposure: internalizing, externalizing, & PTSD. Externalizing types of symptoms are deviance, delinquency, & aggressive behavior while internalizing symptoms are anxiety, depression, and desensitization. A third type is posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which includes flashbacks, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviors. Prevalent violence in some communities can lead to a communal sense of insecurity (Fowler et al., 2009). Understanding the relationship between community violence and PTSD is important to understanding the impact of community violence on the psychological health of young adults (Cole et al., 2020, 2519). Repeated exposure to community violence by adolescents and young adults (ages 16-24) can produce a model of violent responses as a socially acceptable way of resolving conflict (Cecil et al., 2014). Community violence exposure has been shown to influence individual attitudes and beliefs about violence, consistent with social learning theory, and can result in normalizing the use of violent behavior (Motley et al., 2017).

Collective trauma severely impacts marginalized communities across the United States, and southwest Atlanta is a hotspot for community violence and associated collective trauma (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021); thereby, it provides an appropriate location for a pilot study regarding the effects of community violence on schools. Collective trauma, as it is defined, refers to

> an entire group's psychological reaction to a traumatic event, such as the Trail of Tears (Native Americans), slavery, Japanese internment, and Holocaust…, emotionally connecting people around the world through experiences of helplessness, uncertainty, loss, and grief. Collective trauma is significant because, unlike individual memory, it can persist across generations and time (Saul, 2013, as cited by Watson et al., 2020, p. 832).

With community violence, tragedy is represented in the collective memory of the group, and like all forms of memory, it comprises not only a reproduction of the events but also an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma. This reconstruction creates meaning about community identity and the identity of its inhabitants.

The Role of Local Schools in Addressing Community Violence

Experiences of community violence by youth might include involvement in life-threatening situations, witnessing or hearing about threats to the lives of others, or living with verbal or physical abuse (Ludwig &Warren, 2009). At school, community violence can involve a diminished sense of safety when coming and going to the building, seeing or hearing about weapons on campus, or attending classes in damaged school buildings, as well as assault, battery, or theft on campus (Burdick-Will, 2013). Student attention, impulse control, and performance on standardized reading and math tests are all impacted by community violence (Milam et al., 2010; Sharkey et al., 2012). Proximity to violence matters, as well; students who live within 1,500 feet of a homicide demonstrate diminished attention and impact control, while students living within 2,000 feet of the same homicide are less affected (Sharkey et al., 2012). Block by block, youth participants may experience the impacts of violence

exposure very differently. Furthermore, race may play a significant role in how violence shapes student experience and performance in schools. Black students experience a reduction in cognitive capacity in the period following a neighborhood homicide, while Latino students from the same neighborhood are not significantly impacted—although it is unclear what may cause this difference (Sharkey, 2010).

Thousands of children in the United States are impacted by traumatic experiences which include those caused by community violence (CDC, 2010). More recently, there has been a movement to include trauma-informed care practices (TICP) within education settings (Crosby, et al., 2023), as schools have been identified as a critical component in the delivery of mental health services (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). Students in urban settings often present with histories of past trauma which can ultimately impact levels of school engagement, which can include academic performance, behavior, and social-emotional outcomes (Chafouleas et al., 2018; Crosby, et al., 2023; Maring & Koblinsky, 2013). All these components can impact overall school success and life trajectories. Research has well documented the impact of childhood traumatic stress on health and life outcomes well into adulthood (Felitti et al., 1998; Shonkoff et al., 2012 Wade et al., 2014). Research also shows that through engagement, trauma-informed schools utilize frameworks that empower students with coping skills, strategies, and interventions used to foster resilience against traumatic events (Crosby et al., 2023; Von der Embse et al., 2016). Key components to the success of trauma-sensitive schools include training trauma-informed staff members (Crosby, et al., 2023; Kalubi et al., 2023; Maring & Koblinsky, 2013) and the relationships built between staff and students.

