Qualitative Analysis of School Professional Beliefs and Subjective Theories About Adolescent Behavioral Health and Discipline

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Assessing a School, Justice and Behavioral Health Collaborative Approach to Improving School Safety

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Addressing the School Safety Challenge

Presenting Challenge

• Identifying youth with mental health and substance use needs.

• Developing appropriate responses to address need in the school setting.

School Safety

Physical Safety

Psychological Safety

Emotional Safety
Collaborative & Capacity Building Interventions

School Responder Model
• A behavioral health response model to school infractions that provides an alternative to calling law enforcement and focuses on addressing the root causes of behavior.

Adolescent Mental Health Trainings for School Resource Officers
• Training for school resource officers intended to build skills for appropriately responding to behaviors displayed by youth with mental health needs.
Study Goals and Design

(1) To examine the effects of the **School Responder Model (SRM)** and **Adolescent Mental Health Training for School Resource Officers (AMHT-SRO)**, both independently and collectively, on key outcome measures.

(2) To measure differences in the outcomes due to local variations in context and resources.

**Research Design**: Convergent parallel mixed methods over three year period, examining four research groups:

- Group A – SJMHC & AMHT-SRO (4 high schools)
- Group B – SJMHT (4 high schools)
- Group C – AMHT – SRO (4 high schools)
- Group D – Control Group (4 high schools)
Conceptualization of Data Collection

**Quantitative**

**Youth-Level**
- Demographics
- Academic & Disciplinary Records
- Justice Involvement
- Behavioral Health Utilization

**Organizational-Level**
- Climate & Culture
  - Survey of Leadership, Faculty & Staff Members
- Readiness & Managing Change
- Organizational Resources
  - Individual Interviews
  - Group Interviews
  - School Policies & Procedures

**Community-Level**
- Human, Social & Financial Capital

**State-Level**
- Health/Justice Policy
- Economy & Resources

**Qualitative**

**Organizational-Level**
- Climate & Culture & Attitudes
- Readiness & Managing Change
- Organizational Resources
  - Individual Interviews
  - Group Interviews
  - School Policies & Procedures

**Mesosystem-Level**
- Quality of Intervention Services
  - Satisfaction Surveys
  - Knowledge Questionnaires
  - Observations
- Collaborative Practices & Structures
  - Individual Interviews
  - Group Interviews
  - Observations
Data Collection & Analysis (Year 1)

Focus: Community Context and Resources

- Group Interviews: 7 groups
  - High school faculty and student support staff members.
  - Community-based behavioral health practitioners.

- Interviews: 45 individuals
  - High school leadership, faculty, and student support staff members.
  - Community-based behavioral health leadership and practitioners.
  - Law enforcement leadership and officers (those assigned to or working in schools).

- Interpretive Memos
- Predetermined (based on conceptual framework) & a priori Coding
What are the beliefs or theories that exist among professionals, particularly in schools, regarding the source of disruptive or unsafe behaviors in the school community?
Belief – The Problem of Outsiders

- Disruptive or unsafe behaviors are brought to the school community by outsiders, which draw on stereotyped perceptions of race and ethnicity, and what follows is professional disengagement from the youth with demonstrating needs.

“When I was first hired [at this high school] in the [1990s], you could count on one hand the number of African American students in the building … I want to say we’re close to 60% now African American, maybe? I don’t know, I think we just went over the 50 mark, so we’re between 50 and 60% … And the other thing I was going to say was, in the 22 years I’ve been there, last year we had more incidences of marijuana, of weed, in our building than all my other years combined. I don’t know why, I don’t know … we had dealers. Known dealers in the building. The kids.”

– High School Teacher
Belief – The Problem of Lack of Structure

• Behaviors are the result of a lack of discipline itself, primarily the structure that is provided in the family, but also of the broader community. To follow is belief in enhanced structure and rules in school to counterbalance lack of structure elsewhere.