Community-based responses to violence impacting youth can result in collective support and ownership of processes and can uplift local knowledge that might otherwise be ignored by institutional researchers (Hernández-Cordero, et al., 2011). Community dialogue, however, is not an uncomplicated solution to addressing complex structural processes, especially when dialogues are initiated by community outsiders. As research on community dialogue during planning meetings has shown, the way these conversations take place can reify existing power relationships, economic and social imbalances, and racial anxieties (Bernstein & Isaac, 2021). Collaborative planning can be co-opted to appear as a democratic, community-engaged process while repeating patterns of exclusion for community members already marginalized by race, income, ability, and other factors to disguise a decision that has already been made as one that is up for discussion (Roy, 2015). And, due to "the traditional focus on schools as the source and receptacle of all problems and possibilities," the prospect that schools might function as community-based support systems requires "re-visioning and revision" (Gadsden & Dixon-Roman, 2017, p. 440) of what schools can do and for whom. Further research might examine how this re-visioning might take place despite the recent trends in austerity politics, privatization in education, and top-down approaches to school management, as well as how youth and their families identify and respond to structuralized gentrification and criminalization as violent factors.

Protective factors are individualized, relational elements that support student resilience in the face of community violence (Solberg et al., 2007). Many scholars have found that relationships and communication, both at home (Ozer & Weinstein,

2004; Ludwig, 2010; LeBlanc et al., 2011) and at school (Burdick-Will, 2013; Ozeret al., 2017; Moore & Begoray, 2017; Alvarez, 2020), can serve as protective factors for young people navigating community violence. While exposure to violent crime within school walls also negatively impacts student achievement on standardized reading and math assessments (Burdick-Will, 2013), it has not been shown to impact student grades – which scholars have interpreted to indicate that relationships between students and their teachers can serve as strong protective factors. Some teachers have high levels of professional self-efficacy in noticing the suffering of students and consider the noticing of suffering among their students to be an integral part of the teacher's professional capabilities; they feel capable of responding effectively to this suffering because they serve unprivileged urban communities (Oplatka & Gamerman, 2021). In addition, community-level protective factors, such as mentoring programs, after-school programs, and mental health access, may also help reduce negative consequences for many adolescents (Pittman & Farrell, 2022).

Our study examines the role of teachers and schools through interviews with five local educators and addresses the need for preparation for trauma-informed teaching while drawing on school systems and teacher education to address the interface between school and community. There is a need for school system leadership and faculty in traditional teacher preparation programs to transform university coursework and clinical experiences to include aspects of trauma-informed care (Ciganek, 2020). Furthermore, education may be "the greatest hope" (Van der Kolk, 2014) for children experiencing trauma, and teacher preparation programming must be innovative and reflective in its approaches to preparing teachers to help students affected by community violence.

METHODS

Narrative Theory of Communication Related to Trauma

In recent years, the use of narratives and its impact has received considerable attention from scholars in communication, education, and psychology. Scholars consider narratives an effective means to convey messages (Shen, et al., 2015) and, as part of the "narrative turn" in recent decades, the role of narrative representations of knowledge has been recognized as significant for our understanding of how communication works. We have come to see narrative as central to such communication processes as the transmission of culture, the organization of social knowledge, and the structure of experience (Mandelbaum, 2003). The central idea animating narrative-based theories in the behavioral and social sciences is that human beings make sense of their lives and their worlds through constructing and telling stories (Stewart & Neimeyer, 2007; Schauer et al., 2011). Furthermore, trauma experts have noted that developing a coherent narrative is vital for making sense of trauma (Briere & Scott, 2015). From a coherent narrative, the person's identity often takes the form of an inner story, complete with setting, scenes, characters, plot, and themes (Crossley, 2000). Internalized life stories are based on biographical facts, but they go well beyond those facts as individuals appropriate aspects of their experience and construe both past and future to construct stories that make sense to the individual

and their audiences. Narrative theory suggests that one's experience of being absorbed into a story is a key mechanism whereby the story can influence one's real-world beliefs and behaviors (Green & Brock, 2000).

Narrative Analysis as Methodological Approach

The interdisciplinary research team for this study identified narrative analysis as the methodological approach to review the educator interviews conducted in this community-based research project. While positioned in the diverse fields of education, psychology, and communication, the researchers approached the narrative analysis from a mindset of caring and empathy for both the teachers and students affected by community violence. The research team was comprised of:

(1) The professor and researcher of education, a White male, who has predominantly worked in urban communities and with urban schools. Living not far from the neighborhoods represented in this study provided some insight on the process of gentrification as lived experience but both self-reflection and discussion with the research team was employed to mitigate bias and remain open to varied perspectives;

(2) The professor and researcher of counseling psychology, also a White male, who has worked extensively using narrative theory with populations struggling with trauma in the U.S. and abroad. He believes that we are all natural storytellers, and each person has a unique story that needs to be considered and understood separately to find meaning and construct individual and community solutions;

(3) The professor and researcher of communication, a White female, who has focused her research in urban studies that explore the challenges of marginalized communities as expressed through narrative communication. Her research is grounded in issues of environmental and social justice as informed by an interdisciplinary lens through which she reflects on values of collaboration in teaching and research; and

(4) The professor and researcher of counseling, a Black female, who has also worked with historically marginalized communities, specifically in the areas of trauma-informed education within urban school settings. She believes that stories should be told through the contexts in which individuals perceive and experience the world. This includes examining the impacts of institutions and systems on communities and the lived experiences of participants.

Two of the professors (one female and one male) had conducted previous qualitative studies in marginalized communities. Through storying and re-storying experience, the narrative inquiry method seeks to highlight and productively complicate the interwoven, interdependent, and co-emergent ways researchers and participants make meaning of time, space, relationships, and structures. Narrative can

move from particular experiences to "theory-building knowledge" (Willis & Siltanen, 2009) and construct/are constructed by social, political, and affective assemblages.

In narrative inquiry, narrative is both an object and a method of study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry builds off John Dewey's work on experience as both individual and embedded in social contexts and also builds off anthropological methodologies that aim to chronicle change and continuity from an embedded inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative moves in four simultaneous directions: inward (reflecting storytellers' internal conditions); outward (existential and environmental conditions, including place); and backward and forwards in time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

For this qualitative study, one-on-one interviews were conducted with participation garnered using purposive sampling—purposive in the sense that all participants were either formal educators (four) or youth advocates (one) in the community and willing and available to meet via Zoom web conferencing. The one-on-one interviews were conducted by two of the researchers (one a male professor in education and the other a female professor in communication), who used probing questions to solicit in-depth responses. The school-related participants interviewed consisted of four educators in the local school system and one college professor who also is a community leader involved in a local youth development organization. Three additional participants advocated for schools in the community. Transcripts from the interviews were analyzed by a larger research team using a narrative approach to describe, categorize, and interpret participants' responses to questions regarding community violence and related phenomena. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data and is usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts. The analysis followed the procedures for general qualitative data analysis beginning with a series of open-ended, in vivo, and context coding strategies. Subsequently, the codes were placed into categories and patterns were identified resulting in emerging themes (Saldana, 2015). The research team looked over the codes created, clarified shared understandings of analytic codes, identified patterns, and came to a consensus on broader themes. The collaborative interpretation of the interview data in this study produced the following narrative themes: power and agency, collective trauma, mental health, gentrification, and schools as anchors.

FINDINGS

Stories of Power and Agency

Throughout the interviews conducted, participants described what could be considered a theme of the lack of power and agency. It became clear that violence is something these individuals experience on a normal basis. Schools, contrary to being a safe space, have often become a dangerous site with the potential for violence and teachers are not trained to handle the aftermath of such situations. One teacher shares, "It's just a meeting ground, right? It's a lot easier to find who you're looking for at school, because you know they're going to be there versus trying to go and find them in the community." These realities prevent the community from fully reaping the benefits of education because of the constant threats of harm that they endure on a

day-to-day basis. People in leadership and power have moved on and not given thought to the resources that were taken, as one community activist comments,

> If crime is high, that's where we need to spend some of our money in the budget, for crime. I remember when we had walking police in Pittsburgh. And the people in Buckhead start complaining about crime [so] then they moved the walking police to Buckhead... and yeah Buckhead is a safer community. So that is why I keep talking about policy and elected officials understanding the impact of crime and the impact of education and the impact of economic development.

Another community activist described the living conditions that some residents of these communities face:

> Over the last couple of months, it's been people who've been sick, pneumonia due to the mold in the conditions of the houses. You got people who live in trash, you got people who live in the building barely with a window glass... these are the type of things that these kids are seeing. And they translate that, as 'no one cares about me, because this is how I live.'

Throughout the interviews, a paradox emerged of the lack of power and agency as well as the desire—or as one participant noted, the ignition of agency. How these two realities clash can create apathy in some but also spur each other forward toward some type of change.