“If [the behavior] is criminal, [the school resource officers] proceed with it … if the mental aspects comes in then [the school resource officers] have some resources. I’m not exactly sure what they are. They will turn over [information about a mental health issue] too. We don’t face that a whole lot … I think poverty is a big issue … not a whole lot of structure in their lives, you know? It’s not always their fault. It’s just the way it works out for them, you know?”

– School Administrator for Discipline
Belief – The Problem of Learning Disabilities

• Behaviors viewed through an educational lens and attached primarily to learning disabled and special education students. To follow is a view of issues that excludes issues of trauma, mental health and substance abuse, which is reinforced by attention demanded by special education laws.

“…a lot of times it's clearly stated how they should approach certain children, behavior issues come up, it's just a matter of getting everybody onboard to actually know what they're supposed to do, and then doing it ... instead of jumping to a conclusion and calling cops to come and, hold them down, put them in handcuffs, look at their plans first and see how to calm the child or whatever…

– Community-Based Provider & Advocate
Belief – The Problem of Poverty, Social Isolation and Social Exclusion

- Behaviors are the result of the intersection of economic poverty, as well as social isolation (disengagement from public life) and exclusion (prevented from participating in public life). To follow is a professional re-conceptualization of the role of school, and the ways to relate to youth.

“It becomes a matter of, do you believe in kids? And especially kids who are the worst possible kids that you could ever have in your classroom, and they are doing the worst possible things, and they're doing it on purpose to see if you really care about me.”

– High School Teacher
Belief – Problem of Disengaged School Structures and Rules

• Behaviors emerge because of adult-created structures and rules that are disengaged from the experience of youth in schools. To follow shift to youth-centered structure and rule making.

“…What I’m speaking of is how we allow students to use their electronic devices. We have come to the conclusion that instead of telling them, you know, “Hey, put them away.” What we’re doing is teaching them how to use their smartphones in the way they were created to be, as a handheld computer … teachers are now building that into their lesson planning. They also, we have a 74-minute class time, we have a couple teachers that were doing what we call Brain Breaks. They’re allowing their students to take them out, “You’ve got three minutes, go ahead and check your tweets” or whatever it may be.”

– High School Principal
Belief – The Problem of Disengaged Responses and Practices

- Behaviors are exacerbated because of adult-centered practices and responses to the behaviors themselves, and what follows is an emphasis on relationship building between adults and youth.

“… I also think for a lot of low-income students, our children, yelling is the worst possible thing you can do for them. They have it all day long at home, and so the reaction from it is not going to be positive. And new teachers coming in, that's the first thing they do. So any teacher who yells is going to have more discipline problems…”

– High School Teacher
Contextual Factors

• **Policy Factors**
  - Accountability Centric Educational Policies
  - School Choices Program and Charter School Movement
  - School Leader and Teacher Preparation Programs

• **Organizational Factors**
  - School Leadership – Philosophy and Staff Engagement
  - Leadership, Faculty and Staff Turnover
  - Transient Youth Population
  - Changing Population of Student Served by School
  - Mental or Behavioral Health Staff Part of School Decision-Making Teams
Challenges to Implementation

• Some beliefs and theories aligned to the principles of the interventions while others are not.

• Each school is not uniform in its exposed beliefs and theories, there are a diversity of viewpoints, and often misalignment between leadership and frontline practitioners.

• Forces (contextual factors) make this a true systems-level challenge spanning all levels, presenting challenges for effectiveness of interventions when implemented.

• Additionally, contextual factors present competing priorities that not only shape beliefs and theories, but present other immediate needs.
Next Steps …

• Implementation of the SRM complete by the start of the 2018-2019 school year in all participating high schools.

• AMHT-SRO provided in the spring and summer of 2018 in all participating high schools.

• Continue data collection including administrative data (year 2 and 3), interviews (year 2 and 3), group interviews (year 3), and climate and culture survey (year 3).
Discussion Questions

• As we are finding, beliefs and theories are deeply ingrained, what are the best ways to address this, especially in the context of intervention implementation?

• Beyond implementation of the interventions, are there other thoughts about addressing these issues, especially in the context of schools and among education professionals?