Stories of Collective Trauma

Collective trauma was a theme expressed within each of the interviews conducted. Participants spoke of hypervigilance, fear, and hopelessness experiences as a collective. Teacher interviews spoke about the traumatic experiences that students have at home that carry over into the school setting:

> Something like that happened right where their cousin got stabbed [and] they're just not ready for the classroom so you do see it in the classroom, it is a lot more difficult to teach instruction in an urban school than it is in a nice suburban school and because of that, I think the priority sometimes switch in that the content is less focused on and then, what ends up happening is their emotional stability is more focused on.

One community advocate reported… "I don't think our teachers are prepared for the mental health burden that's being placed on them and that's just one of the many things that's leading to teacher burnout and turnover and people leaving the field." Trauma has impacted communities in ways that help perpetuate violence. One teacher reports, "a lot of kids try to grow so quickly, and they try to control the narrative themselves." And another teacher reported, "during the pandemic, escapism becomes limited due to not having a range of motion and are exposed to digital content and continued images of police brutality." A second community advocate spoke of the

need to understand the complex trauma that some of the people in these neighborhoods experience and have dialogue and content that is appropriate. A third community advocate stated, "Not only are we teaching resiliency skills for like what happens if your parents get divorced or your girlfriend breaks up with you, but we're also teaching resiliency skills about what if your brother gets killed by a police officer in front of you."

This collective trauma has created environments that require a high level of resiliency that others are not required to maintain. In one teacher interview, it was reported: "There is no equity to ask a child who lives in poor living conditions to be expected to perform at the same level of those who have more security in housing" and one community advocate reports

> I hope that there's a way for you as you retell the story to highlight their resiliency but also, and like you know some success, but also all the factors that combined to create a situation. Particularly brown and black kids have to be resilient when other kids that are you know similarly aged don't.

Stories of Mental Health

Participants talked about mental health as a very important component in the discussion of collective trauma. Many participants noted the many traumas embedded in the community, such as poverty, access to services and resources, coping skills, and psychological education. One teacher stated, "Therapists give them access even outside of school hours so that now if I do have a conflict or if I am seeing something traumatic, I have some tools to kind of work through that instead of becoming a statistic."

In recent years, there's been an uptick in collective trauma and the social factors that contribute to trauma: factors like communication norms and social media. A teacher stated:

> I don't think our teachers are prepared for the mental health burden that's being placed on them and that's just one of the many things that's leading to, you know, teacher burnout and turnover and people leaving the field. How can we support you? Did you miss the bus, can we provide transportation? Whereas others may be like 'Oh they're just lazy. They just don't want to come to school today.' And maybe that's the case, maybe that is the case, but let's talk about why. Why did you not get sleep? Because there were shootings in your neighborhood? Are you starving? And you know, there's a million reasons why and so let's explore those and figure out how we can support you and get you to school. Living in poverty, learning how—I mean nobody should have to learn those skills. But, but how do they manage through anger and all of that, when they don't really have the coping skills?

Stories of Gentrification

Participants notably talked quite a bit about gentrification as a form of community violence and expressed its impacts in nuanced terms. Participants spoke to gentrification as a structurally violent intrusion into the lives of long-term residents and also alluded to gentrification's role in interpersonal violence. Participants experienced the effects of gentrification as violence in three main ways. Gentrification displaces long-term residents, which then limits access to resources (including education), brings interpersonal violence as a response to clashing cultures between new residents and long-term residents, and deepens existing feelings of race and class alienation among long-term residents and their advocates. As one advocate noted, "Gentrification is [not] synonymous with violence, but I am saying it is a piece of the pie."

First, participants spoke again and again about displacement caused by rising property values, which they say have become untenable for the area's long-term, low-income residents, as further supported in previous research (Bernstein & Isaac, 2021; Isaac et al., 2020). According to one teacher, displacement means young people find themselves living farther from their schools, which increases stress and decreases attendance, as the logistics of the home-to-school journey become more complicated.

Second, several participants described an increase in violence due to an influx of new residents. One educator explained, "You get a high volume of police calls because the new people who move into town don't know [that] this is how they celebrate Fourth of July. So you may think I'm reckless, [but] I'm just saying, this is my independence." While new residents may associate increased police presence as a signifier of safety, long-term residents, who are more likely to be Black and/or low-income, are more likely to experience violence as a result of a police call.

Third, the speed of changes in these neighborhoods is noted as a factor in both the community's inability to respond to them and as one that often leaves those impacted with feelings of hopelessness and disconnectedness. These feelings are linked to racialized histories and collective memories of broken promises, specifically to Black communities from government agencies and institutions. An educator commented that there are some studies suggesting the amount of affordable housing promised when development was proposed never materialized. She added that, furthermore, "the definition of affordable is laughable. The bar that we're using to measure what is affordable is not the same as what the powers that be are using." Another participant noted that those powers are "so focused on getting those new people that [they're] not looking at the existing people." These comments make clear that long-term residents and their advocates find themselves misunderstood, overlooked, and unaccounted for in the city's plan for improvement. One participant further notes

> I think, a couple things first and foremost, I think, it just, it's got to be so hard for these families. I know it is because I've heard the kids say it, you know. To see the city that they feel like has kind of forgotten about them. [The City is] growing up around them at such a fast pace and there's not really a space for them in it.

Finally, participants described the complications of living in spaces that are "in-between" pre-gentrification and gentrification. One teacher explained, "You have the socioeconomic status of some of the neighborhoods sitting in between gentrified neighborhoods... you might have a neighborhood where the average household income is $40,000 sitting in between two $800,000 homes, and all three of those children go to the same school." Participants also noted the liminality of not knowing what would become of people pushed out of neighborhoods because of rising housing costs. "What's it going to be like? When will they be able to return?" one educator asked. Several participants echoed uncertainty and fear of unknown timetables for return—or whether residents would ever be able to return to make homes and lives in their neighborhoods.

For educators, the "in-between" status of these neighborhoods leads to challenges in addressing the needs of a student body, especially as schools with blended populations disregard disparate material and emotional needs or may be unable to provide the resources necessary for students undergoing compounding challenges of poverty and displacement. However, amid neighborhood changes, schools can be viewed as places of both community sustainability and permeability.

Stories of Schools as Anchors

Educators experience both anxiety and hope about the permeable boundaries between school and the larger community. Some described fights from the community following students to school, or fights starting at school and "bleeding out" into the community, as one educator put it. Educators described fights that involve students and parents fighting on behalf of each other, and that many conflicts originate from disrespect toward parents or children who are then defended by their family members. "Whatever happens in the community ends up being on our campus," one educator said.

One of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, one teacher explained, has been the intensification of student needs—both physical and emotional—as it leaks into classroom and school spaces. The task of responding to this increased need, one teacher explained, "is placed at the teacher's feet," in addition to teachers' preexisting priorities, mandates, and job expectations. This participant expressed the feeling of constant, overlapping, and intensifying priorities—educational, social/emotional, and otherwise—that are ignored or under-resourced by government bodies and expected to be met by individual teachers. She explained:

> I know at school, unfortunately, teachers over the years have been saddled with way more than just academics. Now, as a teacher, you're asked to teach ethics, and project-based learning is great. But now I also want you to do some social/emotional learning. I'm here to teach chemistry, but ok—you do your best to follow the state guidelines of whatever kind of program they want... school [is] the anchor to tie in and pick up the slack.

This participant expressed frustration at the divide between school and home, which she saw as detrimental to academic and social/emotional education. "The second the

kid leaves school, that's not reinforced at home, that's not reinforced in the community," she said. This divide could be breached if schools allocated more money to counselors or social workers, who could be available before and after school hours.

Notably, this participant described school safety as misunderstood by educational leaders and politicians. While students are unlikely to report concerns with bullying, violence, or school misbehavior via the district-sanctioned channels, for example, they readily report concerns to their teachers on a personal level and via social media. This teacher saw social media to bridge the gap between home and school, and to increase physical and emotional safety in both locations by "meeting students where they live" in the virtual world.

Other participants, who work in education but not as classroom teachers expressed hope for building positive relationships between school and home by working to ease the boundaries between the two. Some of the participants we spoke to for this study run a resource center for communities experiencing poverty and trauma at a school site in southwest Atlanta. These participants explained that they had carefully chosen this school site as their location because they envisioned becoming "embedded" in the school. For these participants, being embedded at the school site "is really how we build relationships with students, families, and school administration."

Furthermore, the staff at this resource center spoke with pride about supporting students by assisting their families with access to low-cost grocery shopping (via a "corner store" made available at the school site) and with navigating structural barriers, like food stamp offices or landlords, alongside parents by physically "going out" to the community and leveraging resources to meet parents where they are and get them where they need to go. What works about this model of school, according to these participants, is that it is available to cross boundaries between school and home, and by doing so, can realistically meet the challenge of supporting students whose experiences at home leak into school, and vice versa.

To the staff of the resource center, easing the dividing lines between home and school also improves the parents' perception of school, shifting parent perception from school as a place of discipline to school as a resource for their emerging needs. Many schools, including the one that houses the resource center, send out an automated "robocall" to parents that notifies them of student absences, tardies, or other disciplinary infractions. Citing the resource center's ability to move between home and school, one participant explained that

> I think what we're finding is that more and more families are seeing the school as a resource... I hope that when we're sending out the robocall saying, 'Hey, the corner store is open today,' that [parents] are like 'Oh awesome, this is another resource from school.'

Crossing between home and school, either physically or digitally, was seen by participants to both meet student needs and respond to student and family concerns for safety and wellbeing; at the same time, however, participants expressed concern about violence that follows students to and from school because of the permeable nature of boundaries between the two.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As the research team for this study reviewed the narratives described, it became apparent that the central focus of the impacts on youth in the community and the educators who served their needs called for initiatives related to the schools and their interaction with the community. As a tool for change, narratives can influence public opinion and policymaking (Ertas, 2015). Given the fact that educators may unwittingly function as a significant ally of an economic and political system that perpetuates institutionalized racism and class discrimination, we need to utilize a set of principles, values, and practices that are not just after the fact but bring the problems into the policymaking arena. Issues of inequity and inequality differentiate the inner-city schools from suburban schools in the Metro Atlanta area both directly and indirectly—directly, as community violence has a more profound role in the inner city school environment, and indirectly, as neighborhood changes through gentrification affect the socioeconomic conditions in which the youth must function in both home and school environments.

As the collective stories of community violence and its associated impacts unfolded through the educator narratives, the research team became convinced that the significance of this project lies in its illumination of conditions related to school system policy and practice, which encompasses the relationships and functionality among students, educators, and administrators in their struggles for addressing the associated trauma of community violence. It was clear that educators tend to think of community violence as a symptom of larger societal contexts (that is, gentrification and displacement, economics, and police brutality) and that the impacts of COVID-19 on the socio-emotional learning of students are both profound and less than fully understood. As stated by the educators interviewed, what happens in the community happens in the schools. In turn, what happens in the schools calls for intervening and protective factors for both the youth and their educators who are confronted by the daily conditions associated with violence in their community. If education is "the greatest hope" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 353) for children experiencing trauma, then revisioning of teacher preparation and institutional support by the school system are essential (although not sufficient) components in addressing the mental health trauma associated with community violence (Kim et al., 2021; Luthar & Mendes, 2020).

Therefore, the research team offers the following recommendations regarding school system policies to address some of the challenges of serving a community with a higher-than-average occurrence of violence and its associated collective trauma:

- Recognition and support of the role of schools as a community resource in addressing the permeable boundaries between school and the larger community associated with community violence and collective trauma;
- Institutional support for employment of professionally trained, school-community liaisons who facilitate collaboration of benefit to students, parents, and teachers in addressing the associated effects of community violence and collective trauma; and

- Functional and budgetary support for educators in the inner-city school system who are confronted by the day-to-day struggles of working with students living in a community experiencing community violence and associated collective trauma. This support includes trauma-informed training.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In that narrative can be a behavioral change communication tool, the narratives in this study can provide language and meaning for future communication related to mental health impacts of community violence, including messages promoting prevention and intervention (Baezconde-Garbanati et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Mandelbaum, 2003). Furthermore, based on narratives from the small sample of educator interviews, the research team is interested in conducting follow-up research to this pilot study that will investigate the stories of additional educators regarding their insights for school system policies that will help to mitigate the collective trauma of community violence as it affects the school environment and functions in the marginalized community of interest in southwest Atlanta. This important stakeholder group will provide further insights for these researchers who are reaching out to the community for the benefit of scholarship and a community of practice.

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